PRIORITY Criminal Justice NEEDS INITIATIVE

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Community-Based Alternatives to Youth Incarceration

Melissa M. Labriola, Samuel Peterson, Dulani Woods, Michael J. D. Vermeer, Brian A. Jackson

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Relative to the late 1990s, the juvenile justice system nationally has seen drastic reductions in the number of cases referred, petitioned, adjudicated, and—ultimately—resulting in an individual being placed in a residential facility. The National Center for Juvenile Justice estimates that there was a 50-percent reduction in residential placement facilities from 2000 to 2019, with a 74-percent reduction in large facilities from 1997 to 2019 (Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022). Given the scale of this decline, along with efforts to reduce out-of-home placements and increase community-based alternatives, the time is ripe to explore the challenges and opportunities associated with closing secure juvenile residential facilities and improving alternatives to youth incarceration.

Responding to this need, RAND, on behalf of the National Institute of Justice, hosted a workshop in June 2023 as part of the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative. The workshop brought together a group of juvenile justice system administrators, researchers, judges, and policy experts to identify and prioritize the needs that, if addressed, would have the greatest impact on closing secure juvenile facilities and improving alternatives to youth incarceration.

The workshop produced 30 needs that participants identified and prioritized for their importance and their probability of success. The needs were sorted using the following themes, though some needs cut across multiple themes:

- family support and equity concerns
- serious youth offending and high-risk, high-needs youth
- systems and creating a road map for reform
- politics, buy-in, and voice
- funding for alternatives and community capacity.

SELECTED PRIORITY NEEDS

RESULTS

Family Support and Equity Concerns

- Conduct an analysis of the major decision points in the legal system, making sure to consider common demographic dimensions.
- Examine the impact of risk tools and whether they are continuing to propagate structural bias.
- Conduct research on the best approaches for family engagement, preparedness, and advocacy throughout the process (including reentry planning).

Serious Youth Offending and High-Risk, High-Needs Youth

- Identify, develop, and promote the application of effective change strategies and best practices to improve outcomes for youth held in facilities.
- Develop a research strategy to identify community-based interventions (e.g., trauma-informed and community-relevant programs) and gaps in services that are effective in keeping youth healthy and safe in their communities after release.

Systems and Creating a Road Map for Reform

- Analyze barriers to working with government and nongovernment funding organizations (i.e., procurement, contracting, and reporting processes), and identify concrete strategies for making those processes easier for organizations with limited capacity.
- Develop and prioritize approaches to holistic community improvements (e.g., resource mapping, incubator organizations, reinvestment funds).

WHAT WE FOUND

Workshop participants identified and prioritized 30 needs. Eleven needs were ranked as high-priority, and the following themes emerged:

- The juvenile justice system disproportionately affects Black communities and families. Disparities exist at most points in the process, leading to a need for analysis of the major decision points to better understand how such disparities are produced. Part of this analysis requires examining risk tools and their use.
- With youth incarceration declining, family engagement by the juvenile justice system will be critical for ensuring positive outcomes. There is a lack of research on family engagement and intervention, particularly for those youth with the highest levels of needs.

INTRODUCTION

From 2000 through 2020, there was a 77-percent decline in youth held in juvenile justice facilities, based on a one-day count (Rovner, 2023). This is a striking decrease, although it combines detention (pre-adjudication) with commitments (which may or may not be to secure facilities). Terminology matters for understanding how the juvenile justice system has changed over time. In this report, the term *youth incarceration* refers to youth committed to secure juvenile facilities. This can include detained youth awaiting a disposition who are being held in detention facilities. We will interchangeably use *placement* and *youth incarceration*.

The decline of the population of incarcerated youth exists alongside efforts to reduce overall youth involvement in the juvenile justice system. Youth arrests for violent crime decreased by 56 percent from 2010 to 2020, while youth arrests for all offenses declined by 74 percent during that same period (Puzzanchera, 2022). Other efforts to reduce the size of the juvenile justice population include raising the minimum age at which a person can be processed through juvenile courts, employing school-based strategies, limiting lengths of stay and placement for certain offenses, expanding community-based alternatives, and implementing juvenile diversion practices (Mendel, 2011; Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 2021). To specifically reduce residential populations, states have engaged in policy changes to prohibit placements for certain offenses, limit lengths of stay, and expand community-based alternatives (Juvenile Law Center, 2012). Several states have

The decline of the population of incarcerated youth exists alongside other efforts to reduce overall youth involvement in the juvenile justice system.

engaged in efforts to expand community-based alternatives by allocating funding specifically for community-based alternatives for youth (Pew Charitable Trusts, 2023). Some of these states also require that counties reduce their populations of incarcerated youth to remain eligible for funding. Others have enacted multiple policy changes. For instance, Kansas state law limits case and probation length, reduces large facilities and out-of-home placements, and limits use of secure facilities to the most-serious cases (Kansas State Legislature, 2016). This legislation also allocated millions of dollars for community-based alternatives to confinement. Despite these changes, there are questions about how to best repurpose facilities, how to sustain or expand funding for community-based alternatives, and what to do with the youth at the greatest risk.

During the same period as these policy changes (2000–2019), the number of juvenile residential facilities also decreased by 50 percent (Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022). This decrease is starkest among large facilities, which decreased 74 percent from 1997 to 2019. The move to close facilities has gained traction for several reasons, such as investments in alternative rehabilitation and community-based programs, cost savings, and recognition of the need to treat young offenders with a focus on rehabilitation rather than punitive measures (Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022). The decisions to close these facilities are complex.

What We Know About the Effects of Incarceration on Youth

Incarceration can have significant effects on youth, both during their time in confinement and after their release, and it can have a profound psychological impact on youth, such

as increased levels of stress, anxiety, depression, and trauma (Colman et al., 2009). This can be due to the restrictive and harsh environment of correctional facilities, which can exacerbate existing mental health issues (Gilman, Hill, and Hawkins, 2015). In particular, youth often face disruptions in their education due to limited access to quality educational programming (Gilman, Hill, and Hawkins, 2015). This can make it challenging to reintegrate into mainstream education when they are released. Moreover, having a criminal record can significantly limit future employment opportunities for youth (Colman et al., 2009). The combined effects of limited education and employment options can have long-lasting repercussions for youth and their success after incarceration; studies have also shown that youth who are incarcerated have a higher risk of reoffending than those who receive alternatives. The restrictive and punitive nature of incarceration may not adequately address the underlying causes of their behavior or provide the necessary support for rehabilitation and reintegration (Mendel, 2011). Finally, incarceration can strain family relationships: Youth may be physically separated from family and friends for extended periods (Mendel, 2011), which can affect family dynamics and cause emotional distress. Overall, research paints a picture of incarceration that suggests it is a fairly negative experience for youth that does not contribute to positive outcomes for them after release.

What We Know About Community Alternatives for Youth

Community alternatives for youth are programs and interventions designed to address, without resorting to incarceration, the needs of young individuals who have engaged in delinquent or at-risk behavior. These alternatives aim to provide support, rehabilitation, and supervision in a community setting rather than confining young people to secure juvenile facilities, and they include mentoring programs, youth diversion programs, crisis intervention services, family counseling and support, and substance abuse treatment. These community-based alternatives are often seen as more effective in addressing the underlying causes of delinquency, reducing recidivism, and promoting the rehabilitation and successful reintegration of young individuals into society (Petrosino, Turpin-Petrosino, and Guckenburg, 2010; Mendel, 2023).

Challenges to Understanding Best Practices in Closing Facilities

Given the reduction in the number of juvenile residential facilities, it is important to also understand the impact of these closures in terms of state and county budget implications, the workforce, public safety (e.g., recidivism), and youth outcomes (e.g., positive youth development). Although there is no existing research evaluating best practices for closing juvenile justice facilities, there is literature on jurisdictions' practices that were implemented to ensure a smooth transition and minimize potential negative impacts (Harvell et al., 2020). The following key practices are mentioned in the literature:

- Bring all key stakeholders—such as staff, youth, families, community members, local government officials, and advocacy groups—to the table. Their input and involvement throughout the closure process will help ensure a well-informed and inclusive decisionmaking approach (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 7).
- Ensure that communication is transparent (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 6).
- Prioritize the safety, well-being, and needs of the youth during the closure process. This includes ensuring that appropriate alternative placements, such as community-based programs or residential facilities, are available to accommodate specific needs. Comprehensive support services—including counseling, education, vocational training, and reentry planning—are also needed to facilitate a successful transition (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 11).
- Maintain essential services previously provided by the facility—such as mental health support, substance abuse treatment, and educational programs—for continuous support (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 11).
- Develop a plan to support affected staff members through the closure process. Consider such options as reassignment to other positions within the juvenile justice system

The combined effects of limited education and employment options can have long-lasting repercussions for youth and their success after incarceration.

