



OJJDP FY 2022 Regional Listening Session: Mid-Atlantic Region

August 2, 2022 | 2–4 p.m. ET

Breakout Room 1: Treating Children as Children

1. What Does Treating Children as Children Mean to You?

- The first thing is to keep kids out of any adult facilities—even if they are sentenced as an adult—and what we have seen is states not following this. In [location redacted], however, we are seeing that youth are not moved to adult facilities until they turn 18.
- When children are in juvenile court, it is so important that they are treated as children. Their development needs to be supported. Part of what we know about child development is that young people need opportunities for unstructured activities. There are so many issues with court supervision and probation, and it can interfere with a youth's identity and development.

2. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to treat children as children?

- One of the challenges I see is state law. In my region, there is a presumption required of youth that certain offenses have to be tried as adults.
- Part of the problem is every state has statutes that either allow or mandate youth to be tried in adult courts. When states try to chip away at that, there are still certain offenses that are presumed to need to be tried in adult courts, no matter that the person in question is a young person. As we know, a lot of this came about back in the '90s with the idea of the super predator, which has since been debunked, but this idea still runs prevalent, and we are seeing a resurgence of it now.
- Research shows that children naturally age out of these offending behaviors, and it's problematic that this research isn't at the forefront when it comes to legislation.
- Another challenge is that there are a lot of localities that are not publishing data that is broken down by race. At the national level, there are a lot of efforts towards this, but it can be more of a challenge with certain regions.
- Some localities also just don't have good data in general. We are seeing more anecdotal stories being the main focus. There is this trend of the media focusing on the very few horrific stories, and unfortunately, that is how policy gets made. It's a response from those stories.

3. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP Act) establishes four core requirements: (1) the deinstitutionalization of status offenders; (2) separation of youth from adults in secure facilities; (3) removal of youth from adult jails and lockups; and (4) reducing racial and ethnic disparities.

- a. What goals do you recommend OJJDP set for the jail removal requirement (which states must follow if they want to participate in the Title II Formula Grants Program)? (For example, zero youth in adult jails.)



- Again, just this emphasis of zero youth in adult facilities. If states want funding, they need to really adhere to this principle. So, we need to incentivize states with funding if they keep the focus of no youth in adult prisons and jails.
 - OJJDP should refine data reporting and collecting to gain clearer outcomes under the jail removal requirement.
- b. Can we undertake any work with partners like the National Sheriffs' Association, the American Jail Association, or others to help reach the specified goals?**
- [Fair and Just Prosecution](#) would be a great group to partner with. Really, any group that has a law enforcement component to it would go a long way.
- c. What challenges, if any, do you anticipate facing as a result of the pandemic when enforcing the jail removal requirement to remove juveniles from adult jails and lockups?**
- This isn't so much of a comment, as it is more of a question, but I am wondering about all of these alternative placements for kids, and if factors related to the pandemic have reduced the availability of placements for youth. I know our region wants to know if alternative placements are now placing kids further away from their communities and homes, so it would be interesting to see what the numbers are for that.

4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for treating children as children should be?

- The first goal is to keep children out of the adult system, period. We are seeing children being criminalized for adolescent behavior. So, we have to look at ways that keep kids out of the system, whether that's pre-arrest diversionary programs or implementing more mental health services. That is critical.
- Only 9–10 percent of youth arrests are for violent crimes, so to me, we can drastically reduce the contact that youth have with the system. Instead, we need to invest in things that may actually benefit their lives.
- We are seeing more criminalization of Black and Latino youth, so shifting the focus on how these systems can address racial bias. We want to bring their voices to the forefront on how their contact with the system has really impacted their lives. We have a responsibility to look at this while we are trying to address these issues and are forming many of these goals.
- We need to lift a focus on racial disparities. Systems really struggle with how to meaningfully reduce disparities.
- OJJDP is using the right language in their priorities when they say youth contact with the system should be rare, fair, and beneficial. Although, if I had a magic wand, it wouldn't happen at all.

5. 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.)

- Policy guidance can be really helpful. Locally, states struggled to interpret whether some of the jail removals were retroactive. OJJDP had to reach out to state administrators to clarify that, in order to initiate change. There is this confusion of the law not really being clear to states, so having OJJDP step in to predict and clarify would be very helpful.



