



Report to

Vermont Governor Phil Scott

Members of the Senate and House Judiciary Committees

2025 Annual Report

Council for Equitable Youth Justice

Vermont State Advisory Group on Delinquency Prevention

**In Accordance with 34 U.S. Code § 11133 [Sec. 223]
and 33 V.S.A. § 3303(e)**

Submitted to:

Phil Scott, Governor

Jenney Samuelson, Secretary, Agency of Human Services

Sandi Hoffman, Interim Commissioner, Department for Children and Families

House Judiciary Committee, Senate Judiciary Committee

Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, U.S. Department of Justice

Report Date: March 2, 2026

Table of Contents

Executive Summary 3
 Compliance with JJRA Requirements 3
Background Information 6
 CEYJ Mission 7
 Currently Appointed Council Members 7
Section 1: Monitor and Oversee Compliance 8
 Definitions 8
Section II: Elimination of Racial Disparities 11
 Figure 1: Selected Contact Point Numbers for FFY2024 (Oct 1, 2023 – Sept 30, 2024) 12
Section III: System Improvement in the Juvenile Justice System 13
Section IV: Reducing Delinquency through Youth Services 15
Conclusion 16
Appendix 18
 Circles of Peace for Youth 19
 Turning Dollars into Impact Brief 20

Executive Summary

The Council for Equitable Youth Justice (the Council), in collaboration with the Vermont Department for Children and Families (DCF), oversees the activities of the Vermont Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Three-Year Plan (Federal Fiscal Year 2024-2026). The state receives funds from the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) Title II formula grant program to support these activities. As a recipient of the Title II grant, the Council is required to submit a report focusing on the progress with the three-year plan and compliance with the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), as amended by the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018 (JJRA). Please refer to Sections I, II, III and IV for details about compliance monitoring of the JJRA requirements, addressing racial disparities, systems improvement to the juvenile justice system, and delinquency prevention efforts.

The three goals of the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Three Year Plan](#) are to eliminate racial disparities, prevent delinquency, and improve the juvenile justice system.

Compliance with JJRA Requirements

DCF collected and reported data from Oct 1, 2024 – Sept 30, 2025, to OJJDP in July 2025. OJJDP issued a letter regarding areas where the state was in compliance or non-compliance. Vermont was in compliance with four of the five key areas:

- section 223(a)(11)(A) of the JJDP (the “**deinstitutionalization of status offenders**” or “**DSO**” requirement) (34 U.S.C. § 11133(a)(11)(A)).
- section 223(a)(11)(B) of the JJDP (the “**juveniles charged as adults**” or “**JCA**” requirement) (34 U.S.C. § 11133(a)(11)(B)).¹
- section 223(a)(13) of the JJDP (the “**jail removal**” requirement) (34 U.S.C. § 11133(a)(13)).
- section 223(a)(15) of the JJDP (the “**racial and ethnic disparities**” or “**R/ED**” requirement) (34 U.S.C. § 11133(a)(15)).

Vermont is **not in compliance** with section 223(a)(12) of the JJDP (the “**separation requirement**”) (34 U.S.C. § 11133(a)(12)). The Council and DCF will collaborate to develop a plan for addressing this core requirement. Vermont had eleven sight and sound separation violations and did not meet the .81 threshold established by OJJDP (refer to the 2025 Sight and Sound Separation Violations).

Addressing Racial Disparities

One of the JJRA core requirements is to address racial and ethnic disparities. Partnering with DCF, the Council contracted with an anti-racism consultant, Mathematica, to achieve three objectives in 2025:

1. Help the Council members understand and identify what white supremacy culture and systematic racism are within themselves and their work
2. Develop and review the Council's core values to ensure that the Council's primary goal is the elimination of ethnic and racial disparities in Vermont's juvenile justice system by initiating and acting as a catalyst for both direct intervention and primary prevention strategies
3. Assist the Council with training and assessment of its three-year plan, policies, programs, and practices, and include written recommendations on how to proceed.

The Council members participated in seven training sessions between Oct 2024 and August 2025. One of the sessions was a two-day retreat to reflect on the data and learning from the prior training sessions and to develop an action plan moving forward to address racial disparities in the juvenile court system.