PARTICIPANTS

Judge Aurora Martinez Jones
126th District Court Judge, Travis County, Texas

Brett Peterson
President, Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators

Reverend Charles Boyer
Salvation and Social Justice

Clinton Lacey
President and CEO, Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement

Dana Kaplan
National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform

Gary Ivory
Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.

Gladys Carrion
Senior Fellow, Columbia Justice Lab and Youth Correctional Leaders for Justice

Henry Gonzalez
Executive Director and Chief Probation Officer of Harris County Juvenile Probation Department (Texas)

Iliana Pujols
Connecticut Justice Alliance

Katherine Weinstein Miller
Juvenile Probation Department (San Francisco)

Melissa Sickmund
National Center for Juvenile Justice and National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (retired)

Regina Mitchell
Director of Systems Innovation, Center for Children's Law and Policy

Samantha Harvell
Three Flights Consulting

Susan Burke
The Carey Group

Thomas Andriola
Office of Youth Justice, New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services

Valerie Slater
Rise for Youth

Wayne Bear
President, National Partnership for Juvenile Services

or provision of training and resources for career transition (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 11).
- Maintain open lines of communication among all stakeholders, including families, and provide support throughout the transition period (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 6).
- Allocate resources saved from the closure to support community-based alternatives, prevention programs, and services that address the underlying causes of juvenile delinquency (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 11).
- Invest in initiatives that promote youth development, education, mental health, and community safety (Harvell et al., 2020, p. 11).

METHODOLOGY

Project staff involved with RAND's Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative (PCJNI) assembled a panel of juvenile justice system administrators, researchers, judges, and other policy experts. A pool of candidate participants was identified in consultation with the National Institute of Justice (NIJ) and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Candidates were identified via existing networks, searches for organizations and individuals with relevant experience, searches for individuals who study relevant topics, and referrals. Ultimately, a group of 17 experts was convened. The participants and their affiliations are shown in the box titled "Participants."

The in-person workshop was held in June 2023. During the initial stage (April and May), project staff completed individual interviews with each participant via a web-conferencing application. The length of the interviews ranged from 45 to 60 minutes. The purpose of the interviews was to gather participant insights on the issue of closing youth residential or secure juvenile facilities, potential challenges related to closures, and options for community-based alternatives to youth incarceration. Project staff provided the participants with an outline of discussion points in advance of the interviews; however, participants were encouraged to speak about the issues most germane to them according to their roles and experiences.

Discussion Points

The outline of discussion points provided to participants in advance consisted of the following items:

- What were or are the motivating factors for juvenile facility closure? What are the counter arguments?

- What needs to happen before facilities can be closed and what are important things to consider in the closure process?
- What is the impact of closing these facilities? How is the local labor market affected? The local community? The youth?
- Can the facility or property be repurposed for other things?
- Are local communities equipped to provide community-based services? What about considerations for the families of the youth?
- What are the workforce needs for former facility employees? What about the community-based providers?
- Are you aware of any research on the impact of juvenile facility closure?
- What types of research should be done on facility closures?
- How is success defined? What outcomes should be measured?
- Are there data to answer these questions?

Project staff captured the input from these interviews and synthesized it into an initial list of 17 problems. The list of problems was provided to the group to review in preparation for the second stage, which was the in-person workshop.

In this second stage, project staff convened the group in two meetings that lasted seven hours each over two days. During the workshop, participants began by discussing the identified problems, fine-tuning the wording of the problem statements, identifying additional problems that had not been raised, and prioritizing the problems according to their importance. Next, participants developed 30 associated needs related to the 17 problems. We use the term *need* to describe a specific requirement tied to either solving a problem or taking advantage of an opportunity to help better address a challenge. Once the needs were developed, we guided participants through a process to fine-tune the wording of the needs.

Finally, the participants were led through an exercise to prioritize the final set of 30 needs and create clusters of higher-, medium-, and lower-tier needs. More details on the technical methods used to structure the workshop and identify and prioritize needs are provided in the technical appendix. It is important to note that, because of the nature of the workshop, open conversation about needs often led to broader discussion. For this workshop, we started with the listed discussion points, but the needs—although often broader than those points—were identified by the experts. The next section describes the results of the prioritization exercise.

RESULTS

The 30 needs identified by the participants were organized into five major themes:

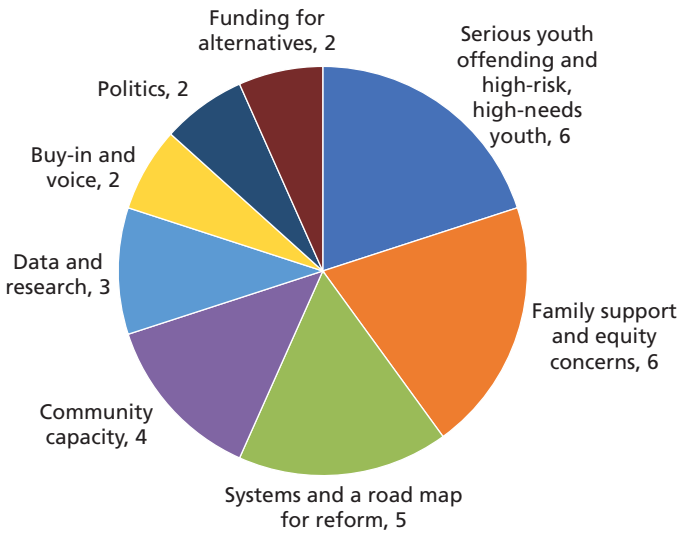
- family support and equity concerns
- serious youth offending and high-risk, high-needs youth
- systems and creating a road map for reform
- politics, buy-in, and voice
- funding for alternatives and community capacity.

Project staff determined these themes using input from pre-workshop interviews with the participants, and the themes were used to structure the workshop discussions. See Figure 1 for the distribution of needs across several categories. The full list of needs can be found in Table A.2, in the technical appendix.

The prioritization exercise (which we describe in greater detail in the technical appendix) elicited rankings of the importance and probability of success of the identified needs from the participants. These rankings were used to sort needs into high, medium, and low priority (also referred to as Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3, respectively). Ultimately, 11 of the needs fell into Tier 1 and were categorized as high-priority needs (Table 1).

Figure 2 illustrates the breakdown of the high-priority needs. We discuss these needs in greater detail in the next section. As a result of the prioritization exercise, none of the needs related to politics, buy-in and voice, data and research, community capacity, or funding for alternatives fell into Tier 1, so these themes are omitted from that discussion.

Figure 1. Total Number of Needs, by Theme (*n* = 30)



NOTE: Some needs were identified as separate categories, as show in this figure, but were combined to create our top-tier themes. Needs for data and research were identified but did not score in the top tier.

Table 1. The 11 High-Priority Needs by Theme

Issue or Problem	Associated Need
FAMILY SUPPORT AND EQUITY CONCERNS	
Disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of youth of color occur at every point in the legal process.	• Conduct an analysis of the major decision points in the legal system, making sure to consider common demographic dimensions. • Examine the impact of risk tools and whether they are continuing to propagate structural bias.
The system is not structured to partner or engage with families as they support their justice-involved youth.	• Conduct research on the best approaches for family engagement, preparedness, and advocacy throughout the process (including reentry planning). • Conduct research on agency best practices for supporting engagement with families.
SERIOUS YOUTH OFFENDING AND HIGH-RISK, HIGH-NEEDS YOUTH	
Some youth may still be held in a secure facility, which will need to be designed and organized in a way to minimize additional trauma and harm.	• Conduct research to identify the most-effective methods (domestically and internationally) to operate within the best trauma-informed practices (i.e., setting, operational and programmatic, staffing, training). • Conduct research to identify strategies to optimize length of stay in the least-restrictive setting and continuity of care and services as youth transition back into the community. • Conduct research to determine the best infusion of community services, supports, and opportunities to minimize institutionalization and prepare youth for release. • Identify, develop, and promote the application of effective change strategies and best practices to improve outcomes for youth held in facilities.
There are not enough individualized community-based solutions for youth charged with the most-serious offenses.	• Develop a research strategy to identify community-based interventions (e.g., trauma-informed and community-relevant programs) and gaps in services that are effective in keeping youth healthy and safe in their communities after release.
SYSTEMS AND CREATING A ROAD MAP FOR REFORM	
Most affected communities (those with high levels of poverty, historical underinvestment, or structural racism) are underresourced and lack the financial and organizational capacity to serve youth and families with justice system involvement.	• Analyze barriers to working with government and nongovernment funding organizations (i.e., procurement, contracting, and reporting processes), and identify concrete strategies for making those processes easier for organizations with limited capacity. • Develop and prioritize approaches to holistic community improvements (e.g., resource mapping, incubator organizations, reinvestment funds).