- Having grant funding to build and further programs to prevent violence and keep kids at home is also important.
 - It's important to note when pilot programs are successful and to really get the word out. For example, the Civil Citation Program has kept a lot of children who have committed low-level offenses out of the system. If we can continue to see what other states are doing and have that information be more accessible nationwide, it will effectively help other states reap the benefits too.
 - OJJDP can potentially help states and local jurisdictions collect better data and get that data in the hands of advocates and the community.
 - Supporting jurisdictions to have defenders available during interrogation, arrests, and bail hearings. Truthfully, having defenders present whenever a critical decision is made is important to ensure youth are being adequately represented.
- a. What publications or products could OJJDP consider developing to support the priority of treating children as children?**
- The defense community is very aware now about adolescent brain development. If you are going up against a prosecutor or judge, they may not always know about this critical information. So having more publications leaning towards this and having it accessible to others within the field is important.
 - Anything related to juvenile jurisdictions and, again, brain development. Youth are being released and not having any support after the age of 18, and studies show that they still need services and support provided to them. So additional training on this would be beneficial.
- b. How can OJJDP support better cross-system collaboration to lead to improved treatment of children as children?**
- What we are doing with the delinquency system is tied with the child welfare system. There are so many examples of people calling law enforcement because they don't know who else to call, when in reality, a crisis center or a mental health professional really should be intervening. We need to strengthen that cross collaboration between juvenile justice and child welfare.
- c. What kinds of strategies or activities is your state or region currently doing well?**
- There are programs in place in states where there are pre-diversionary programs. This is mostly tailored for youth who don't really have heavy involvement with the system.
 - There are restorative justice programs that are trauma-informed, and it encourages youth to fully divert from the system.

Breakout Room 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?

- The pandemic really showed us—we already knew, but it definitely gave us a better picture—the disadvantages that our young people face. And the work we do is really based off of relationships.



Having a positive adult or being a positive adult. Working with them while at home while in a remote or virtual setting set limitations because it didn't allow for that social interaction. They were in school virtually all day, so joining us after school, they weren't as engaged because it was just too much for them. It created limitations for us and showed us some of the limitations they have because sometimes the home was not the best or safest place for them to be, and we really realized what they didn't have.

- It would be ideal, I mean, that should be the goal: having young people at home. I wish that we didn't have any young people in detention facilities or long-term locked facilities. I see it as that is what we should be aspiring to—that all youth should be served well at home. From a work perspective, we have to work harder when young people are placed at home. It's a real responsibility that I think kind of "poof" goes away when young people are incarcerated. It's easier when they are incarcerated. So, I think there has to be more effort when young people are placed at home. But one of the extraordinary challenges we have is that neighborhood safety is a particular concern, and safety of young people themselves with regard to their involvement in the juvenile justice system. It's just overall an issue of safety for them.
 - Something that is comprehensive and holistic and serves both the youth and their families. There's lots of "stuff"—programs and initiatives. What it really means to create a system of services and supports for young people and their families when they touch the justice system that is community-based and family-oriented really requires levels of appropriate resourcing. We actually have to invest in creating those integrated community-based resources and infrastructures and services. Not just to resource them, but to also make them connected and accessible to young people and their families, not just when they are in crisis or transition from some sort of out-of-home placement, but something that is continuously accessible at the level of intervention that they need. It means simply creating a system of supported and integrated services for young people and their families that is multigenerational and multisystemic and is well resourced.
- a. **What do you think are best practices for serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families?**
 - b. **Do you have specific examples of implementing community-based alternatives and involving families in the treatment of youth?**
 - Just providing services and supports to both the young person and the family as a whole, including siblings, not just parents or their caregivers. I like [Functional Family Therapy](#) (FFT) a lot. So that's a service we had more broadly. That's an example of one I think is effective.
 - One of the things that I found effective and helpful is [Youth Villages](#) for that transition period and in-home services and work with that caregiver for a series of months before the young person even gets back to the home, as well as with the young person themselves while they are in whatever out-of-home placement they are in. The idea is to have a bridge not just for the young person, but for everyone in the household. So not just for the parent, but for anyone who comes into that house. That helps prepare for that transition and bridge some of the relational gaps and identify some of the resources the family might need to ensure safety and support for the young people and their families. Those transitional services that also are in the home while a young person is still in an out-of-home placement are important to helping both the young person and the family make that transition. The other thing I like are models like [Roca](#), especially for older young people and young people into young adulthood who are oftentimes thought of as harder to reach. The Roca model is well-evaluated and rooted in