The Burlington School District (BSD) received Title II funds from December 1, 2020, to September 30, 2024, to address racial disparities in school suspensions. In the 2024–25 school year, BIPOC students made up 42% of BSD's student population but accounted for only 33% of suspensions, according to [the district's report](#). This is a drop from the 2021-2022 school year when students of color — 38% of the population — represented 50% of suspensions in the school district. This data highlights significant progress toward more equitable disciplinary practices and reflects BSD's decades of commitment to addressing this issue. Additionally, the district reported a decrease in overall school suspensions, fewer incidents requiring suspension, and a reduction in lost school days due to suspensions, all contributing to improved educational outcomes and student engagement.

Delinquency Prevention

The Council funded youth centers and the Vermont Afterschool Program to support positive youth engagement in their community and promote adult youth relationships. The results of these projects include building protective factors among the youth such as positive self-esteem, improved parent/caregiver relationships, positive leisure/recreational activities and being part of prosocial peer group. The youth centers that received Title II grant funds included The Hub in Bristol and the Berkshire Family YMCA in Bennington. One of the positive outcomes reported by The Hub was a steady increase in at-risk youth that participated in activities after school. They started the project with 47 youth participating from Jan 1 – March 30, 2024, and increased participation to 152 youth between April 1 – June 30, 2025.

The Vermont Afterschool Program received proposals from several community youth organizations and awarded funds to two programs: 1) The Lounge, Center for Restorative Justice, serving Bennington County and 2) the Barra School, East Corinth, service area which includes the towns of Topsham, Bradford, Washington, Chelsea, Fairlee and Orange. Reported highlights from each program include:

- The funds provided youth with new tools and resources to manage and overcome adversity and stress in a healthy/productive way, education on life skills, including self and co-regulation skills, and support for youths’ self-esteem through “challenge by choice” activities that provide a sense of accomplishment and success.
- In Bennington, there was an incident of hitting between students in their lounge space outside of program hours. In response, the program provided more targeted and deeper support in teaching youth to develop healthy relationships with each other that are rooted in productive conflict resolution.

Although the Berkshire YMCA and Vermont Afterschool grant project have successfully ended, the Council supported additional funds to the Hub in Bristol for another year (until Aug 31, 2026). The Hub proposed adding one new staff member to foster meaningful connections between youth and adults. The Hub director explained that every individual connects differently, and having a variety of staff members allows more opportunities for young people to build important relationships with safe adults who make them feel truly seen and supported.

System Improvement

The Council approved funding to the Hartford Community Justice Center (HCJC), Circles of Peace for Youth program to employ restorative practices to address domestic violence caused by youth, blending early intervention with accountability, empathy, and atonement. This project was based on an earlier project funded by the Council which provided recommendations for a youth domestic violence intervention program in accordance with Vermont’s Statewide Standards for Domestic Violence Accountability Programs (DVAP) approved by the Vermont Council on Domestic Violence. During the first year of the project (2024 – 2025), the program which is the first of its kind in Vermont, engaged in extensive outreach and education across the state. This outreach led to the first referrals to the program by the end of the first year of the project, March 31, 2025. The project was extended for another year with the goal that eligible youth statewide would continue to be referred to and participate in Circles of Peace for Youth. HCJC reported that one youth expressed appreciation for the opportunity to participate in the program.

Background Information

The Council for Equitable Youth Justice (the Council) is the Vermont state advisory group (SAG) that supports compliance with the four core requirements of the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP), as amended by the Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2018 (JJRA) [34 U.S. Code § 11133 \[Sec. 223\]](#). The Council's role and responsibilities to promote an effective Vermont juvenile justice system and support compliance of the JJRA requirements is defined in [33 V.S.A. § 3302](#).

The Department for Children and Families (DCF) within the Agency of Human Services, is the designated state agency (DSA) charged with coordinating with the Council in the preparation and administration of the three-year state plan required by the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). DCF is also the State agency responsible for monitoring and data collection for purposes of compliance with the JJRA.

The Council and DCF have a longstanding partnership to fulfill the JJRA requirements, focusing on reducing racial disparities, improving the youth justice system, and preventing delinquency. DCF annually receives a grant award from the Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) through the Title II formula grant program. The Council and its committees strategize with DCF to expend these funds to community-based agencies or consultants capable of executing work that supports the JJDP three-year state plan.