Discussion

This section, which is organized by theme, provides further context for the high-priority needs identified by the workshop participants. The material in this section is primarily derived from input received from workshop participants during the pre-workshop interviews and in-person meetings. We include references to other literature and sources where they provide supplemental data that contextualize participants' input.

This discussion is organized around the identified needs in the following themes:

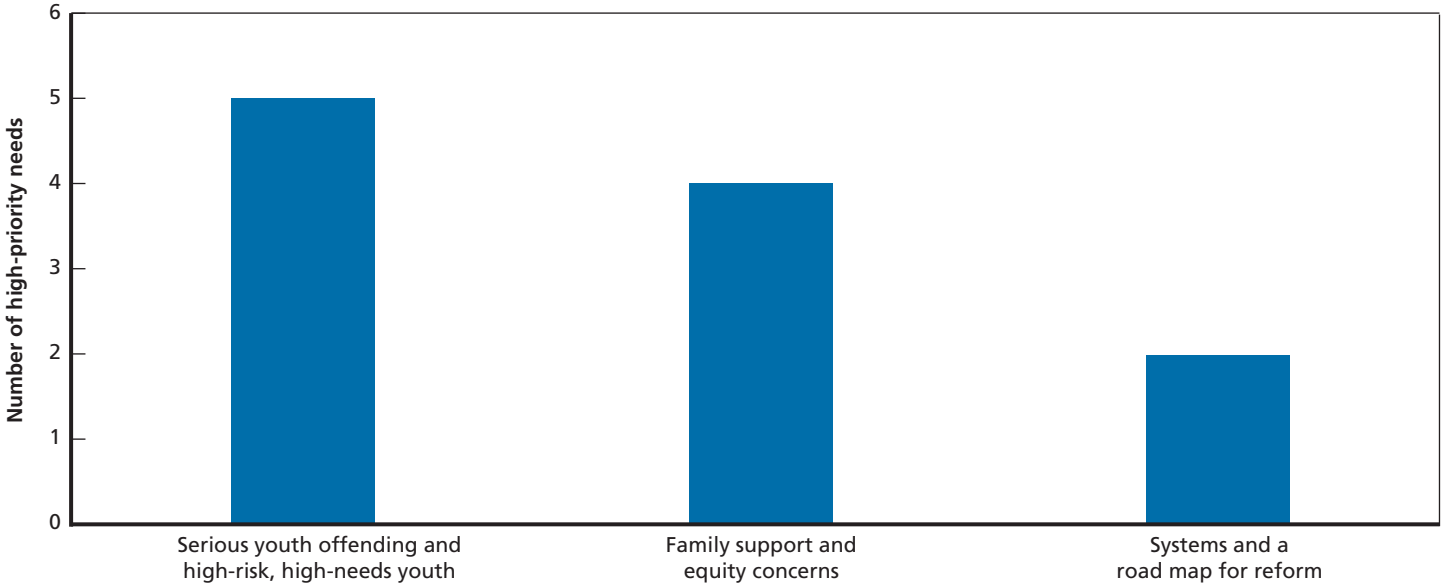
- family support and equity concerns
- serious youth offending and high-risk, high-needs youth
- systems and creating a road map for reform.

Overall, the participants noted the importance of emphasizing positive youth development as a key focus of juvenile justice systems and juvenile justice system stakeholders.

Family Support and Equity Concerns

The characteristics of and support available to families of youth involved in the juvenile justice system are even more

Figure 2. Breakdown of High-Priority Needs (*n* = 11)



important for positive outcomes related to efforts to reduce out-of-home confinements. The backgrounds of youth involved in the juvenile justice system are of particular importance for improving the structure and functioning of the juvenile system—which, in turn, would improve outcomes and support positive youth development. To this end, participants noted that families of youth involved in the system need more involvement and support throughout case processing. Participants also noted that cases that are processed through the juvenile system disproportionately involve youth of color; therefore, families of color need more support. Four of the 11 Tier 1 needs fell into this theme.

Participants acknowledged that racial and socioeconomic disparities exist in terms of the youth committed to secure juvenile facilities. Overwhelmingly, youth of color and youth of lower socioeconomic status are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system relative to their proportion of the youth population. The participants emphasized the particular importance of understanding where and how disparities occur throughout the system, noting that societal factors should also be considered. For instance, among individuals under age 18, 27 percent of Black youth and 21 percent of Hispanic youth live below the poverty level, compared with 8 percent of White youth (Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022). Compared with 21 percent of White youth, 51 percent of Black youth and 28 percent of Hispanic youth live in single-parent households.

Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund (2022) also found that Black youth in particular are overrepresented in delinquency cases seen in juvenile court, representing 35 percent of the caseload while being 15 percent of the youth population overall. In addition, the authors reported that Black youth and Hispanic youth are the most likely to be detained between court referral and case disposition, regardless of offense type, and are more likely than White youth to be petitioned or formally processed but not more likely to be adjudicated delinquent (see Table 2). Of adjudicated cases, however, Black youth and Hispanic youth are more likely to be placed in a residential facility (e.g., training school, treatment center, private placement facility, group home). These disparities remain even when considering offense type. For instance, the rate of person offenses among Black youth has nearly halved from 2005 to 2019, but the rate of referrals for this offense type is more than double that of other races. Still, within person offenses, Black and Hispanic youth receive less preferential treatment in terms of being diverted, detained, and placed (Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022).

Identifying and Addressing Disparate Treatment

Although the statistics discussed above highlight disparities at different phases of the juvenile justice process, they do little to explain whether certain decisions within the process are more influential than others or what to do about them. In a recent systematic review and meta-analysis of disparities in juvenile justice, Zane and Pupo (2021) found evidence of small disparities in detention and secure residential placement for Black youth relative to White youth, and smaller disparities in intake. For Hispanic youth relative to White youth, there were small

Table 2. Delinquency Case Processing by Race

	White	Black	Hispanic	American Indian	Asian
Referred (per 1,000)	18.3	53.9	17.6	21.5	4.5
Diverted (per 100 referred)	33.5	20.1	27.9	25.3	31.0
Detained (per 100 referred)	20.3	29.5	31.5	25.2	25.6
Petitioned (per 100 referred)	48.4	60.3	52.3	55.7	51.9
Adjudicated (per 100 petitioned)	52.9	49.6	58.3	57.4	52.3
Probation (per 100 adjudicated)	68.0	61.1	65.4	64.5	74.5
Placement (per 100 adjudicated)	21.7	31.0	30.6	24.6	20.6
Waived (per 100 petitioned)	0.7	1.1	0.6	0.6	0.6

SOURCE: Selected findings from Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022.

disparities in detention and smaller disparities for petition, adjudication, and secure residential placement.

The panelists expressed that an analysis of all the major decision points would be a useful first step.[1] Using decision point analysis as a first step in addressing disparities has been recommended elsewhere (Cabaniss et al., 2007) and requires a review of existing data or even data systems to ensure that the data can appropriately answer these questions. In particular, it is important to look at disparities by jurisdiction and by decisionmaker to understand where any changes might be best focused. The participants noted that disparities might be difficult to address "because it is happening at the first point of contact," as one participant phrased it. Participants also highlighted the importance of not only examining disparate treatment by system processing and punishment but also providing support, with one participant asking, "is there disparity for kids getting what works for them?" This speaks to the broader inequities as well, with some communities lacking access to public and mental health supports, along with a more general "lack of resources and school inequity [that] are creating a situation for disproportional experience with justice systems," as one participant put it. The participants also noted that discretion is important in terms of both punitive sanctions and diversion or providing alternatives because, as one participant summed up, "microaggressions and bias cause youth to miss out on alternatives." Indeed, some research has shown that minority youth and White youth have different treatment experiences (Cochran and Mears, 2015).

The panelists also suggested that it was important to examine how risk assessment tools (or risk and needs assessments) are used and whether their use contributes to bias or disparate treatment at different phases of the process. Risk assessments are important tools for reducing recidivism and improving youth outcomes, and they may be improvements over professional judgment alone. Still, there are some questions about whether the use of risk assessment instruments actually changes decisions (e.g., the use of restrictive placements), and there is not enough research on their differential impact by race (Viljoen et al., 2019). Auditing both the risk tool itself and how it is used to make decisions across jurisdictions may be helpful in identifying the most-influential factors contributing to disparities (Vincent et al., 2018). As part of this inquiry, it would be important to examine both the risk assessment's error rate balance across groups and *rater bias* (Venner et al., 2021), or how judges, probation officers, or other system actors are using the risk assessment tool in terms of reliability, appropriate referrals, and other variables (Petkus et al., 2022). This examination should include how overrides or other discretionary decisions (e.g., enforcing the high or low end of the sentencing range) vary across groups.

