



OJJDP FY 2022 Regional Listening Session: Northwest Region

August 29, 2022 | 2–4 p.m. ET

Priority #1: Treating Children as Children

1. What does it mean to you to treat children as children?

- We struggle the most with jurisdictions differentiating between the juvenile justice court versus the adult courts. Because the overall classification is broad, prosecutors are left to decide which court the youth will go to. This can also include offenses that range from petty theft to murder, and either can be held in juvenile justice court or the adult court. Prosecutors primarily get the discretion to decide between juvenile courts or adult courts. I would love to see OJJDP address that question of what is appropriate to keep in adult courts and help raise that issue. We need to pull together national experts and determine the criteria for who goes to the juvenile justice court versus adult courts.
- I would like to treat children according to their age. This looks different depending on the county, but OJJDP could help by raising the age for juvenile crimes to 25.

2. What do you think are best practices for treating children as children?

- Don't transfer any youth under the age of 16 to an adult court. Only transfer really serious felonies to the adult court.
- There is a new law in [state] that focuses on rehabilitation first. After the team has considered all solutions for the youth, then they make the best decision, which may be an alternative to detention.
- OJJDP can get rid of the three strikes law, meaning if you commit a violent or serious crime, you get a strike. In the juvenile justice court, the judge can serve a strike to a youth for serious crimes. If you are a juvenile and you go into adult court, you could end up getting a sentence of 25 years to life as a juvenile because of the three strikes law.
- [State] has a law whereas if a youth is being charged as an adult, they would remain in a juvenile justice facility until they are proven guilty in court, depending on the nature of the crime.
- The [Los Angeles County Youth Justice Reimagined](#) effort is rethinking how to address youth justice in the country and creating a new department that oversees this work. Youth who are at risk get a lot of support ahead of time, rather than the last minute. The new department for youth and families will offer support services such as shelters, food, and other resources 24 hours a day.
- In [state], everything is in juvenile court. No one can be directly filed in an adult court. The only exception is 16- and 17-year-olds who commit serious crimes.
- This is how Long Beach, CA, is engaging with their youth:
<https://www.longbeach.gov/health/healthy-living/community/community-impact/office-of-youth-development/>.

3. What can OJJDP do to advance this key priority through the kinds of strategies and activities it undertakes? (For example, communications, webinars and training, publications, policy guidelines, and pilot programs.)

- Understand and publicize the importance of physical infrastructure and solutions and not just programmatic solutions. Currently, we are working on a pilot project called the Flow Center with co-located programs. At the center, staff provide recommendations for youth that include



access to alternatives to detention. We want to make sure physical infrastructure is a priority in the pilot programs. Oftentimes, it is an afterthought, and still, they are reminiscent of the criminal justice center.

- Think deeper about a youths' needs and what led them to that moment that got the kid there in the first place. Focus efforts on root causes and prevention.
- OJJDP might consider what it means to have credible messengers in schools.
- I would like to see more guidance from OJJDP focusing on states that have similar jurisdictional issues. For example, the definitions of crimes and criteria for what cases should be tried in adult courts versus juvenile courts.
- OJJDP might consider providing additional policy on children in adult municipal courts that is related to the four core requirements
- OJJDP does a good job with disseminating policy briefs. However, the guidance and policy briefs should be more sufficient and digestible with OJP branding on it that will speak to the changes people are trying to make.
- An additional focus on getting the word out about OJJDP's resources and services. Alternatives to detention should receive more publicity because they are helpful to the field. Examples to do this include more listening sessions and policy guidance.
- OJJDP might consider providing additional guidelines on evidence-based practices that are user-friendly documents for folks who work directly with youth.
- A young adult court pilot program funded by OJJDP so that if counties decide to explore how to treat 18–25-year-olds differently, if that's a possibility.
- Definitely think about adverse childhood experience (ACEs) and how to promote mental and physical wellness for youth and communities. With respect to youth justice, I do think of it as a health issue and advocate for holistic health-based interventions.
- Increased interagency collaboration between the federal agencies and implementing a more holistic and evidence-based approach in programming.
- Increased funding for programs that include family engagement.