The Council's priorities for the Federal Fiscal Year 2024-2026 (Oct 1, 2024 – Sept 30, 2027) plan are:

1. Eliminate Ethnic and Racial Disparities (ERD) within the juvenile justice system in the State of Vermont by initiating and acting as a catalyst for a combination of direct intervention and primary prevention strategies that achieve this goal.
2. Ensure that Vermont's juvenile justice system has an appropriate response based on risk and need principles for youth, with a view toward dismantling inequities.
3. Promote active youth engagement in their communities and participation in initiatives and programs that promote civic participation, social responsibility, and community development.

The current JJDP Three-Year Plan was released in August 2024 for the Federal Fiscal Years 24 - 26 (Oct 1, 2024 – Sept 30, 2027).

CEYJ Composition

The Council consists of up to 25 members who are appointed by the Governor with the advice and consent of the Senate for three-year terms. Membership is based on experience with delinquency prevention, and federal membership requirements from the JJRA. For example, the

JJRA requires that there be designated representatives from law enforcement, victim advocacy groups, members who have direct experience with the juvenile justice system, youth members and more.

CEYJ Mission

Our mission is to: prevent youth legal system involvement, shield youth from the adverse impact of a criminal record, eliminate racial and ethnic disparities, and reduce the risk of reentering the system.

Currently Appointed Council Members

Karen Vastine, Chair
Jessica Barquist, Vice Chair
Donn Hutchins, Secretary/Treasurer
Stuart Berry
Julia Brand
Peter Brown
Laurey Burris
Hon. Amy Davenport
Paul Groce
Hon. Kate Hayes
Linda Johnson
Mercedes King
Michael Loner
Katherine O'Day
Hudson Ranney
Zoe Souder
Henri Sparks
Matt Wolf

Section 1: Monitor and Oversee Compliance

The Council is charged with supporting the monitoring of compliance with the JJRA by DCF. For a state to be eligible to receive a federal formula grant, each year, the state must satisfy 33 state plan requirements. Within these 33 requirements, 4 are deemed to be "core" because by statute OJJDP must reduce a state's annual formula grant award by 20 percent for each requirement with which the state is out of compliance ([eligibility requirements](#)). OJJDP will reduce a state's formula grant by 20 percent if the state is out of compliance with any of these core requirements. Additionally, OJJDP requires that 50 % of the remaining grant funds be dedicated to address the noncompliance areas.

The Council uses a portion of its formula grant to fund a part-time Compliance Monitor who monitors violations of the core requirements and reports them to the OJJDP annually. OJJDP requires that all facilities with the ability and authority to hold youth securely are inspected on a three-year cycle which is in line with the Council's three-year plan. The four core requirements are: (1) deinstitutionalization of status offenders, (2) sight and sound separation of juveniles from adult inmates, (3) removal of juveniles from adult jails and lockups, and (4) addressing racial and ethnic disparities. Vermont reports on core requirements (1- 3) as part of the annual Compliance Monitoring report. For core requirement 4, we submit progress with our goal in the three-year plan to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities.

Definitions

Deinstitutionalization of status offenders:

- A status offense is a nondelinquent (and noncriminal) act that is illegal for underage individuals, but not for adults. Status offenders are juveniles charged with offenses such as running away or truant behavior or violating underage liquor law. These juveniles shall not be placed in secure detention facilities or secure correctional facilities. Unlike most states, Vermont treats running away and truancy as grounds for a child protection case rather than delinquency.

Sight and sound separation of juveniles from adult inmates:

- Juveniles may not be subject to sight or sound contact with adult inmates while securely detained.

Removal of juveniles from adult jails and lockups:

- Juveniles charged with a crime may not be detained in adult jails or police holding cells except for processing and release, and for a limited duration of time (6 hours for metropolitan and 48 hours for micropolitan facilities). Vermont also has a state statute that bans juvenile delinquents (of any age) from being housed in DOC facilities.

Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities:

- Youth of color are involved with the juvenile justice system at disproportionately higher rates than white youths. States are required to track ethnic diversity and disparities in involvement and treatment in the juvenile justice system and to create and execute an action plan to address disparities.

