

Youth Incarceration in the United States

THE GOOD

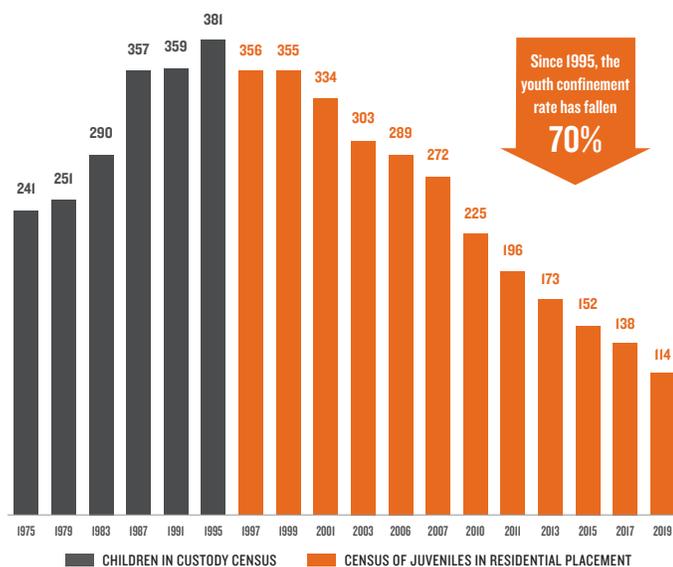
Public agencies have made enormous progress reducing youth incarceration between 1995 and 2019, reflecting the deep declines in juvenile arrests over the same period.

Youth confinement rates were down 70% from 1995 to 2019, closely tracking the drop in youth arrests.

Arrests of youth peaked in 1995 and have declined 74% since then.

YOUTH CONFINEMENT RATE

per 100,000 young people ages 10 through the age of majority in each state (1975-2019)



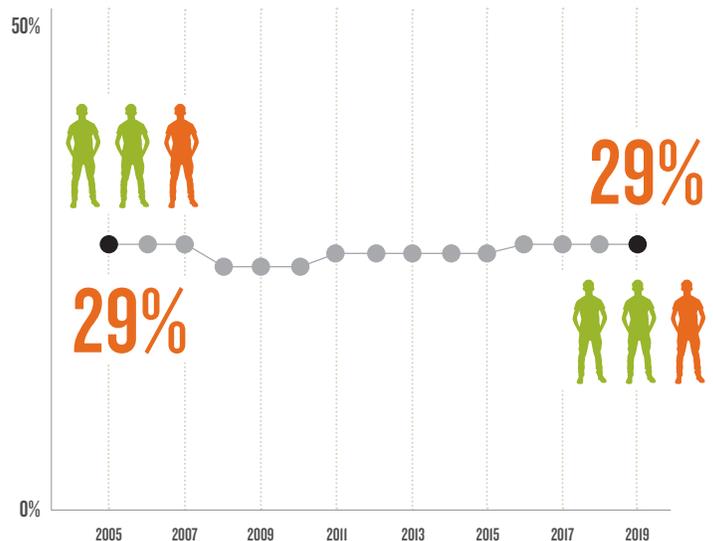
THE BAD

However, some harmful practices remained stubbornly entrenched, such as an overreliance on incarceration once youth are referred to the juvenile justice system, especially for Black and Native American youth.

Young people arrested and referred to court faced the same odds of confinement in 2019 as they did in 2005: one in three.

The number of juvenile court cases fell by more than half from 2005 to 2019, from 1,647,700 to 722,600. But the share of those cases that resulted in confinement held steady at 29%.

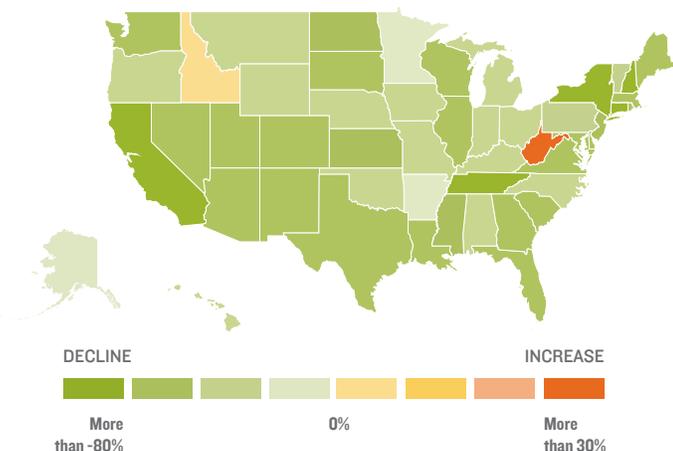
LIKELIHOOD OF CONFINEMENT (2005-2019)



Almost every state has reduced youth confinement.