As other work has pointed out, risk assessments are often the final stage or "top layer" (Eckhouse et al., 2019) of understanding bias in decisionmaking, given that such assessments often use at least some historical or static indicators in risk calculations. Additionally, as Eckhouse et al. (2019) note, if there are different rates of reoffending across groups, it is very

[1] Here, this specifically means examining each decision point in the juvenile system, examining the level of disparity, and (ideally) examining the potential sources of the disparity (e.g., judicial decisionmaking, public versus private defense attorneys).

difficult to achieve an algorithm that is well calibrated and has similar false positive and false negative rates across groups. Research on racial disparities in juvenile risk assessment has shown evidence that risk assessments perform more poorly for minority youth, in some cases underpredicting risk for Black and Hispanic youth classified as high risk relative to White youth classified as high risk; that is, Black and Hispanic youth were more likely to recidivate than predicted by their risk scores (Campbell et al., 2018; Childs, Peck, and Brady, 2022). There is also some evidence that static risk factors overpredict risk for Black youth (Miller et al., 2022). These contradictory findings are not necessarily surprising, given that different risk assessments are used on different populations, but they highlight the need for jurisdiction-specific examinations of disparities in the use of risk assessments.

Policy discussions around the use of risk assessment instruments also must consider what the risk assessments are being used for, such as length of sentence, level of supervision, or level of services provided. As already noted, validating risk assessments based on such outcomes as re-arrest, which are known to also contain disparities or "baked in bias" (van Eijk, 2017), also requires policymakers to be thoughtful about how risk tools are used and interpreted and how they might properly be used to improve not only public safety but also outcomes for youth.

Family Engagement

Next, the workshop participants noted that family engagement is a critical but underexamined aspect of the juvenile justice process. Moreover, youth in the juvenile system can end up in the system partially as the result of issues they are experiencing at home (e.g., poverty, lack of supervision due to parental work hours, family stress). Despite challenges at home or the stigmatizing characterization of families involved in the juvenile system, the parent-child relationship is also important for positive youth development and successful outcomes (Steinberg, Blatt-Eisengart, and Cauffman, 2006; Vidal and Woolard, 2016; Williams and Steinberg, 2011). Indeed, some work has been done recently to reframe juvenile justice around a Positive Youth Development framework (Dempsey et al., 2021), which involves taking a trauma-informed approach and centering family engagement.

Given that the increase in both diversion and closure of secure youth facilities likely means that more youth will be under parental care, lapses in this aspect of the process could lead to both worsening and more-disparate outcomes for some youth. Better family engagement might help in understanding needs, barriers, and potential supports to help improve outcomes. Moreover, improving family engagement might affect case processing outcomes, such as court proceedings or meetings with probation staff (Harvell, Rodas, and Hendey, 2004).

The workshop participants discussed how better family engagement was needed throughout the entire process, with family advocacy and preparation and education being key components of this engagement. Workshop participants agreed that each component of the system could adopt more family-centric approaches or modifications to improve the process and outcomes, with one participant noting that "the system expects the parents to do a lot—change your family structure because your kid is in the system," which might not be responsive to the family's current circumstances and resources.

Participants noted that there need to be best practices for court addressing everything from stipulating judicial expectations of the youth's physical dress to ensuring that parental presence and involvement beginning at this phase. Adjudication decisions need to consider the home environment and potential supportive programming even in the case of diversion. Reentry planning should also include the family because managing expectations for both the youth and their family is important. In addition, consistent guidance throughout the process might prove useful; this could be accomplished through the use of family navigators, community engagement specialists, or similar types of personnel who would ideally have lived experience. Peer navigators have been used in other settings, but there is little research on the use of family or peer navigators in juvenile justice (Honeycutt et al., 2020; Walker et al., 2015).

Family engagement models are needed for all phases of the system, from courts to reentry. Key goals are to improve family connection, communication, and voice (Oppermann,

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A key question is what the appropriate response is for serious youth offenses or youth with high levels of risk and need.

Umpierre, and Bilchik, 2019). One such example is the Youth in Custody Practice Model (Dedel et al., 2016), which is agency- and facility-focused and consists of four key components: case planning, family-based services, transition and reentry, and community-based services. The model also features goals related to building safe, fair, and healthy environments and supporting staff. Importantly, family members are part of the case-planning team, along with direct staff, education staff, behavioral health staff, medical staff, community providers, and aftercare staff or other supportive adults.

Despite recognition of the importance of family engagement, the extent to which family engagement is prioritized and incorporated by juvenile system agencies is unclear. A lack of best practices and likely a lack of resources to support family engagement suggest that the success or lack of success in family engagement will vary from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.

Serious Youth Offending and High-Risk, High-Needs Youth

As efforts are made to close youth facilities and shift to community-based alternatives for youth involved in the juvenile justice system, a key question is what the appropriate response is for serious youth offenses or youth with high levels of risk and need. Panelists noted that sometimes these youth are simply treated as they always have been, with reform efforts ignoring this critical population. Additionally, panelists noted that reform efforts to close youth facilities could be hampered by an extreme case of violent recidivism. Panelists noted that it was important to prepare for an extreme incident with media training, system partner engagement, and advanced planning in the form of a threat assessment to determine, as one participant put it, "what could come up and what should we do to protect against those threats."

A recent assessment of the juvenile court referral histories suggests that roughly 4 percent of youth have chronic histories (meaning four incidents or more) with at least one violent offense, and the proportion of chronic violent referral histories (meaning four or more violent offense referrals) is 0.1 percent (Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022). Thus, the population being considered here is a small portion of those involved in the juvenile justice system, but it is also the population likely to have the most-complicated histories. For this group, panelists noted that there might always be a need to place some youth in secure facilities, at least for some period, but that reforms within this approach should focus on improving conditions within secure facilities, reducing the length of stay, and improving practices for the eventual transition to the community.

Practices for Secure Settings

The panelists expressed that research is needed to identify the most-effective methods (domestically and internationally) to operate within the best trauma-informed (i.e., setting, operational and programmatic, staffing, training) practices. There is robust research on the effectiveness of trauma-informed treatment programs for justice-involved youth and youth at risk of justice system involvement who experienced some form of trauma in their lives (Wilson, Olaghere, and Kimbrell, 2020). That information needs to be properly distributed and communicated to the front-line staff working in the field. Research is needed to guide the most-effective ways for facilities to operate in a trauma-informed fashion—what does that look like? What is the environment like, including staffing? Are there existing performance measures or performance standards to be better?

This research needs to include studies that determine the best infusion of community services, supports, and opportunities to minimize institutionalization and prepare youth for release. Studies also need to identify, develop, and promote the application of effective change strategies and best practices to improve outcomes for youth held in facilities.

The workshop participants spoke at length about how, if the young person cannot be in the community, then the community can be brought to them. This can include more family visitation, more social activities (such as intramural sports), involvement with religious organizations, other support systems, and educational opportunities (such as college courses). These practices could not only lessen harm but also improve reentry rates. As one participant noted, "release planning should begin the day you are detained."

During the discussion around secure settings, panelists also discussed the physical structures of detention and secure commitment. Some had examples of renovating structures

to make them less prison-like. They discussed examples from other countries and what is happening in those juvenile justice systems. This physical reform should include trauma-informed practices, which could create better facilities.

Practices for Community Settings and Optimizing Length of Stay to Be Least Restrictive

The workshop involved a detailed discussion about length of stay. Panelists agreed that additional research is needed to identify strategies to optimize length of stay in the least restrictive setting, with a focus on individualized treatment and on continuity of care and services as youth transition back into the community. This is consistent with research indicating that any placement in a secure facility is not effective in reducing recidivism. In fact, research suggests that placement has detrimental effects on youth health, mental health, and ability to reenter after being detained (Feierman and Ford, 2016). The research also indicates that, because youth who commit offenses desist from crime over time, interrupting the maturing process with placement can increase recidivism. The literature suggests that evidence-based and evidence-informed services are helpful and can be provided without lengthy institutional stays, instead taking place in the home or community. Many such community-based practices are typically used to prevent placement, and they can also be used as a component of reentry that reduces length of stay.

Another discussion point from the workshop was the importance of developing a strategy to identify effective community-based interventions (e.g., trauma-informed and community-relevant practices) or gaps in services that would keep youth healthy and safe in their communities. This can include predictive analytics and the use of assessments to determine who will have positive outcomes based on services and how to match the individual to the right service. Tools to define risk were also discussed. Especially with youth, decision-makers should be using risk tools instead of relying on their gut instincts, although they do need to pay attention to the accuracy and potential disparities involved in the use of such tools.