Federal Definition of Juvenile:

- Federal law does not specify the upper age limit of a “juvenile” covered by the core protections. The upper age limit is defined by state law. **On July 1, 2020, Vermont became the first state in the nation to raise its upper age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 18-year-olds.** This means that, apart from the most serious violent crimes referred to as “the Big 11,” youth accused of breaking the law when they are 18 years old are charged and adjudicated in the Vermont Judiciary’s Family Division as delinquents rather than in the adult Criminal Division. Supervision and coordination of services are provided by the Department for Children and Families (DCF), rather than the Department of Corrections (DOC). Youth accused of breaking the law at age 19 will be similarly included in the juvenile justice system on July 1, 2027, making the 20th birthday the upper age of juvenile jurisdiction in the state.
- Vermont raised the minimum age a youth can be adjudicated in the Family Division from 10 years old to 12 as of July 1, 2025. Currently 12 - 18-year-old youth are covered by the core protections of the JJRA.

Applicability of the Core Requirement to Juveniles Charged as Adults

The JJRA expanded the federal core requirements to include juveniles charged as adults in addition to juveniles charged as delinquents. Juveniles charged as adults cannot be held in an adult jail or lockup or have sight or sound contact with adult inmates, unless the court finds after a hearing and in writing that it is in the interests of justice to do so [34 U.S.C § 223(a)(11)(B)]. If the Court determines that it is in the interests of justice to hold the juvenile in an adult facility, that finding must be reviewed and renewed every 30 days (or 45 days in rural areas) until the juvenile is moved out of the facility. The Judge must continue to make this finding every 30 (or 45) days. This change came into effect on December 21, 2021.

In 2022, Vermont law was amended to require an Interest of Justice (IOJ) hearing for juveniles charged as adults and held in an adult lockup or other secure adult facility. 33 V.S.A. § 5294 provides as follows:

“Not later than the next business day after a juvenile who is awaiting trial or other legal process and who is treated as an adult for prosecution in the Criminal Division is taken into custody, the court shall hold a hearing and determine whether to issue a written order, pursuant to 34 U.S.C. § 11133(a)(11)(B), that it is in the interests of justice to hold the juvenile in a jail or other secure facility for adults owned or operated by the

Department of Corrections and, if such an order is issued, whether to allow sight or sound contact with adult inmates. Hearings held and orders issued pursuant to this section shall conform with the requirements of 34 U.S.C. § 11133(a)(11)(B), including the criteria set forth therein.”

Compliance with the 6-hour requirement for an IOJ hearing is difficult in a small, rural state like Vermont. Vermont courts are not open on weekends, holidays or evenings. Thus, if a youth is charged with an offense on a Friday night, the earliest opportunity the Court can hold an IOJ hearing is Monday morning, days after the federal law requires it to have occurred. There is a “rural removal exception” which extends the 6-hour requirement for the hearing to 48 hours for facilities in rural micropolitan areas. This excludes Chittenden, Grand Isle, and Franklin counties, which are defined as ‘metropolitan’ by the Office of Budget Management.

OJJDP has announced that it will collect baseline data regarding IOJ hearings from states for the first two years before making compliance determinations. As a result, Vermont’s funding has not been reduced for failure to hold an IOJ hearing in a timely fashion. This two-year period has been an opportunity for states to evaluate and identify where and how improvements can be made in their justice systems with the goal of preventing and removing all juveniles charged as adults from adult jails and lockups. The Council has provided information to OJJDP and our Congressional delegation on the difficulties of complying with the 6-hour hearing requirement for small rural states.

DCF Compliance Monitor continues to collaborate with the Judiciary’s Court staff to gather information on IOJ hearings and report them to OJJDP.

2025 Sight and Sound Separation Violations

In July 2025, DCF submitted the data for the OJJDP concerning violations for the Federal Fiscal Year 2024 (October 1, 2023 – September 30, 2024). There were eleven cases of sight and sound separation violations for juveniles held in secure facilities with an adult population. OJJDP issues a threshold rate that states must be at or below to be in compliance. Adjusting for Vermont’s juvenile population the threshold was .20 per 100,000. Vermont’s threshold rate to achieve compliance was .81 or lower. As a result for the FFY 2025 Title II Formula Grant, Vermont will receive a 20% decrease in funds and will be required to develop a plan to address the noncompliance with 50% of the remainder of the funding. The Council and DCF will collaborate to develop a plan and submit this to OJJDP for approval.