4. What can OJJDP do to support early intervention for youth before they enter the juvenile justice system?

- More guidance on the benefit of diversion programs. Perhaps more briefs and white papers on these programs that include OJJDP's name and branding on the resource.
- More targeted programming for 5th- and 6th-graders. This is a pivotal age group where youth begin to get into trouble.
- There needs to be a pot of funding for after-school coordinators. For example, someone who can assign the youth to an after-school program to keep them busy so that they can be diverted from committing crimes.
- OJJDP might consider providing stipends for youth for things like counseling and sports programs so that the youth is not trying to make ends meet by means of robbery or theft.
- Gun-safety diversion programs. For example, the program could provide kids with a ride to school or whatever it is that is causing them to feel unsafe in their community. OJJDP can use their voice to advocate for gun safety to combat the gun violence issue.
- Identify kids with higher ACEs scores or other measures of risk in the education or protective services systems, or who have family members in the juvenile and criminal legal systems, for earlier intervention and trauma-informed support.
- Research/data collection that collects and reports youth charged in lower adult courts, like city municipal courts.



Priority #2: Serving Young People at Home, in Their Communities, With Their Families

- 1. What does it mean to you to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?**
 - Being able to identify and offer more wraparound services to the families to help identify the highest areas of need and what that would look like.
 - Being able to have more resources and offer more research for grants to help answer questions. In our state, we have a couple of counties that utilize evidence-based practices. For example, before a youth enters the juvenile justice system, they undergo an assessment which looks at the seriousness of the offense, the youth's background, and whether they have prior system involvement. Depending on the circumstances, we have a structured decision-making process.

- 2. What do you think are best practices for serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families?**
 - We have seen great partnerships with our state's mental health division. Also, we have been developing more wraparound mental health services that support families and kids and they can be referred for these services. Many kids need this because they did not receive these services prior to entering the juvenile justice system.
 - The Close to Home program based in New York is close to getting kids out of the state and county system facilities. Another example are the safe and secure healing centers in California, which are alternatives to jails and detention centers. The biggest challenge has been getting judges to utilize these centers and resources instead of sending them to the detention facilities. Getting OJJDP on board with more training for judges would be beneficial.

- 3. Do you have specific examples of implementing community-based alternatives and involving families in the treatment of youth?**
 - We have seen a shift in the culture and the norms by bringing multiple people/voices to the table. By doing this, folks are collaborating more and identifying what is best for youth when they get in trouble. This has created a community shift in the right direction.

- 4. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?**
 - The biggest issue is that there are no standards around adult courts versus juvenile justice courts. Our state has one of the highest youth incarceration rates in the country. We discovered that this differs by county according to local laws. We lack the ability to question whether treatment facilities are appropriate for youth in terms of transforming their criminal thought and behavior. It would be beneficial to have more information or clear guidance on developing standards for which community-level services and graduated sanctions work best and putting those out there for the field to advocate for changes in places where evidence-based practices are not being used to respond to youth.

- 5. In what ways do you involve families in the treatment of young people in their homes?**
 - We could all do a better job of including the family at the very beginning and have them provide their input on an appropriate response for their child. We oftentimes do not have a process in place to speak with the family first about what they think is best for their child.



6. What can OJJDP do to advance this key priority through the kinds of strategies and activities it undertakes? (For example, communications, webinars and training, publications, policy guidelines, and pilot programs.)

- There is funding available for child and family programming through HUD, SAMHSA, and HHS, and we must think collectively about what families need as a whole. We must work together more, look at children holistically, and examine their environment and how their communities affect their life.
- A specific pilot program or guidance could be around lead poisoning.
- Someone mentioned interagency collaboration and that would be a health issue that disproportionately affects Black and brown youth correlated to behavioral issues.
- OJJDP has done a great job of promoting guidance around school safety. The more you can put out regarding evidence-based practices for kids who are in these situations, the better.
- Many resources are limited to those who are experiencing legal system involvement and/or demonstrate risk of involvement to qualify. Often those “qualifiers” become a barrier to providing services earlier on.
- Linking school responsibilities to these health issues and how best to respond—we see many students who clearly have disabilities that are still expelled or given long-term suspensions and funneled into the juvenile justice system rather than addressing them appropriately at school as a manifestation of a disability.
- Have a pilot program that mirrors resources that help someone guiding communities on the resources and services that they may need. Educators are often left out, and we need to bring them in the loop to help identify what we should be doing differently.