Systems and Creating a Road Map for Reform

Next, workshop participants acknowledged that communities that are affected most by youth involvement in the juvenile system are already underresourced and often lack the financial and organizational capacity to serve youth and families with system involvement. Specifically, efforts to improve outcomes for youth could be more community-centered if they are designed to identify existing resources and develop organizations that are focused on long-term community investment. Organizations in these communities often face barriers to acquiring sustained funding from governmental or nongovernmental sources, and strategies for addressing these barriers are needed. Two of the 11 Tier 1 needs fell into this theme.

Develop Holistic Community Improvement Approaches

When asked about community approaches for holistic community improvement, workshop participants suggested resource mapping, incubator organizations, and reinvestment funds as potential solutions.

Community resource mapping (or *community asset mapping*) is an approach that is commonly used to identify and catalog the various organizations, programs, and services available in a community. In this context, mapping community social services for youth involved in the juvenile justice system can help ensure that system actors, community organizations, families, and youth all have access to readily available and useful information to access the appropriate services. It can also help identify gaps in services provided. Maschi et al. (2008) discuss how service needs and service usage can also be mapped throughout the juvenile system, which could, in turn, provide opportunities for continuity of services or opportunities to

Communities that are affected most by youth involvement in the juvenile system are already underresourced and often lack the financial and organizational capacity to serve youth and families with system involvement.

increase and improve community-based care. Ideally, resource mapping would also include those who provide services and those who might use services to understand supply and demand (Castrechini, Gardner, and Ardoin, 2011).

Incubator organizations, also called *entrepreneurial support organizations* (ESOs) or *accelerators*, are "explicitly founded for the purposes of catalyzing entrepreneurial activity and providing entrepreneurs with support" (Bergman and McMullen, 2022, p. 689). One component of ESOs is that entrepreneurs and their organizations understand the entrepreneurial ecosystem and develop a financial support network. Research on general ESO success in transforming underdeveloped areas is largely descriptive (Bergman and McMullen, 2022). Some recent research has focused on the role of ESOs in supporting sustainable development startups (SDSs), which might have societal goals rather than profit-driven ones and require large startup funding. Research by van Rijnsoever (2022) showed that ESOs can support SDS development in areas where there is not a preexisting ecosystem of organizations. In the social impact space, researchers have examined how social entrepreneurial organizations use scale to achieve impact, identifying organizational drivers and capabilities that affect the scale and pathway of social impact—such as scaling up as opposed to scaling out (Bloom and Chatterji, 2009; van Lunenburg, Geuijen, and Meijer, 2020). To our knowledge, the use of ESOs for improving outcomes for juvenile system–involved youth and their families has not been researched.

Finally, some workshop participants noted that the funds saved by closing youth facilities should be reinvested in communities most in need. Others noted that sometimes it is difficult to calculate exactly how much money is "saved," given how juvenile system budgets differ. For instance, the cost savings from operating a facility may have simply shifted to other parts of the juvenile system or to other areas of state funding.

Analyze Barriers to Working with Government and Nongovernment Funding

Next, panelists discussed how community-based organizations are often at a disadvantage when it comes to competing for governmental or nongovernmental funding sources. These organizations often have few staff, who are more focused on service provision than documentation, grant-writing, or seeking out funding. They are often funded for limited terms and must reapply for funding cyclically. Additionally, the funding requirements and criteria may change at each funding cycle, leaving these organizations to figure out how to adjust their models to fit the funding parameters.

Panelists said that research to understand current funding approaches, the barriers they present, and strategies to overcome these barriers was a pressing need. In particular, supporting small community providers with technical assistance would help them generate funding applications that are most likely to be successful. Although some existing models provide frameworks for supporting community organizations (Wandersman, Chien, and Katz, 2012), more research is needed to understand what technical assistance is most needed in this space.

CONCLUSION

From 2000 through 2020, there was a striking decrease in youth held in juvenile facilities. Some of this sizable decrease can be attributed to occurrences at the front end of the system: Youth arrests for violent crime have decreased by 56 percent from 2010 to 2020, while arrests for all offenses declined by 74 percent during that same period (Puzzanchera, 2022). Other efforts to reduce the size of the juvenile justice population include raising the minimum age at which a person can be processed through juvenile courts, implementing school-based strategies, limiting length of stay and placement for certain offenses, and expanding community-based alternatives and juvenile diversion. The move to close facilities has gained traction for several reasons, such as investments in alternative rehabilitation and community-based programs, cost savings, and recognition of the need to treat young offenders with a focus on rehabilitation rather than punitive measures (Puzzanchera, Hockenberry, and Sickmund, 2022). The decision to close these facilities is complex. RAND convened an expert panel that explored challenges and opportunities associated with closing juvenile facilities and supporting community-based alternatives.

Several overarching themes emerged. Foremost, panelists emphasized that closing secure youth facilities and reducing residential placement of youth should consider not only recidivism but indicators of positive youth development (e.g., educational achievement, health, safety, self-sufficiency).

Issues around family support and equity concerns are also of major importance. There is a lack of evidence-based practices for family engagement, and considerations around each individual family's needs are important. As facilities close and community alternatives are increasingly adopted, families will be a key part of ensuring success. Many families with youth

Panelists emphasized that closing secure youth facilities and reducing residential placement of youth should consider not only recidivism but indicators of positive youth development.

involved in the juvenile system face challenges that should be accounted for or addressed if possible. Additionally, racial and ethnic minority youth are disproportionately involved in the juvenile system and disproportionately face other socioeconomic challenges. More research needs to be done to understand the sources of disparities within the juvenile system. This might require reviewing juvenile system actor decisions, addressing policies contributing to disparities, or reviewing the use of risk assessments.

Serious youth offending will remain a key challenge for juvenile justice systems. Consideration of youth with high-risk and high-need profiles is important when discussing challenges and opportunities regarding facility closure. Facilities that remain can better support youth who are placed in them by fostering a more supportive environment and improving efforts to bring the outside in to ensure that youth remain connected to the community.

System change and creating a road map for improving community capacity was also a focus for the panelists. They noted that the push to increase the use of community alternatives to youth incarceration might benefit from a holistic community improvement approach. Optimal strategies that might best support juvenile justice–involved youth are lacking and in need of further research. Moreover, it is critical to remove barriers that community-serving organizations face in tapping funding opportunities to increase their capacity.

Much work is ongoing to improve outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile system, but there remain many challenges to serving this population while reducing the use of confinement. The high-priority needs outlined in this report highlight key factors for jurisdictions to consider when making decisions about youth facility closures and improving community alternatives.

TECHNICAL APPENDIX

This appendix presents additional detail on the workshop and our process for identifying and prioritizing research and technology needs and turning them into the research agenda that is presented in the main report. The descriptions in this appendix are drawn and adapted from previous publications of the PCJNI and reflect the adjustments to the needs identification and prioritization process implemented at this workshop.

Workshop Scope and Panel Selection

The topics for PCJNI workshops are selected by reaching a consensus among the action officers and subject-matter experts at NIJ and research staff at the organizations that will facilitate the workshop. Multiple topic areas accompanied by brief scoping descriptions are typically suggested months before the workshop by one or more of the parties involved, and staff engage in group deliberations with NIJ to reach consensus on the topic. We then engage in further scoping of the workshop to develop a discussion agenda through literature review, informal discussions with other practitioners and subject-matter experts, or both. Once the topic and scope have been determined, we recruit participants by identifying knowledgeable individuals through existing professional and social networks (e.g., LinkedIn) and by reviewing literature published on the topic. We then extend an invitation to those individuals and provide a brief description of the workshop's focus areas.

The process of expert elicitation described here was designed to gather unbiased, representative results from experts and practitioners in the field. However, several limitations could affect the findings. The process typically elicits opinions from a relatively small group of experts. To limit the effect of group size on the representativeness of the results, we strive to make the group as representative as possible of different disciplines, perspectives, and geographic regions. However, the final output of the

workshop likely is significantly influenced by the specific group of experts invited to participate. It is possible that the workshop's findings could be different if a different group of experts were selected. Moreover, although the discussion moderators make every effort to act as neutral parties when eliciting opinions from the collected experts, the backgrounds and experiences of the moderators have the potential to influence which questions they pose to the group and how they phrase those questions. This could also introduce bias that could influence the findings.

Identification and Prioritization of Needs

To develop and prioritize a list of technology and policy issues that are likely to benefit from research and investment, we followed a process similar to processes we used in previous PCJNI workshops (see, for example, Jackson et al., 2015; Jackson et al., 2016, and references therein). Participants discussed and refined problems and identified potential solutions (or *needs*) that could address each problem. In addition, needs could be framed in response to opportunities to improve performance by adopting or adapting a new approach or practice (e.g., applying a new technology or tool in the sector that had not been used before). After identifying and refining the needs, we use a voting process based on the Delphi method, a technique developed at RAND, to elicit prioritization information from the group about the identified needs (RAND Corporation, undated).