Update on Coming into Compliance

The FFY 22 grant award was reduced because Vermont did not achieve the threshold for sight and sound separation for the data collected from October 1, 2020 – September 30, 2021.

The Council implemented their compliance plan to expend the \$241,570 of FFY 22 funds that

must be used to address the problems of the sight and sound noncompliance. A request for proposal was released to identify a national consultant to assist DCF and the Facility Planning for Justice Involved Youth Stakeholder work group with planning DCF's High End System of Care (HESOC) which serves youth with intensive needs and youth held in secure facilities. The National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges – National Center for Juvenile Justice was selected, and a contract was executed Oct 1, 2025. NCJJ will evaluate the current state of the HESOC and develop recommendations on ways to improve the current system based on national research, their subject matter expertise, and stakeholder feedback.

The second strategy was to identify an expert to train the Department of Corrections officers that interact with young people in the DOC facilities. Because these facilities house adults too, the training would include:

- Understanding federal and state laws requires separation from older incarcerated adults (e.g., consequences when younger offenders are mixed with older more experienced offenders).
- The rationale behind these laws and the research related to adolescent brain development.
- Practical intervention when working with youthful offenders who are held securely.

DCF released a simplified bid in September 2025, but no proposals were submitted by the deadline. However, at the time of this report, a bidder has come forward with a proposal. The Council, DCF, and DOC will review and discuss next steps. If changes to the original compliance plan are warranted, we will submit information for OJJDP to approved before moving forward.

Section II: Elimination of Racial Disparities

The JJRA requires states to “implement policy, practice and system improvement strategies at the state, territorial, local and tribal levels, as applicable, to identify and reduce racial and ethnic disparities among youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, without establishing or requiring numerical standards or quotas.” DCF submits statewide data to OJJDP at the following five key decision points where research has shown that racial disparities may occur: **arrest, diversion, pre-trial detention, secure confinement, and adult transfer**. While Vermont's race/ethnicity data is incomplete (37% unknown or blank), there is reason for concern based on the data that is available.

The FFY2024 data reveals racial and ethnic disparities at almost every contact point in the juvenile justice system. Disparities exist for black youth at arrest, diversion, and pre-trial detention/secure confinement. There is some improvement in transfers to adult court.

Figure 1: Selected Contact Point Numbers for FFY2024 (Oct 1, 2023 – Sept 30, 2024)

Juvenile Case Filings	<p>4.14% of the total black youth population had arrests compared with 1.02% of white youth population had arrests. The black youth population represents 2.9% of the juvenile population and white youth represent 90.6%. This percentage is higher than last year; 1.63% of the black youth population had arrests compared to .82% of the white youth population.</p>
Diversion	<p>Black youth are less than half as likely to have their cases diverted or dismissed: 61% of white youth vs 27% of black youth cases were resolved this way. Last year the percentage of white youth cased diverted/dismisssed was 50.80 % compared to 51.60% of black youth cases.</p>
Pre-Trial Detention	<p>For secure holding, 34 % of black youth, 29% of Hispanics and 10% of their white peers were held securely.</p>
Secure Detention	<p>The definition of secure confinement is specific to delinquent offenders, “those in which, following a court disposition, ... are placed in secure residential or correctional facilities for delinquent offenders.” Vermont’s only secure juvenile rehabilitation facility was closed in October of 2020. Vermont did not have a secure juvenile detention facility until October 2024, when the Red Clover Treatment Center opened. Red Clover is a small, four bed secure facility and is intended for short term stabilization. Plans to design and build a permanent facility are underway.</p>
Adult Transfer	<p>Black youth are slightly less likely to have charges transferred from juvenile court to adult court (5.06%) is slightly lower than that of white youth (5.43%).</p>
Unknown Data	<p>37% of juvenile case filings are missing race data. This is slightly worse than last year (33%).</p>

Goal: Eliminate Racial and Ethnic Disparities (R/ED) in Vermont's juvenile justice system through direct intervention and prevention strategies to Eliminate Racial Ethnic Disparities

The following reflects progress with the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Three-Year Plan](#)-August 2024, pages 32-34, 44-45.

Progress: Achieve a shared understanding of anti-racism and identify systemic Racism to prioritize eliminating disparities.