- persistence. And I think that is key to a successful intervention especially for young people who are navigating a lot of stuff and their families who are navigating a lot of stuff. The only other one I would add is a new model in Nashville, TN, and a couple of other places that is more in the education space: Educational navigators (e.g., <https://www.ednavigator.org/>). They are individual points of contact that can serve as a one-stop-shop to help a young person and their family navigate systems. It can be applicable to other systems, whether it is family services, mental health services. To have someone who is consistent and persistent and well trained, who can serve as a singular point of contact for accessing all the things you might need to thrive or transition back into the community.
- I agree with a lot of this. Another is providing intensive case management. A lot of youth are living on their own. So, they don't necessarily have family or parents that they live with. These are young people who are either in housing programs or living on their own. So, a lot of services are provided directly to them. If they are partnered or have children, extend the services to them. Provide a holistic approach and extended case management. One program is a long-term program. A young person can be in that program for up to 6 years with their intensive case manager. That adds another layer of benefit because it's such a long-term program. The case manager really gets to learn a lot about that particular youth and is able to provide extensive wraparound services to that young person and to whoever they live with as an adult.

2. What are some challenges the region is currently facing when trying to serve young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

- a. What are your current experiences with providing alternatives to incarceration?**
- b. What are some barriers to providing in-home and community-based programming to youth?**
 - Community safety is a challenge. [Location] is experiencing a lot of violence and access to guns. So, ensuring youth and family safety is absolutely a challenge. That would be my top challenge.
 - Young people are often on their own, they are unhoused, which, with the violence and safety concerns, it adds another layer to all the challenges that they are experiencing. The fact that their legal counsel was likely a public defender who didn't have a lot of time to spare, who didn't get to know much about their case—a lack of communication and a lack of resources for young people—can lead to young people not being informed about their cases and being pulled back into jail for similar things. But it's really due to the lack of resources that are missing out there.

3. In what ways do you involve families in the treatment of young people in their homes?

- Family team meetings are required. Those include all the service providers and the parents. And parent support groups and other opportunities to support caregivers. There is always room for improvement on that. Really making sure families are brought in at every point, every decision point, and not just being told things and told what we are doing. Things like referrals to FFT or Multisystemic Therapy or other services that require parental involvement and thinking about those and those being on the forefront of what might be the right supports for families are important.



- Across the board, I don't think we do a very good job involving families. There are opportunities for us to think creatively about how to do that. Not just in moments of extreme crisis or required compliance, but to really make families and caregivers involved. Sometimes a young person doesn't have the network or that adult or that caregiver, or they are just on their own. Really challenge us to think creatively about how to build that community of support. It can show up to other points of support that a young person trusts; other people the young person can build trust with. We need to think about ways we can expand the definition of family. We don't do a very good job of doing that. What we are really thinking about is a network of people who really care about a young person, who are persistent and have resources, and are themselves supported in that.

4. What are the arguments for and against serving children at home and in their communities?

- The argument for it is that it works. We are in a position as a field where we have evidence that this works. That is first and foremost for me. It's not a pie-in-the-sky dream. We actually have models and evidence that if you want, in a deep and sustainable way, to ensure that communities are thriving and safe, is to invest in communities and community-based services. If your goal is to ensure young people don't reenter the system, invest in communities. That's where they're going to go back to. The goal is that we are able to build a system outside of institutions where everyone has what they need in the community. But, when a young person is out of home, the reality is that they are not going to be in that placement forever. They are going to come back to the community. We need to invest in community-based supports that can be there when they return to make sure they can thrive outside the system and don't come back. We put too many resources into things we know are not going to stop us from seeing this young person again. Plus, it's just the right thing to do.
- I think some of the arguments against are based on fear and incorrect information. There are people who think there are reasons we shouldn't, but they may not be truthful. But I am dealing with young people who are incarcerated. Like, what I hear is, "It's safer for them to be incarcerated instead of in the community." I don't agree with that—that's just an argument that doesn't understand the long-term damage that can be caused by incarceration. But sometimes, we also have real, immediate, validated safety concerns for young people. If they return, there is a good chance they will be targeted and killed. So, there are times when it doesn't make sense from a safety perspective. Other arguments are that the family isn't intact, and they can't handle their young people. But when we don't have the correct supportive services in place, we are setting up families to fail in some ways.

5. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families should be?

- I don't even know what the possibilities are. I don't know how much OJJDP can be helpful on the local level.
- We have a lot of resources, but we struggle to integrate them. A magic wand would address that.
- Communication challenges, especially between Tribal and state and county entities.



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.)

a. What policies, guidance, or communications would be helpful for OJJDP to develop to support the priority of serving young people at home, in their communities, with their families?

- Best practices information can be helpful. Just knowing what other places are doing or exploring and enhancing.
- It is really important because we seem very divided in the direct work that we do and the high-level where OJJDP sits. Having more community and these types of sessions where you are on the ground talking to people who do this work to find out what we need. Some of the things, we have always needed, but things may have changed. Talk to us and find out what those needs are. Having more of these types of sessions would be very helpful. Spaces like this, where the main purpose is to speak to us about what we have seen.

b. What ideas do you have for pilot programs OJJDP could implement that align with this priority?

- There's a dearth of FFT. I wish that we had more than one provider. And one of the reasons we have challenges is because we are dealing with Medicaid billing instead of trying to focus on the services and supporting the program fully. Out-and-out fully fund and eliminate having to seek Medicaid reimbursement. Sometimes, I think we try to create new things all the time when there are things that exist that are not fully operational.

7. How can OJJDP support better cross-system collaboration to lead to improved family-based and community-involved treatment of youth?

- Help us meet the challenges of having to seek medical reimbursements.
- Address the challenges of public defenders and not having the time to spend to understand the youth.

Breakout Room 3: Opening Up Opportunities for System-Involved Youth

1. What does it mean to you to open up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- To shift the focus from a deficit-based approach to a strengths-based approach as well as building protective factors for youth.
- To present opportunities for youth outside of the juvenile justice system. To connect youth to a broader community outside of the institution of the juvenile justice court.
- Ensuring that young people who are system-involved have access to other opportunities that are meant for youth who do not touch the system.
- Increased focus on root conditions as well as economic access, such as paid opportunities where they're paid to learn and use new skills.
- Long-term access to healing-centric and well-being resources and mental health opportunities that address trauma and other factors that drive them into the system in the first place.



- Healing-centered resources and supports that give young people an opportunity to heal.
- To offer supports that reduce and mitigate the length of time for system-involved youth and create opportunities to address the impact of system involvement, such as post-disposition council.
- To prevent youth entry into the system or to mitigate their involvement in the system. When we talk about the system, it's not just the juvenile justice system. Let's not forget all of the other ways those kids become involved in the system. It's important to provide early intervention so that they avoid entering systems altogether.
- There should be an increase of educational opportunities for youth when they transition out of the juvenile justice system. There are many coordinating councils at the state and local level, but how do we connect them with folks and offer opportunities for youth?

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

- One of the problems for opening up those opportunities is that as soon as you start talking about juvenile justice versus what youth and families need, it takes a lot of options off the table. As soon as a kid has contact with the system, then all of a sudden they transform from being a "kid" to being a set of problems. A lot of those options being provided on the back end are not helpful. We have not provided many options for them not to be justice involved. We need to begin with the needs of the kids first (addiction support, trauma, mental health supports).
- One of the primary barriers with girls in the juvenile justice system is the stigma about the communities they come from. This means girls may be sent to residential placements. This plays out in a way where we're not providing youth with what they need to feel safe. We're just placing them in facilities that are not beneficial. Families are also not being given the resources they need. Oftentimes, parents feel like they can't keep their child safe and that's when they turn to the system. Also, community-based organizations play an important role, and they enable trust just by virtue of their attachment to the system. Sometimes, the entities don't have the resources or respect of court systems to do the work well. There are many silos because we're not taking advantage of the programs and opportunities where there is overlap in multiple agencies.
- Government entities can present a huge barrier. The funding allocated to the systems has increased dramatically per capita. We need to shift the resources to invest in youth and their families rather than continuing to grow government agencies.
- There is an assumption because there are fewer girls in the juvenile justice system, that they don't need resources. It's this kind of dis-investment that's exactly the challenge. Girls and women are often the mainstays of our community. We also need to consider issues of sexual abuse and trauma and how they affect system-involved kids. It's extremely hard to collect data on these issues. The collection of data for this youth victimization is an issue. We don't know what's actually happening to these kids. There is also a lack of data for youth in immigration facilities. OJJDP can play a large role in this space as it relates to the data collection.
- When we think about therapeutic services for children, the services have continuously declined. We've gone entirely backwards during a time when we've put more complex issues in front of youth, alcoholism, drugs, etc. Instead of at-risk youth, I like to refer to them as "children we should prioritize." Currently, we do not have a responsive, child-serving system. We have a fractured system with different parts that we've patched together. We need to create a more child-centered system.