Interviews

Prior to the workshop, we conducted remote interviews with the panel members to discuss the challenges they considered to be related to the workshop's focus area. We also asked participants to identify areas in which additional investment in research and development could help alleviate the challenges. During these discussions, participants suggested additional areas that were potentially worthy of research or investment. We then consolidated and integrated the problems, opportunities, and potential solutions described by the participants in the separate interviews into a single summarized list. In advance of the in-person workshop, we emailed participants a summarized list of issues and needs.

In-Person Workshop

For the workshop, panelists traveled to the Office of Justice Programs offices in Washington, D.C. During the workshop, we started by asking the panelists to collectively review, discuss, and correct the wording of the consolidated list of problems from the interviews. Each identified problem was placed on a Microsoft PowerPoint slide and displayed in front of the room for discussion. Once the participants agreed on the wording of the problems, they were asked to vote on the importance of the problems on a scale of 1 (low) to 9 (high). Votes were recorded anonymously using a using a handheld device (specifically, the ResponseCard RF LCD from Turning Technologies).

After the participants provided their individual ratings using the handheld device, we displayed a histogram-style summary of participant responses within the polling system's interface. If there was significant disagreement (as determined by our visual inspection of the histogram), then the participants were asked to verbally discuss or explain their votes at one end of the spectrum or the other. If a second round of discussion occurred, participants were given an opportunity to adjust their rating on the same question. With the data from the voting, we prioritized the list of problems by calculating the median vote for each problem.

The prioritized list of problems was then used as an agenda for the remaining workshop time. If time ran short, then only the higher-rated problems were examined for potential solutions or opportunities. For each problem, participants were asked to identify potential opportunities and potential solutions. Again, we used Microsoft PowerPoint slides that were displayed in the front of the room and edited in real time to incorporate participant revisions and comments. In some cases, the facilitators provided solutions that were previously identified during the interviews.

Once the group reached consensus on a group of needs, we conducted a real-time voting prioritization exercise using Delphi techniques. We asked the panel to anonymously vote using a handheld device (again, the ResponseCard RF LCD from Turning Technologies). Each participant was asked to individually score each need and associated strategies to address those needs using a 1–9 scale for two dimensions: importance and probability of success.

For the *importance* dimension, participants were instructed that 1 was a low score and 9 was a high score. Participants were further told to score a need's importance with a 1 if it would have little or no impact on the problem and with a 9 if it would reduce the impact of the problem by 20 percent or more. Anchoring the scale with percentage improvements in the need's performance is intended to help make rating values more comparable from participant to participant.

For the *probability of success* dimension, participants were instructed to treat the 1–9 scale as a percentage chance that the need could be met and broadly implemented successfully.

That is, they could assign the need's chance of success between 10 percent (rating of 1) and 90 percent (rating of 9). This dimension was intended to include not only technical concerns (whether the need would be hard to meet) but also the effect of factors that might cause practitioners to not adopt the new technology, policy, or practice even if it were developed. Such factors could include, for example, cost, effect on practitioner workloads, other staffing concerns, and societal concerns.

After the participants provided their individual ratings using the handheld devices (i.e., for importance or probability of success), we displayed a histogram-style summary of participant responses within the polling system's interface. If there was significant disagreement among the panel (the degree of disagreement was determined by our visual inspection of the histogram), then the participants were asked to verbally discuss or explain their votes at one end of the spectrum or the other. If a second round of discussion occurred, participants were given an opportunity to adjust their rating on the same question. This process was repeated for each question and dimension at the end of each topic area.

Post-Session Prioritization

Once the participants had completed this rating process for all of the topic areas, we put the needs into a single prioritized list. We ordered the list by calculating an expected value using the method outlined in Jackson et al. (2016). For each need, we averaged the median problem importance with the median problem-need importance (from the second round if necessary). This formed the overall importance score for each need. This score was then multiplied with the median probability of success for each need to produce an expected value. We then calculated the median of that product across all of the respondents and used that as the group's collective expected value score for the need.

Next, we clustered the resulting expected value scores into three tiers using a hierarchical clustering algorithm. (We used the "ward.D" spherical algorithm from the "stats" library in the R statistical package, version 4.1.3.) We chose this algorithm to minimize within-cluster variance when determining the breaks between tiers. We chose to use three tiers, in part, to keep the methodology consistent across the set of needs-prioritization workshops we have conducted for NIJ. Also, the choice of three tiers provides a manageable system for policymakers. Specifically, the Tier 1 needs are the priorities that should be the primary policymaking focus, the Tier 2 needs should be examined closely, and the Tier 3 needs are probably not worth much attention in the near term (unless, for example, they can be addressed with existing technology or approaches that can be readily and cheaply adapted to the identified need).

Because the participants initially rated the needs one topic area at a time, we gave them an opportunity at the end of the workshop to review and weigh in on the tiered list of all identified needs. The intention of this step was to let participants see the needs in the context of the other tiered needs and allow them to consider whether there were some that appeared too high or low relative to the others. Participants were able to see all of the ranked needs collected across all of the sessions; this provided a top-level view that was complementary to the rankings provided session by session. To collect the participants' assessments, we emailed the entire tiered list to them in a Microsoft Word document. The participants were then asked to examine where each of the needs landed on the overall tiered list and whether this ordering was appropriate or needed fine-tuning. Participants had the option to indicate whether each problem and need pairing should be voted up or down on the list. Table A.1 provides an example of this form.

We then tallied the participants' responses and applied those votes to produce a final list of prioritized and tiered needs. To adjust the expected values using the up and down votes from the third round of prioritization, we implemented a method equivalent to the one we used in previous work (Hollywood et al., 2016). Specifically, if every participant voted "up" for a need that was at the bottom of the list, then the collective effect of those votes should be to move the need to the top. (The opposite would happen if every participant voted "down" for a need that was at the top of the list.) To determine the point value of a single vote, we divided the full range of expected values by the number of participants voting.

To prevent the (somewhat rare) situation in which small numbers of votes have an unintended outsize impact—for example, when some or all of the needs in one tier have the same or very similar expected values—we also set a threshold that at least 25 percent of the workshop participants must have voted on that need (and then rounded to the nearest full participant). For this workshop, there were 14 participants, so for any votes to have had an effect on changing a need's tier, at least three participants would have had to have voted to move the need up or down.

After applying the up and down vote points to the second-round expected values, we compared the modified scores with the boundary values for the tiers to see whether the change was enough to move any needs up or down in the prioritization.

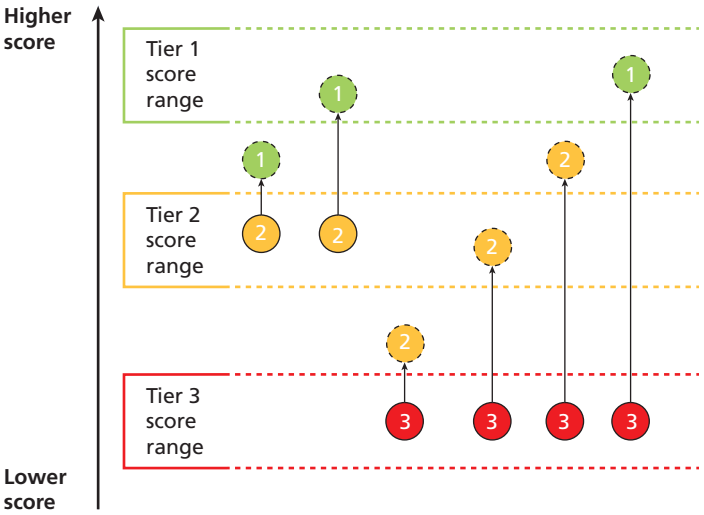
Table A.1. Mockup of the Delphi Third-Round Voting Form