- Mathematica was hired and led seven anti-racism trainings between Oct of 2024 and Aug of 2025. The training sessions supported the Council to establish the foundation of concepts including understanding power and privilege that influence systems, priorities and strengthening roles for change, addressing data and decision points, deepening data analysis, and developing an action plan.

Progress: Improve the accuracy of race data collection for delinquency filings and juvenile arrests.

- The Council worked with members of the judiciary to prioritize accuracy in race and ethnicity data, prompting juveniles to provide this information, and making sure that the juvenile intake sheet that law enforcement use has clear instructions.
- DCF’s Compliance Monitor continued to support police departments, sheriffs and courthouse staff to improve efforts to collect race and ethnicity data for the secure holding logs than they have for initial case filings reported to OJJDP.
- Mathematica’s training of the Council members included two sessions on data analysis and reviewing available data to identify priorities for developing strategies for the action planning session.

Progress: Fund community programs to reduce racial and ethnic disparities and ensure youth feedback.

- The Council’s Ethnic and Racial Disparities Committee and DCF released a request for proposal to address racial disparities by implementing alternatives to suspension. There were seven bids and DCF is negotiating with the bidder selected by the review team, comprised of Council members and DCF staff.

Section III: System Improvement in the Juvenile Justice System

The Council is federally charged with advising the administration on juvenile delinquency needs and strategies for prevention. The Council advises on state and federal legislation that affects youth by engaging with governmental partners and advising on compliance with the JJRA. Historically, the Council has partnered with DCF and other stakeholders to implement state legislative changes in youth court jurisdiction such as the Raise-the-Age (RTA) legislation described earlier and the hybrid “Youthful Offender” option for 14- to 21-year-old youth and young adults.

The Council’s System Improvement Committee monitors state and federal legislation related to juveniles and recommends funding for programs related to improvement of Vermont’s juvenile justice system. In 2025, the Committee monitored legislation in the Vermont Legislature to raise the minimum age from 10 to 12 and maximum age of 19 years. The legislation was passed that delayed the maximum age until 2027 to give the state more time to open a secure facility for youthful offenders. Furthermore, the committee set forth policy recommendations for the federal delegation to address issues in the JJRA. One was noted earlier in this report regarding the timeframe for IOJ hearings, and a second relates to the formula used by OJJDPs to determine the number of allowable violations. For low population states like Vermont, the OJJDP threshold adjusted for population is less than one. Vermont’s allowable number of sight and sound violations was .6 youth.)

Goal: Ensure that Vermont’s justice system has an appropriate and equitable response for youth.

The following reflects progress with the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Three-Year Plan](#)-August 2024, pages 35-38, 46-47.

Progress: Support the development of innovative programming and ensure current programming is in compliance with OJJDP requirements and provide appropriate services that help

- The Council’s System Improvement Committee developed criteria to fund a consultant for the High-End System of Care to assist in the development of hardware-secure and staff-secure residential placement availability in Vermont. The secure residential facility Woodside closed in 2020. As a result, Vermont has faced challenges with placement of youth in secure facilities that house adults and compliance with the JJRA sight and sound separation requirement. The consultant will work with the Council, DCF, and Facility and Planning Workgroup in the development of short-term stabilization and longer-term treatment programs in a secure facility, based on the following: stakeholder feedback, subject matter expertise, and lived experience. The consultant selected for this project is the National Council of Juvenile and Court Judges, National Center for Juvenile Justice (NCJJ). Through extensive interviews with all of the players including youth, the NCJJ will develop recommendations for the operation and programming in the high-end system of care that promotes clear and sustainable system oversight, regulation, and accountability. NCJJ will also address the enhancement of post-placement community-based services for youth.
- The Committee supported an extension to the Hartford Community Justice Center to continue its implementation of the Juvenile Domestic Violence Accountability Program (DVAP), Circles for Peace project. In the first year of the project the focus was on outreach and education of potential referral sources and training volunteers to support youth in the program.
- The Council and DCF released a request for proposal to identify a trainer to develop a curriculum for DOC staff to enhance their understanding of the JJRA sight and sound separation of youth in facilities, the rationale for it, adolescent brain development, and best practices when working with youth. At the time of this report one consultant has submitted a proposal for consideration.

