



Reauthorize the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP)

Invest in What Works

What is the JJDP?

In the United States, there is no national, centralized juvenile justice system. Rather, there are more than 56 different juvenile justice systems independently operated by the U.S. states, territories, the District of Columbia and local governments. Consequently, policies and procedures vary widely from state to state and among local jurisdictions, creating a patchwork quilt of juvenile justice systems resulting in inconsistent outcomes for youth, families and communities, including youth exposure to physical, mental and emotional injury. To address inconsistencies and to improve outcomes for youth and community safety, in 1974 Congress passed the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP) and changed the way in which states approach juvenile justice.

Most recently reauthorized in 2002 with bipartisan support, the JJDP creates a federal-state partnership for the administration of juvenile justice and delinquency prevention. The JJDP also sets forth federal standards to ensure a minimum level of safety and equitable treatment for youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system. To be eligible for the funds provided under the JJDP, each state must comply with four core requirements/protections.

The Time Is Now to Reauthorize the JJDP

Prevent and reduce delinquency. Advances in adolescent brain science demonstrate that children and youth are different from adults and that they should be held accountable in different ways. The U.S. Supreme Court has also affirmed the differences between youth and adults in recent decisions.¹ The JJDP must be strengthened to further encourage states to invest in evidence and research-based programs proven effective.

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Strengthen safeguards. Youth incarcerated in juvenile facilities are at serious risk of physical and emotional injury. Youth of color receive disparate treatment at every point along the juvenile justice continuum. Girls are the fastest growing population in juvenile justice systems that are not designed to effectively respond to their needs. Other special populations, such as LGBTQ youth and youth with mental health needs, are at risk of harm in the juvenile justice system. The JJDP must be strengthened to reflect contemporary needs and opportunities to assist youth.

JJDP Core Protections

1. Deinstitutionalization of Status Offenders (DSO);
2. Adult Jail and Lock-up Removal (Jail Removal);
3. Sight and Sound Separation; and
4. Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC).

The JJDP also established the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). In order for the federal government to function as a responsive and responsible partner with all states under the JJDP, it is critical that juvenile justice have a dedicated focus and a "home" within the federal government, distinct from a larger focus on criminal justice. OJJDP is the only federal agency charged solely with fulfilling this role.

Build safe communities. By preventing and reducing delinquency, the JJDPA invests in communities. The JJDPA plays a critical role in public safety and should reflect the most current knowledge about what works and what does not work to prevent and reduce delinquency and keep communities safe. The JJDPA must establish and promote the highest standards of care for systems that interact with youth. In this time of economic restraint, the JJDPA provides states with leverage to obtain additional state and local public and private investments to promote the best outcomes for youth.

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ⁱ *Roper v. Simmons*, 543 U.S. 551 (2005); *Graham v. Florida*, 130 S.Ct. 2011 (2010); *J.D.B. v. North Carolina*, 131 S.Ct. 2394 (2011); and *Miller v. Alabama*, 132 S.Ct. 2455 (2012).