Question	Tier	Vote Up	Vote Down
Tier 1			
Issue: Disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of youth of color occur at every point in the legal process. **Need:** Conduct an analysis of the major decision points in the legal system. Be sure to consider common demographic dimensions.	1		
Issue: After low- and medium-risk youth are removed from secure facilities, there are not enough individualized community-based solutions for the remaining youth (those charged with the most-serious offenses). **Need:** Develop a research strategy to identify effective community-based interventions (e.g., trauma informed and community relevant programs) or gaps to help keep youth healthy and safe in their communities.	1		
Tier 2			
Issue: Facility closure decisions are influenced by the belief that some young people cannot or should not be rehabilitated but should be punished. **Need:** Conduct research to identify effective messaging strategies and credible messengers with regard to the relative impact on society of alternatives to incarceration.	2		
Issue: There is a lack of knowledge about how to close facilities and ensure positive youth development and public safety. **Need:** Evaluate existing and historical strategies (continuum of interventions) to identify which are most effective (considering the community context).	2		
Tier 3			
Issue: Data collection and record-sharing on youths among providers are often insufficient and inefficient. **Need:** Identify and evaluate existing examples of improving data-collection capacity and data-sharing among agencies and providers.	3		
Issue: There is a lack of common language and definitions of *incarceration*, *detention*, *secure*, *recidivism*, etc., that would allow for mutual understanding, transparency, and evidence-informed policymaking. **Need:** It is particularly important that stakeholders and researchers carefully consider the definitional differences when collecting data and communicating findings.	3		

(Note that there were gaps between these boundaries, so some of the modified expected values could fall in between tiers. See Figure A.1.) As with prior work, we set a higher bar for a need to move up or down two tiers (from Tier 1 to Tier 3, or vice versa) than for a need to move to the tier immediately above or below. Specifically, a need could *increase by one tier* if its modified expected value was higher than the highest expected value score in its initial tier. And a need could *decrease by one tier* if its modified expected value was lower than the lowest expected value in its initial tier. However, *to increase or decrease by two tiers* (possible only for needs that started in Tier 1 or Tier 3), the score had to increase or decrease by an amount that fully placed the need into the range two tiers away. For example, for a Tier 3 need to jump to Tier 1, its expected value score had to fall within the boundaries of Tier 1, not just within the gap between Tier 1 and Tier 2. Figure A.1 illustrates the greater score change required for a need to move two tiers (one need on the far right of the figure) compared with one tier (all other examples shown).

Applying these decision rules to integrate the participants' third-round inputs into the final tiering of needs resulted in numerical separations between tiers that were less clear than the separations that resulted when we used the clustering algorithm in the initial tiering. This can occur because, for example, when the final expected value score for a need that was originally in Tier 3 falls just below the boundary value for Tier 1, that need's final score could be higher than that of some other needs in the item's new tier (Tier 2). Figure A.2 shows the distribution of

Figure A.1. How a Need's Increase in Expected Value Might Result in Its Movement Across Tier Boundaries



NOTE: Each example need's original tier is shown by a circle with a solid border (the two needs starting in Tier 2 and the four needs starting in Tier 3). Each need's new tier after the third-round score adjustment is shown by the connected circle with a dotted border.

the needs by expected value score after the second-round rating process and then after the third-round voting process.

For the third round of voting, we received votes from several participants. As a result, two needs moved up from Tier 2 to Tier 1 (Table A.2). The output from this process became the final ranking of the panel's prioritized results.

Figure A.2. Final Distribution of the Tiered Needs

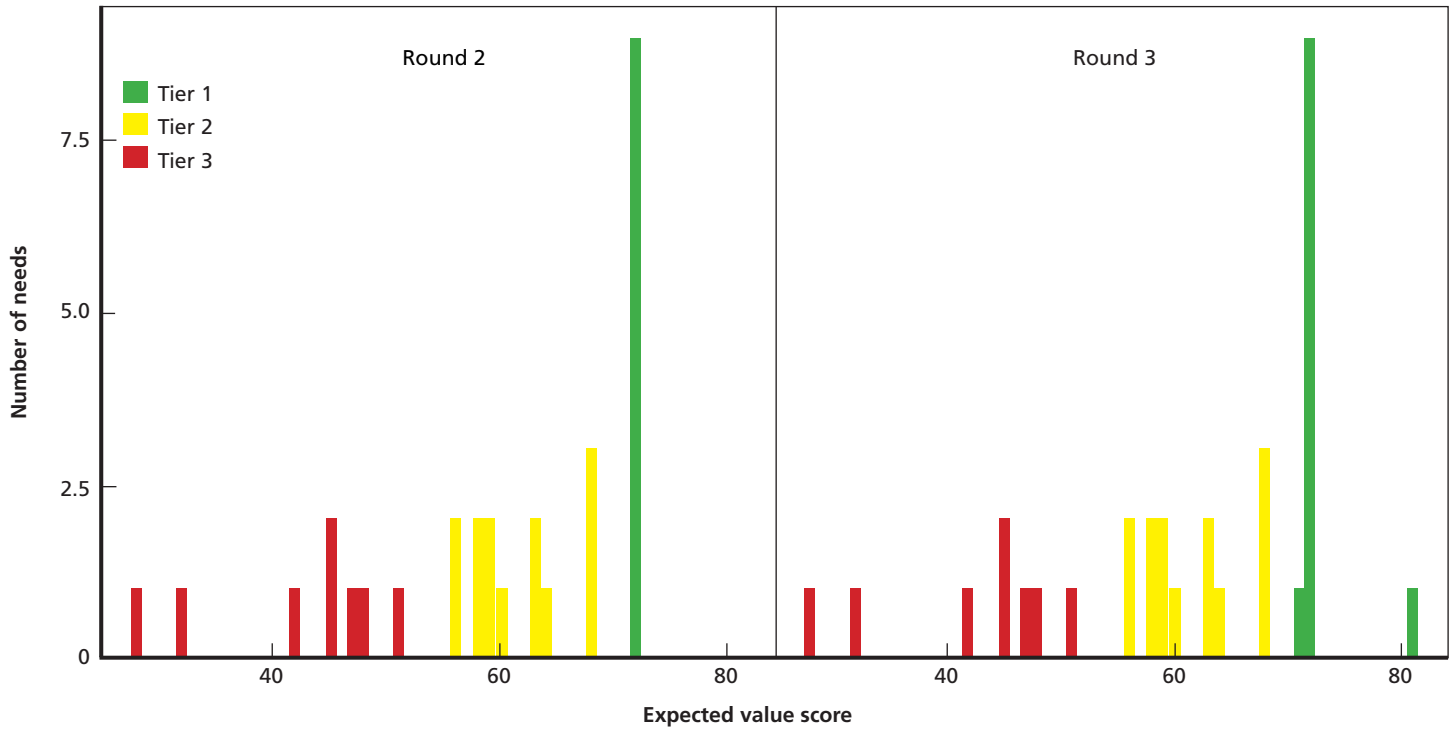


Table A.2. Complete List of Needs, by Tier

Issue or Problem	Associated Need	Tier
FAMILY SUPPORT AND EQUITY CONCERNS		
Disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of youth of color occur at every point in the legal process.	• Conduct an analysis of the major decision points in the legal system. Be sure to consider common demographic dimensions. • Examine the impact of risk tools and whether they are continuing to propagate structural bias.	1
The system is not structured to partner or engage with families as they support their justice-involved youth.	• Conduct research on the best approaches for family engagement, preparedness, and advocacy throughout the process (including reentry planning). • Conduct research on agency best practices for supporting engagement with families.	
SERIOUS YOUTH OFFENDING AND HIGH-RISK, HIGH-NEEDS YOUTH		
After low- and medium-risk youth are removed from secure facilities, there are not enough individualized community-based solutions for the remaining youth (those charged with the most-serious offenses).	• Develop a research strategy to identify community-based interventions (e.g., trauma-informed and community-relevant programs) or gaps in services that are effective in keeping youth healthy and safe in their communities.	1
Some youth may still be held in a secure facility, which will need to be designed and organized in a way to minimize additional trauma and harm.	• Conduct research to identify the most-effective methods (domestically and internationally) to operate within the best trauma-informed practices (i.e., setting, operational and programmatic, staffing, training). • Conduct research to identify strategies to optimize length of stay in the least-restrictive setting and continuity of care and services as youth transition back into the community. • Conduct research to determine the best infusion of community services, supports, and opportunities to minimize institutionalization and prepare youth for release. • Identify, develop, and promote the application of effective change strategies and best practices to improve outcomes for youth held in facilities.	
SYSTEMS AND A ROAD MAP FOR REFORM		
Most affected communities (those with high levels of poverty, historical underinvestment, or structural racism) are underresourced and lack the financial and organizational capacity to serve youth and families with system involvement.	• Develop and prioritize approaches to holistic community improvements (e.g., resource mapping, incubator organizations, reinvestment funds). • Analyze barriers to working with government and nongovernment funding organizations (i.e., procurement, contracting, and reporting processes) and identify concrete strategies for making those processes easier for organizations with limited capacity.	1
FAMILY SUPPORT AND EQUITY CONCERNS		
Disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of youth of color occur at every point in the legal process.	• Use a public health framework to identify key areas in the community to develop partnerships, and collate preventative services to address disparities.	2
DATA AND RESEARCH		
There is a need for more evidence-informed, trauma-responsive, culturally informed, and congruent programs and practices (and particularly for nonclinical and community-led services) that are rigorously evaluated for various populations of youth.	• Conduct research to identify, promote, develop, and evaluate appropriate solutions.	2