Progress: The data in Vermont’s juvenile justice system better reflects the system and the youth that are involved in the system so that it is possible to monitor progress towards a more equitable system

- The Council approved funding for a recidivism study to measure the impact of legislation that raised the age of juvenile jurisdiction in the Family Division to include 18-year-olds (Raise the Age legislation). The first step in that process was a recidivism study completed in April of 2022 by the Vermont Crime Research Group that analyzed

recidivism for 18- and 19-year-olds adjudicated in the Criminal Division. This study established a benchmark that can be used to compare recidivism outcomes for 18-year-olds adjudicated in the Family Division after implementation of the Raise the Age law on July 1, 2020.

The law has been in place for almost five years, and the follow-up study will look at the number of offenders who have had any subsequent disposition adjudicated in the Family Division or the Criminal Division within 3 years of the disposition of their case in the Family Division in the base year.

Crime Research Group was the selected bidder and started on Sept 1, 2025, by requesting data from Judiciary with support from the Council.

Progress: Educate legislators on research, best/promising practices, and public policy that can best ensure the justice system will help youth thrive.

- The Council continued to educate lawmakers about the value of raising the minimum age of delinquency to 12 years old and provided testimony on the legislation to raise the maximum age to 19-year-olds in April 2025. The 12-year-old minimum age passed, effective on July 1, 2025. Raising the age to 19 was delayed until 2027.

Section IV: Reducing Delinquency through Youth Services

The Council's Youth Services Committee focuses on programming for youth and the development of youth voice. In 2025, the Committee had a two-pronged approach to develop youth voice. First, it created a fact sheet to educate and recruit youth to the Council. JJRA requires at least one fifth of the members of the State Advisory Group to be under the age of 25 at the time of appointment. This and other onboarding materials being developed will formalize the orientation process for all new members.

Second, the Committee conducted a survey of Council members about expectations related to youth voice.

Goal: Youth are actively engaged in their communities—participating in initiatives and programs that promote civic participation, social responsibility, and community development.

The following reflects progress with the [Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Three-Year Plan](#)-August 2024, pages 39-41, 42-43.

Progress: Provide Vermont communities with tools to strengthen youth engagement and voice.

- The Committee reviewed the outcomes of one of the youth center grantees that requested a continuation of its work with at-risk youth through August 2026. The Hub serves Bristol and surrounding towns and has positive results. They started the project with 47

eligible individuals who participated in positive leisure/recreational activities from Jan 1 – March 30, 2024, and increased participation to 152 youth April 1 – June 30, 2025. The Hub had asked to use the funds to hire another adult to help build youth and adult relationships. The Committee agreed with this idea and the proposal was approved by the full Council. We receive quarterly updates on their progress to engage at-risk youth.

Progress: Create a structure for youth who are justice system-involved to provide the Council and other youth justice decision-making entities with youth perspective.

- The Committee surveyed the Council members to understand and identify criteria to collect youth voice. This led the Committee to propose a project to hire a consultant to gather youth input about juvenile system impacted youth: a) what specifically they need from the system; b) how the system could be more helpful/or improve; c) what has been harmful in their experience involved in the system; and d) what youth believe would've prevented their system. A request for proposal yielded seven proposals and the review committee identified the best bid. DCF is working with the bidder to enter into a contract agreement for 2026.

Conclusion

Key 2025 Successes:

- Council members participated in seven training sessions to build on their strengths and develop an action plan to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities.
- The Council developed a budget plan and in partnership with DCF funded two significant juvenile justice projects:
 - NCJJ was hired as the High End System of Care consultant to develop recommendations for a secure residential treatment facility.
 - A recidivism study by the Vermont Crime Research Group is in progress. The results will assist the Council and the State of Vermont in its understanding and evaluation of the impact of the 2020 legislation raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction to include 18-year-olds.
- The Council has approved funding for the following additional projects:
 - To address racial disparities in school suspensions.
 - Training for DOC officers related to adolescent brain development, the JJRA sight and sound separation requirements, and best practices when working with adolescents.
 - To collect and analyze input from youth impacted by the system to develop recommendations to improve the juvenile system, policies, and practices.
- The Council reconvened its Governance Committee to operate a recruitment and retention plan for filling in any gaps in the JJRA requirements for Council membership.
- The Council recruited three new youth members.

