



A CAMPAIGN OF THE JUVENILE JUSTICE & DELINQUENCY PREVENTION
COALITION
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FACT SHEET

YOUTH REENTRY PLANS AND SERVICES NEEDED TO AID SUCCESSFUL REINTEGRATION TO THE COMMUNITY

What are the current JJDA provisions regarding pre-release planning and reentry services?

The JJDA currently does not adequately address the needs of youth exiting the juvenile justice system. The only two mentions in the JJDA of reentry services are provisions that allow the use of federal funds for: (1) "...community-based programs that provide follow-up post-placement services to adjudicated juveniles, to promote successful reintegration into the community"; and (2) "...community-based programs and services to work with juveniles, their parents, and other family members during and after incarceration in order to strengthen families so that such juveniles may be retained in their homes."¹

Why Does Youth Reentry Matter?

Approximately 200,000 youth and young adults age 24 and under leave secure juvenile or adult correctional facilities and return to their communities each year. This is close to one-third of all returning offenders, and nearly half of these individuals are under 18 years old. Youth are often discharged from care back to families struggling with domestic violence, drug and alcohol abuse, and unresolved mental health disabilities. Many youth are placed back into neighborhoods with few youth supportive programs, high crime rates, poverty, and poor performing schools. Considering that recidivism rates are as high as 70% in some localities, much greater attention is needed to the group of youth who exit secure confinement to ensure they are given the best possible chance at leading a delinquency-free life upon their return to the community.

Plans are rarely in place to support youth as they exit confinement and reintegrate back into their family, peer group, school, and community. This is a gap in services that contributes greatly to reoffending. Many youth do not have the necessary skills for independent living, and also lack awareness of or access to aftercare services and programs. It is no surprise that so many young offenders fail to complete school or find work, become homeless, or

¹ Section 223 (9) (Q) and Section 223 (9) (M).

reoffend, only to return to secure confinement. Studies of homeless youth demonstrate the connection between youth homelessness and contacts with the juvenile and criminal justice systems. In a recent survey of homeless youth between the ages of 10 and 17, the Wilder Research Center found that 46 percent had been in a correctional facility, and of those, 44 percent exited into an unstable housing situation.ⁱ

Reentry services and aftercare to youth exiting juvenile justice facilities **reduces recidivism** and supports their successful reintegration back to families and communities. By fostering improved family relationships and functioning, reintegration into school, and mastery of independent life skills, youth build resiliency and positive development to divert them from harm and delinquent behaviors.

New Provisions Should be Added to the JJDPa that:

- Require a **written case plan** for each juvenile, based on an assessment of the needs of the juvenile and developed and updated in consultation with the juvenile and his or her family that:
 - Describes the **pre-release and post-release programs and reentry services** that will be provided to the juvenile;
 - Describes the **living arrangement** to which the juvenile is to be discharged; and
 - Establishes a **plan for the enrollment of the juvenile in post-release health care, behavioral health care, educational, vocational training, family support, public assistance, and legal services programs, as appropriate;**
- Obligate, where appropriate, a **hearing** in family or juvenile court that is held *at least* 30 days before a youth's release, and in which the youth has legal representation, which determines the juvenile's **discharge plan** including
 - A determination of whether a safe, appropriate, and permanent living arrangement has been secured for the juvenile and
 - Whether enrollment in health care, behavioral health care, educational, vocational, training, family support, public assistance and legal services, as appropriate, has been arranged for the juvenile; and
- Enact federal policies ensuring that discharge planning and **procedures are completed in a timely fashion** and do not delay a juvenile's release from custody; and
- Secure state cooperation in providing **technical assistance** to local grantees on utilizing federal funds for reentry services and programs.

ⁱ Owen, G., Heineman, J. and Decker Gerrard, M. 2007. Overview of Homelessness in Minnesota 2006: Key Facts From the Statewide Survey. Wilder Research Center. St. Paul, Minnesota. September 4, 2007 <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=1963>. Owen, G., Heineman, J. and Decker Gerrard, M. 2005. Homeless Youth in Minnesota. 2003 Statewide Survey of People Without Permanent Shelter. Wilder Research Center. St. Paul, Minnesota. September 4, 2007 <http://www.wilder.org/download.0.html?report=410>.