44 states and the District of Columbia had declines of 50% or more.

CHANGE IN YOUTH CONFINEMENT per 100,000 (1997-2019)



Public systems still confined more youth for relatively minor offenses than for serious ones.



More specifically, young people were locked up after they were charged or adjudicated for:

- damaging property without the owner's permission (21%);
- violating the terms of their probation agreements, such as missing appointments or curfew (14%);
- disturbing public order (14%);
- violating drug laws (4%); or
- committing status offenses, which are offenses that would not be illegal if committed by an adult, such as truancy, underage drinking or running away from home (4%).

IN 2019, FEWER THAN ONE IN THREE youth who were confined were locked up based on a Violent Crime Index offense (homicide, aggravated assault, robbery or sexual assault).

THE GOOD

Confinement rates declined for youth of all races and ethnicities.

YOUTH CONFINEMENT RATE BY RACE

Decline from 1997 to 2019 based on the confinement rate per 100,000 youth

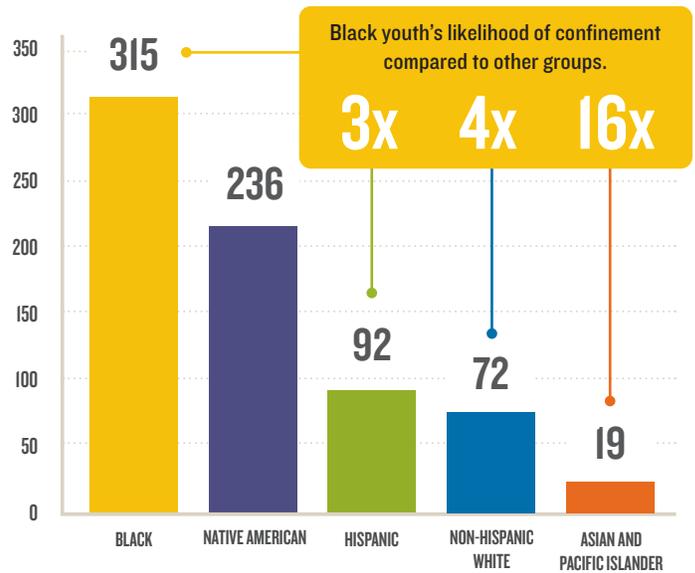


THE BAD

Black and Native American youth were far more likely to be confined than other youth.

Black youth in 2019 were more than 16 times as likely to be in custody as their Asian and Pacific Islander peers, four times as likely as white peers and three times as likely as Hispanic peers. Compared to white youth, the disparity in 2019 was the same as it was in 1997. Compared to Asian and Pacific Islander and Hispanic youth, the respective disparities grew significantly, but fell compared to Native American youth.

YOUTH CONFINEMENT RATE IN 2019 *per 100,000 youth*



THE OPPORTUNITY

Building a world where all young people are able to thrive and grow into responsible adults requires us to respond more effectively when young people push boundaries and go as far as to break the law.



REDUCE ALL FORMS OF OUT-OF-HOME PLACEMENT EVEN FURTHER by keeping significantly more young people safely in their communities.



MAKE STRATEGIES EXPLICIT ABOUT RACE to counterbalance generations of structural racism and overrepresentation of youth of color in the legal system.



EXPAND THE USE OF EFFECTIVE COMMUNITY RESPONSES, including options that keep some kids away from the justice system altogether.



TRANSFORM PROBATION into a relationship-based, time-limited intervention focused on positive behavior change and long-term success for young people with serious and repeat arrest histories.



PROMOTE COMMUNITY-BASED GUIDANCE AND SUPPORT NETWORKS that offer young people stable connections to positive adults and activities.

