

Close Texas' 5 Youth Prisons, and Support Kids in Their Communities and Schools

Policy Background

Multiple crises in the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) have led to inhumane conditions for approximately 600 children in its care. Facilities are dangerously understaffed, leaving kids trapped in tiny cells for as many as 23 hours a day without access to bathrooms. Programming has been cut, removing opportunities for rehabilitation and socialization. Since summer 2022, nearly half of detained kids have been on suicide watch or engaged in self-harm.

Proposed Solution

Texas leaders should commit to closing TJJD's 5 state secure institutions by 2030 through a thoughtful, staggered closure plan.

The Legislature should invest in building communities' infrastructure to appropriately address the needs of children who would have been incarcerated, and allow recapture from closed facilities to reimburse the costs for those community-based resources.

Among other things:

- Kids should have access to robust resources and restorative justice programming in their schools, along with at-home supports from local service providers, to improve mental health outcomes and violence prevention, and to prevent kids from coming into contact with the punishment system altogether.
- Kids should also have tailored treatment plans and case management outside of prison walls to help them safely return home from TJJD. Short-term funding to counties will facilitate children's transition to non-punitive services; this should include the development and expansion of community-based service providers in partnership with the community, schools, and the Texas Health and Human Services Commission (HHSC).
- Kids who cannot go home should live in safe, non-institutionalized settings, with caring adults who know how to effectively serve them.
- The state should establish a dedicated office within HHSC to ensure that children and their families are provided the appropriate, public health-focused resources to aid in violence prevention and mitigation.

Relevant Bills

- **Bill Number:** [HB 4356](#) [Talarico]
Bill Caption: Relating to the dissolution of the Texas Juvenile Justice Department and the creation of the Office of Youth Safety and Rehabilitation.

Other Materials

- TCJE webpage: [Finish The 5: Campaign to Close Texas' Youth Prisons](#)(opens in a new tab)[2022-23]
- TCJE(opens in a new tab)testimony on the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, submitted to the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Articles I, IV, and V [February 2023]
- TCJE(opens in a new tab)testimony on the Texas Juvenile Justice Department, submitted to the Senate Finance Committee [February 2023]
- TCJE flyer: [Finish the 5: Our Journey to Zero Youth Prisons in Texas](#)(opens in a new tab)[December 2022]
- TCJE policy brief: [Finish the 5: Our Journey to Zero Youth Prisons in Texas](#)(opens in a new tab)[October 2022]
- TCJE webinar with Austin Liberation Youth Movement: [Texas' Youth Prison Crisis, Explained](#), featuring Jolie McCullough of the *Texas Tribune* [October 2022]
- TCJE(opens in a new tab)testimony on youth justice, including [Community Reinvestment Funds](#), submitted to the House Criminal Justice Reform, Interim Select Committee [August 2022]
- TCJE's 2021 legislative portfolio: [Spend Your Values, Cut Your Losses](#)(opens in a new tab) (Smart and Safe Solution #6), with corresponding webpage (recommendation 2) (opens in a new tab)[2021]