Key 2025 Challenges:

- The state of Vermont's system of care continues to have implications for compliance with the core requirements of the JJRA. While the FFY 24 federal grant award reduction is now appealed, the lack of a secure juvenile facility for juveniles charged either with delinquencies or criminal charges creates a situation that makes it difficult for Vermont to comply with the JJRA core requirements.
- There is uncertainty when the FFY 25 federal Notice of Funding Opportunity will be released. In past years, the NOFO was released in the summer. We are already well into FFY 25 and still awaiting notification.
- Incohesive (and for some members of the juvenile justice system, antiquated) databases create significant challenges for data collection and analysis. However, we expect some new strategies from action planning that are in development and will address the data system. Committees are also discussing strategies to improve the data the Council relies on to measure progress.

For more information please email:

Karen Vastine, Chair, Council for Equitable Youth Justice, karen.vastine@uvmhealth.org, or

Sheri Lynn, Juvenile Justice Coordinator, DCF, sheri.lynn@vermont.gov

Appendix

The **Hartford Community Restorative Justice Center's** *Circles of Peace for Youth* program employs restorative practices to **address domestic violence** caused by youth, blending early intervention with accountability, empathy, and atonement. Voluntary "Applicants" (youth who caused harm) engage in exercises to understand their actions' impact without excuses, identifying harmful behavior patterns and beliefs. Supported by "The Circle," youth are **held accountable while being affirmed in their commitment to change, fostering better communication, healthier relationships, and positive life outcomes.**

THE CIRCLE

PEOPLE

- Youth Applicant
- Two Circle Keepers (including a victim advocate)
- 3 - 5 community volunteers
- Support person, if the Applicant chooses

PROCESS

- Presentation of a topic or issue
- Sharing and discussion
- Creating and reviewing goals

TOPICS

- Understanding domestic violence
- Self-reflection and responsibility
- Emotional skills development
- Relationship dynamics
- Progress and goals

Survivors have the choice to participate in any or all of the following:

- Meet with a confidential advocate
- Participate in survivor-only Circles
- Participate in Circles with the Applicant
- Receive info about the Applicant's program attendance
- Receive support from a Circle facilitator and/or Circle volunteers
- Choose not to participate

Email bharvey@hartfordjusticecenter.org or call **(802) 291-7173** for more info.

This infographic walks through how youth justice funding moves from idea to impact. It shows who makes decisions, how projects are chosen and supported, and how the money is used responsibly.

01 FEDERAL FUNDING

The Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) provides Vermont with about \$600,000 annually to be spent within four years.



02

SUPPORTING YOUTH THROUGH GRANTS



Around \$400,000 of this funding is set aside for projects that support youth.

03 OVERSEEING FUNDS & REQUIREMENTS



The Vermont Department for Children & Families (DCF) manages the funds and ensures compliance with the JJDP's 33 requirements.

04 COUNCIL OVERSIGHT

The full council approves funding decisions, allocating grants across priority areas and committees.



05 COMMITTEE WORK

The CEYJ committees meet to develop ideas and then draft funding proposals.



06 FULL COUNCIL APPROVAL

Committees present proposals to the full council for approval.

07 CALL FOR PROPOSALS



If approved, DCF & council members will put a "Request for Proposals" out to the community.

09 FINALIZE PLAN & BEGIN WORK



DCF works with the selected organization to finalize the agreement, then the project gets underway.

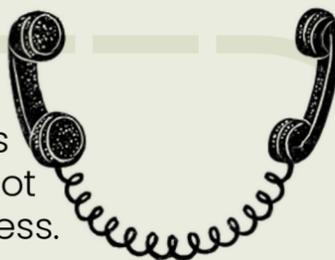
08 PROPOSAL REVIEW & SELECTION



Submitted proposals are reviewed by a team of CEYJ members and stakeholders. The best proposal(s) is selected.

10 ONGOING SUPPORT

CEYJ, DCF, and grantees stay in touch to troubleshoot and support project success.



11 ANNUAL REPORTING

Each year, DCF reports outcomes to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP).

12 SHARING OUR IMPACT

CEYJ shares updates with legislators, partners, and the public about how these funds supported prevention and positive outcomes for youth.

