

THE PROBLEM

Each year, thousands of kids face charges in court, are held in detention, and end up in locked facilities for status offenses—non-criminal behaviors prohibited by law due to a young person’s age. Pushing youth toward court and system involvement exacerbates the very factors underlying status offenses.



STATUS OFFENSE CASES SENT TO COURT



Breakdown of Petitioned Status Offense Cases:



Constituting over half of the status offenses cases filed nationwide, truancy cases result in more adjudications, detentions, and out-of-home placements than any other type of status offense court case.

WHY YOUTH ARE DETAINED

- 1974** **Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) Established**
The JJDP A set forth four requirements for states to receive federal funding towards juvenile justice programming. The Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO) requirement prohibits the detention of youth for status offenses.
- 1980** **DSO Amended to Include VCO Exception**
The VCO exception enables judges to incarcerate young people when they violate court orders, like “stop running away” or “stop skipping school”.
- Today** **Youth Detained Using VCO Exceptions**
In states such as Kentucky, Washington, and Arkansas, VCO exceptions have increased detention usage for status offenses.

IMPACTS OF SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT

Youth who commit status offenses are more likely to be victims of abuse and to experience physical and mental health problems. Courts are not designed to quickly assess and respond to such underlying circumstances, especially when crises are at hand.

Youth placed in detention or longer-term facilities are more likely to engage in future delinquent behavior.

Detention and out-of-home placements have serious negative impacts on youths’ mental and physical health, education, and employment.

WHAT WORKS

There is a better way. Many states and localities have implemented community-based and family-focused alternatives to court intervention that reduce court caseloads, lower government costs, and provide meaningful and lasting support to children and families.



PROMISING PRACTICES

1

Collaborative efforts to divert youth from court involvement

Keeping kids out of court requires mechanisms for addressing early signs of misbehavior and needs and using each point of contact as an opportunity for intervention and diversion. Multi-stakeholder groups and cross-over roles (such as school resource officers) help bridge inter-agency gaps and provide a more seamless and comprehensive approach to addressing individual youth cases.

2

Specialized first responders to provide appropriate and immediate responses

Families may need immediate assistance from trained professionals who can work with them—often in their home—to de-escalate the situation and get them connected to the right services. Officers who respond to status offenses should be specialized in juvenile cases and have access to supports (such as social workers) and resources (such as 24-hour drop-off centers) to determine a proper course of action.

3

Centrally coordinated services that are appropriate, accessible, and effective

Effective systems identify youth and family needs and tailor services accordingly. While some families require only brief and minimal intervention, others need intensive and ongoing support to resolve problems. A central service provider can conduct careful screening and assessment, coordinate and connect families to nearby services, and provide ongoing case management.

JURISDICTIONS WITH WORKING STRATEGIES

FLORIDA developed a statewide network of service providers that families and youth can access for help without court involvement.

Results Kept kids out of the system and saved state dollars.

- Within the first 5 years (from 2004 to 2009), early intervention services saved the state \$160 million.
- In 2011-2012, 91% of diverted youth were crime-free six months after services.
- By 2013, only 4% of all status offense referrals were sent to court.



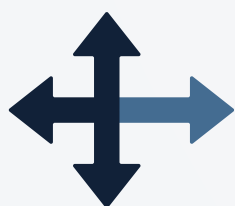
CONNECTICUT encouraged schools to intervene early when problematic behaviors became apparent and created one-stop service centers for youth and families needing intensive services.

Results Reduced court interventions and boosted community-based care.

- From 2006 to 2008, the number of court referrals dropped by 41%.
- By 2011, only 5% of referrals received formal court processing—down from 50% in 2006.



MOVE YOUR JURISDICTION IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION



The Status Offense Reform Center (SORC) provides policymakers and practitioners with tools and information to create effective, community-based responses for keeping young people who engage in noncriminal behavior out of the juvenile justice system.

STATUS OFFENSE | REFORM CENTER

For research on truancy and other status offenses, visit us at statusoffensereform.org.