Priority #3: Opening up Opportunities for System-Involved Youth

1. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to open up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Once the youth is in the system, a slew of unintended consequences occur. Furthermore, attitudes and ideas about youth who return to the community [can mean] they have a difficult time resuming their normal lives. More medical opinions have been presented regarding the public health risk that children face as a result of their involvement in the juvenile justice system.
- We struggle to get restorative justice programs off the ground and struggle to find funding for them. Restorative justice is a huge need, and we need to be able to establish and support these programs.

2. Please share your ideas for reducing referrals and the flow of youth from the mental health system to juvenile justice. What ideas do you have to reduce referrals from child welfare systems, including foster care, to juvenile justice? What ideas do you have to reduce referrals from the education system to the juvenile justice system?

- The education system has the best way of addressing referrals and I would vote to see other systems adopt something similar.
- Putting safeguards in place for systems to create more processes.
- More uniformity so that it is less likely for silos to be created between the systems.

3. What can OJJDP do to advance this key priority through the kinds of strategies and activities it undertakes? (For example, communications, webinars and training, publications, policy guidelines, and pilot programs.)



- Reworking OJJDP's Title II Formula Grants Program so that more states can qualify and have access to these funds.
- More interagency collaboration with other federal agencies
- Create a one-stop shop for federal grants from all the federal government agencies that categorizes opportunities on topics such as public safety, juvenile justice diversion, public health, child victimization, etc.

General Questions

1. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for implementing its priorities should be?

- Include incentives for individualized responses to services and treatments for youth.
- Recognition from the federal government regarding the acknowledgment of the youth's constitutional rights. I believe the federal government should pay to create a system for which public defense is accessible for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. OJJDP should fund more public defense services around the country.
- Examine and rethink OJJDP's four core requirements to see if they are adequate and examine whether additional requirements should be introduced and required throughout the state.
- More efforts for keeping children in their homes, instead of the juvenile justice system.
- In addition to the excellent priorities mentioned here, place matters. Keeping children in community and having physical spaces for healing and informal and formal networking, co located services.
- More funding for training to address biases in services, particularly for kids of color.
- More resources and funding opportunities being offered from all of the federal government agencies.

2. How can OJJDP support better cross-agency collaboration?

- Create an opening for a dedicated role such as a coordinator on the team to facilitate the cross-agency collaboration. Local and state government staff are stretched thin. There needs to be something in place, even if it is just an organizer to really represent a community during these conversations.
- More targeted investments. Everyone wants a grant, but more targeted grants are needed. We could think about how we can make more concerted efforts to invest in communities.
- Flexibility for who can apply to grants. A nonprofit organization may be able to submit a grant provided they receive a letter of commitment from the state. Our state agencies do not always have the staff or experience to write a grant.
- OJJDP can assist by providing states with public defenders and funding for counties to create robust public defense systems, which will help children stay out of the system.
- More assistance with data collecting and infrastructure and system development. More training for local and state employees. Staff require some sort of system to track and measure performance metrics. Organizations do not have adequate capacity to accomplish this task. Targeted funding for data efforts to raise awareness and lay the groundwork for organizations. [Code for America](#) and [FUUSE Fellows](#) would be able to work with local governments and data.



3. What additional ideas or recommendations do you think OJJDP should consider for the upcoming fiscal year?

- I am worried that we are going to see a real influx of young parents. We need to treat children as children, but sometimes they're in very adult situations. We need to consider how we address the trauma and findings for supporting kids who have kids.
- Lots of funding for creative ways to make progress on these new goals.
- Community engagement funding for community-based solutions ... especially with justice-involved youth.