

Governor Phil Murphy

Acting Governor Oliver Announces Release of Youth Justice Task Force Report

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Task Force Report Consisted of Input From Stakeholders Involved in All Areas of Juvenile Justice

TRENTON – Acting Governor Sheila Y. Oliver today announced the release of the Youth Justice Task Force Report, which was issued by the Task Force for the Continued Transformation of Youth Justice in New Jersey (“Task Force”). The Task Force, which was created in 2018 when Governor Phil Murphy signed Executive Order No. 42, consists of over a dozen stakeholders involved in all facets of juvenile justice and is charged with providing recommendations to the legislative and executive branches on strategies for continuing the reform of the state’s youth justice system.

Prior to the signing of Executive Order No. 42, the existing Juvenile Justice Commission conducted groundbreaking work to reduce the incarcerated youth population through the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. Through the Commission’s efforts, New Jersey made great strides in modernizing its juvenile justice system. However, large racial disparities in youth incarceration rates persisted.

“New Jersey is the only state to be designated a national leader by the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative. The Youth Justice Task Force’s recommendations to create a safer, fairer, more equitable juvenile justice system will work to further meet the goals of the JDAI,” **said Governor Murphy**. “I look forward to seeing these recommendations integrated into our juvenile justice system in the near future.”

“I am pleased to announce the release of the Youth Justice Task Force Report,” **said Acting Governor Sheila Y. Oliver**. “This report is a continuation of an equitable approach to transform the youth justice system in New Jersey. Although we have seen a reduction in the number of incarcerated children since the enactment of the JDAI, there is still much more work to be done to create a safer and more equitable system.”

The report consists of four major parts, broken down by the four Task Force subcommittees:

1. Residential and Secure Facilities
2. Sentencing and Parole
3. Stationhouse Adjustment
4. Youth Services Commissions and Investment in Community-Based Programs

In developing the recommendations listed in the report to further reform the juvenile justice system in our state, the Task Force conducted extensive research examining every facet of the youth justice system, reviewing data on the current system, and identifying best practices. To identify a path forward in tackling the systemic racial disparities, the Task Force conducted public listening sessions throughout the state. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, more than 900 residents engaged with the Task Force, with many sharing their lived experiences. The Task Force also heard from industry experts, impacted youth, and visited existing programs. The report reflects the work and engagement efforts of the Task Force.

The Administration will review the report findings within the context of pandemic realities, subsequent legislation, directives, and administrative decisions.

“This report underscores New Jersey’s continued leadership in juvenile justice reform,” **said Acting Attorney General Platkin**. “The Youth Justice Task Force has given us a roadmap to continue improving our youth justice system to ensure that each young person has every opportunity for success.”

“While working toward a vision of New Jersey where no children are incarcerated, we also recognize that current sentencing laws, which allows prosecutors to charge children in adult court, necessarily mean that some children will be imprisoned in high-security facilities away from home,” **said Alexander Shalom, Esq., Senior Supervising Attorney, ACLU of NJ**. “Until we can eliminate youth prisons altogether, we support the Task Force’s recommendation to create smaller facilities that operate under a model of trauma-informed care, where children can maintain closer contact with their families and have access to more space.”

and programming. Above all, New Jersey must invest far more money in keeping kids out of prison than keeping them in.”

“Every child is born with an incredible abundance within them; no child is born destined for involvement in the system. Starting from that premise, we were able to focus our conversation on the assets that our youth and communities can bring and the investments needed to prevent system involvement so that they can manifest their full potential, while also addressing the systemic barriers that have created this societal ill,” **said Carlos Lejnieks, CEO, Big Brothers Big Sister, Essex, Hudson, and Union.**

“The recommendations of the Task Force embody a vision for youth justice in New Jersey that is more equitable, rational, and restorative than the current system,” **said Laura Cohen, Director, Rutgers Law, Criminal, and Youth Justice Clinic.** “I look forward to working with the Governor, the Juvenile Justice Commission, and the Legislature as we move toward implementation and, hopefully, better outcomes for all of our State’s children.”

“Equipping young people who make serious mistakes to focus on addressing and healing from traumatic experiences so they can be successful as adults is an important component of public safety,” **said Tanya Washington, Senior Associate, Juvenile Justice Strategy Group, Annie E. Casey Foundation.** “I hope the state will take action on these data-based recommendations to close facilities and move away from its current correctional model to one that promotes therapeutic support, growth and opportunity along with safety.”

“As a longtime advocate for juvenile justice reform, I was happy to serve on the Youth Justice Task Force and I appreciate everyone who put their time and effort into bringing this report to fruition,” **said Senator Nellie Pou.** “It is crucial we continue to build upon progress made in recent years and work towards a fairer, more just and less racially biased juvenile justice system.”

To view the full report, click here

(https://d31hzlkh6di2h5.cloudfront.net/20220510/4e/b9/c4/02/d75de4d2ea5ab1e41992158c/Task_Force_Report_070120_EP.pdf).

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