3. Please share your ideas for reducing referrals and the flow of youth from the mental health system to juvenile justice.

- a. **What ideas do you have to reduce referrals from child welfare systems, including foster care, to juvenile justice?**
- b. **What ideas do you have to reduce referrals from the education system to juvenile justice system?**
 - The lack of systems of care is right on point. Regardless of what pathway a child takes, if there's a mental or behavioral health need, they go through the children's system of care. Through the coordinated system of care, state agencies can take a look at the full continuum to ensure children can be served close to home. We do not have enough of functional arrays of supports to help meet the needs of where they are. Lack of coordination is a part of the issue. The way the funding works forces people to choose. There's not enough space for creative, individualized approaches. How do we "hyper-customize" supports for youth and families?
 - We need more training for judges around referrals. It's very important for people in decision-making positions to understand what happens to youth when they are moved across systems. How do we recognize and acknowledge what's not happening?
 - I would love for the role of the delinquency system to be that of a tight gatekeeper and hold the other agencies accountable for their actions.
 - As we think about this work, we should consider the partners who have access to the resources for youth and families.

4. If you had a magic wand, and there were zero barriers in the way, what would you say OJJDP's goal for opening up opportunities for system-involved youth should be?

- If a kid got in trouble, we wouldn't immediately diagnose the trouble and refer them to the system. We would have an opportunity to sit with that kid and their family to identify resources and supports before sending them to a facility. This would include youth, school, families, and others across state agencies.
- We don't create enough time and space to figure out what's going on. Imagine if we had restorative centers where that would be the first place to go! We need time and space to understand what exactly happened.
- Invest in early intervention and diversion programs to engage with you in a different way that includes the family and restorative practices versus adjudication.
- Do some mapping of who you are funding from your different silos and seeing where there are synergies.

5. 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.)

- a. **What policies, guidance, or communication would be helpful for OJJDP to develop to support the priority of opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?**
- b. **What ideas do you have for pilot programs OJJDP could implement that align with this priority?**



- Lets pilot this: <https://osf.io/preprints/socarxiv/q85ux/>.
- Highlight best practice and results: <https://www.osbm.nc.gov/operational-excellence/north-carolina-results-first/juvenile-justice#Confidence>. The North Carolina example is interesting, and they are taking a stab at identifying value-based approaches...figuring out what is actually working.

c. What types of trainings or webinars would it be helpful for OJJDP to develop on the topic of opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

d. What publications or products could OJJDP consider developing to support the priority of opening up opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- Develop models for federal agency collaborations (HUD, HHS, DOE, SAMSHA).
- Here's an example of agency collaboration between HHS and HUD: <https://acl.gov/HousingAndServices>.
- OJJDP sits in an interesting place in the ecosystem. To someone's point earlier, the idea is for OJJDP to put the delinquency system out of business. I would love to see OJJDP pilot initiatives that incentivize reinvestment not just from incarceration to community-based services, but from the delinquency system itself to non-system supportive services (targeted economic development, economic assistance, and early intervention_.
- I would echo and then add: 1) a focus on economic access and development with more and more paid opportunities for young people, 2) elevating the role of community-based organizations and working with other agencies and philanthropy, and 3) support strategies that young people themselves are asking for.
- A communication tool that invites organizations to share the work they are doing and makes policies and practices easily accessible.
- I think OJJDP could lean into the "delinquency prevention" part of its mission to support the above (and make sure it is in fact "rare." I tend to always lean toward focusing on the "rare" of the rare, fair, and beneficial).

6. How can OJJDP support better cross-system collaboration to lead to improved opportunities for youth involved in the juvenile justice system?

- I'd love to explore the public/private partnership conversation.