Table A.2—Continued

Issue or Problem	Associated Need	Tier
POLITICS		
Facility closure decisions are influenced by the belief that some young people cannot or should not be rehabilitated but should be punished.	• Conduct research to identify effective messaging strategies and credible messengers with regard to the relative impact on society of alternatives to incarceration.	2
Isolated bad incidents following the closure of a secure facility can undermine evidence-informed policy.	• Develop a comprehensive picture of successes and failures that is easily consumed by the public, the media, and legislatures.	
COMMUNITY CAPACITY		
Public and private funding streams are structured in a way that presents barriers for small and/or startup community providers (i.e., cash flow or funding timelines and procedures, performance measures, application and reporting regimes).	• Analyze barriers to working with government and nongovernment funding organizations (i.e., procurement, contracting, and reporting processes) and identify concrete strategies for making those processes easier for organizations with limited capacity.	2
Often, the youth legal system (i.e., law enforcement, prosecution, defense, courts, corrections, probation, and community) does not work collectively to realize community well-being, public safety, or positive youth and family outcomes.	• Develop multisystem trainings relative to the harms of incarceration and positive youth development. (Include system maps with guidance on how groups can strengthen the system.) • Research and promote collaboratives (e.g., the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development's Choice Neighborhood program) that plan and implement strategies to reduce reliance on incarceration, improve public safety, and improve community investment in alternatives.	
SERIOUS YOUTH OFFENDING AND HIGH-RISK, HIGH-NEEDS YOUTH		
Some youth may still be held in a secure facility, which will need to be designed and organized in a way to minimize additional trauma and harm.	• Conduct research to determine the impacts of minimum sentencing requirements and adult transfer laws on youth well-being and safety.	2
FUNDING FOR ALTERNATIVES		
Savings from facility closure do not always directly translate to community-based alternatives or resources.	• Study the relative cost-effectiveness of the various existing and potential reinvestment strategies. (Not all strategies will result in savings.)	2
There is a lack of knowledge about how to close facilities and ensure positive youth development and public safety.	• Evaluate existing and historical strategies (continuum of interventions) to identify which are most effective (considering the community context).	
SYSTEMS AND A ROAD MAP FOR REFORM		
Those involved in systems that provide referrals for justice-involved children and families often do not use or understand the full variety of community organizations that could receive them.	• Identify best practices for creating, updating, and sharing community resource maps (including peer navigator models and technological solutions).	2
SYSTEMS AND A ROAD MAP FOR REFORM		
Most affected communities (those with high levels of poverty, historical underinvestment, or structural racism) are underresourced and lack the financial and organizational capacity to serve youth and families with system involvement.	• Identify transformative solutions that bring existing communities up to a reasonable standard of healthy and thriving.	3

Table A.2—Continued

Issue or Problem	Associated Need	Tier
COMMUNITY CAPACITY		
There is a lack of guidance on the best ways to repurpose a secure facility to maximize community well-being.	• Catalog existing and historical transitions and evaluate the impact on community well-being.	3
DATA AND RESEARCH		
Data collection and record-sharing on youths among providers is often insufficient and inefficient.	• Identify and evaluate existing examples of improving data-collection capacity and data-sharing among agencies and providers.	3
There is a lack of knowledge about how to close facilities and ensure positive youth development and public safety.	• Use the data collected by the U.S. Census (Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement [CJRP] and the Juvenile Residential Facility Census [JRFC]) to track and report the pattern of closures (e.g., public, private, state, local) nationwide.	
SYSTEMS AND A ROAD MAP FOR REFORM		
There is a lack of guidance on the best ways to transition a closed facility's workforce.	• Develop a comprehensive picture of successes and failures that is easily consumed by the public, workforce, unions, the media, and legislatures.	3
BUY-IN AND VOICE		
There is a lack of common language and definitions of *incarceration*, *detention*, *secure*, *recidivism*, etc., that would allow for mutual understanding, transparency, and evidence-informed policymaking.	• It is particularly important that stakeholders and researchers carefully consider the definitional differences when collecting data and communicating findings.	3
Often, the youth legal system (i.e., law enforcement, prosecution, defense, courts, corrections, probation, and community) does not work collectively to realize community well-being, public safety, or positive youth and family outcomes.	• Evaluate whether and how agency and community organizations have operationalized strategies for achieving the common goal (i.e., mission or purpose clauses) of reducing reliance on incarceration and investing in community alternatives.	
FAMILY SUPPORT AND EQUITY CONCERNS		
Disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of youth of color occur at every point in the legal process.	• Conduct research to identify incentives and sanctions that will have the greatest impact on the underlying structural racism.	3

NOTE: This table was updated in November 2024 in two places:

1: We removed a duplicated need ("Conduct research on the best approaches for family engagement, preparedness, and advocacy throughout the process (including reentry planning") from the Tier 1 "FAMILY SUPPORT AND EQUITY CONCERNS" section and replaced it with the intended need ("Conduct research on agency best practices for supporting engagement with families").

2: We added a need that had been inadvertently omitted ("Analyze barriers to working with government and nongovernment funding organizations (i.e., procurement, contracting, and reporting processes) and identify concrete strategies for making those processes easier for organizations with limited capacity") to the Tier 1 SYSTEMS AND A ROAD MAP FOR REFORM section.

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About the Authors

Melissa M. Labriola is a senior behavioral scientist at RAND. She is leading several projects studying police and prosecutor-led diversion, including a randomized controlled trial of prosecutor-led pretrial diversion in San Francisco and an evaluation of early diversion programs in New York City. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology.

Samuel Peterson is a policy researcher at RAND who has conducted research on a variety of topics across the criminal justice system, including policing, courts, and corrections. His research emphasizes the perspectives of criminal justice and community stakeholders to improve criminal justice practices and improve legitimacy. He holds a Ph.D. in criminal justice.

Michael J. D. Vermeer is a senior physical scientist at RAND. He is a technologist researching science and technology policy in criminal justice, homeland security, the intelligence community, and the armed forces. He co-leads the PCJNI, a research partnership identifying technology and policy needs across sectors of the criminal justice system. He holds a Ph.D. in inorganic chemistry.

Dulani Woods is a data science practitioner at RAND, specializing in data acquisition, transformation, visualization, and analysis. Woods has worked on policy-related research efforts in multiple domains, with a primary focus on criminal justice and homeland security. He holds an M.S. in agricultural economics (applied economics).

Brian A. Jackson is a senior physical scientist at RAND. His research focuses on criminal justice, homeland security, and terrorism preparedness. His areas of examination have included safety management in large-scale emergency response operations, the equipment and technology needs of criminal justice agencies and emergency responders, and the design of preparedness exercises. He co-leads the PCJNI and has a Ph.D. in bioinorganic chemistry.

About This Report

On behalf of the U.S. Department of Justice, National Institute of Justice (NIJ), RAND—in partnership with the Police Executive Research Forum, RTI International, and the University of Denver—is carrying out a research effort to assess and prioritize technology and related needs across the criminal justice community. This research effort, called the Priority Criminal Justice Needs Initiative (PCJNI), is a component of the Criminal Justice Requirements & Resources Consortium (RRC) and is intended to support innovation within the criminal justice enterprise. For more information about the RRC and the PCJNI, please see www.rand.org/jie/justice-policy/projects/priority-criminal-justice-needs.

This report is one product of the PCJNI. In May 2023, researchers from RAND conducted an expert workshop, "Alternatives to Youth Incarceration," to identify high-priority needs for improving outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. This report presents the workshop proceedings and discusses the topics considered, the needs that the panel developed, and the overarching themes that emerged from the panel discussion. The results this report presents should be of interest to juvenile justice administrators, youth services providers, policymakers, and the research community.

Other RAND research reports from the PCJNI that might be of interest include

- Joe Russo, Michael J. D. Vermeer, Dulani Woods, and Brian A. Jackson, *Community Supervision in a Digital World: Challenges and Opportunities*, RR-A108-10, 2021.
- Joe Russo, Dulani Woods, George B. Drake, and Brian A. Jackson, *Leveraging Technology to Enhance Community Supervision: Identifying Needs to Address Current and Emerging Concerns*, RR-3213-NIJ, 2019.
- Joe Russo, Dulani Woods, John S. Shaffer, and Brian A. Jackson, *Countering Threats to Correctional Institutional Security: Identifying Innovation Needs to Address Current and Emerging Concerns*, RR-2933-NIJ, 2019.

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