Representing Youth Charged with Gun Offenses Annotated Bibliography

Created by the Gault Center 2026
Transformative Policy Initiative

Special thanks to the Law Firm Antiracism Alliance, Ropes Gray LLP, Steptoe LLP, and Troutman Pepper Locke for providing support and research for the annotated bibliographies through their summer 2026 internship program.

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I. Key Takeaways

- Decades of research and the lived experience of young people, families, practitioners, and communities demonstrate that community-based, holistic support reduce gun violence while punitive responses to youth gun possession

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cases produce worse outcomes than restorative justice and tailored diversion programs, undermining public safety rather than reducing gun violence.[1]

- Research consistently shows that punitive approaches fail to address the factors that drive youth firearm carrying and violence, undermine long-term public safety, and can increase the likelihood of future justice system involvement. [2]
- These policies disproportionately impact Black and Latine youth, who are more likely to experience the trauma of both disparate policing and prosecution and gun violence because of longstanding patterns of structural racism, residential segregation, and concentrated disinvestment. Research indicates that disparities in firearm possession arrests are primarily attributable to enforcement practices—not to higher rates of firearm possession among specific demographic groups.[3]
- This disparity reflects a broader pattern: when gun violence threatens predominantly White communities, the legislative response is treatment; when it threatens predominantly Black communities, the legislative response is punishment. And the policy and legislative responses to the gun violence that disproportionately impacts Black youth in urban communities have trended toward increased penalties, mandatory transfers to adult court, and punitive detention.
- Although some states have moved toward prevention-over-punishment frameworks,[4] others have recently enacted harsher penalties for youth gun possession and gun violence, conflating these two separate behaviors and shifting away from what the evidence shows works.[5]

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[1] *See* Richard A. Mendel, *From Punishment to Prevention: A Better Approach to Addressing Youth Gun Possession*, THE SENTENCING PROJECT (June 12, 2025), https://www.sentencingproject.org/reports/from-punishment-to-prevention-a-better-approach-to-addressing-youth-gun-possession/.
[2] *Id*.
[3] *Id*.
[4] *See* 2025 Ill. Legis. Serv. P.A. 104-140 (S.B. 2280) (West).
[5] *See* H.B. 1181, 2024 Legis. Sess., 126th Reg. Sess. (Fl. 2024); S.B. 20, 2024 Gen. Assemb., Reg. Sess. (Ky. 2024).

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- To effectively address firearm carrying and gun violence, the strongest evidence supports a public health approach that addresses the conditions driving youth firearm carrying—including trauma, fear of victimization, and structural disadvantage—rather than defaulting to punitive sanctions that increase system involvement and fail to reduce violence. Effective approaches include community violence interruption diversion programs that allow informal processing for gun possession cases, programs that include promote cognitive behavioral therapy offer some of the strongest evidence-based alternatives to punishment. These responses address the root causes of gun carrying (namely, trauma, environmental pressures, and social context)while producing meaningful reductions in youth gun violence.[6]

II. Empirical Studies & Research Reports

A. Gun Possession and Gun Violence from a Public Health Perspective

1. American Psychological Association, *Gun violence: Prediction, prevention, and policy* (2013).
   - **Purpose**
     - To identify the psychological, developmental, social, and cultural risk factors that serve as precursors to gun violence, and to evaluate evidence-based prevention strategies at the individual, community, and policy levels.
   - **Methodology**
     - A panel of ten experts with backgrounds in clinical psychology, public health, law enforcement, threat assessment, pediatrics, and social policy synthesized peer-reviewed literature across six domains: (1) developmental antecedents, (2) gender and culture, (3) individual prevention, (4) community prevention, (5) policy interventions, and (6) mental illness.

[6] *See supra* note 1.

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- The panel drew from major national datasets including Centers for Disease Control mortality data, Federal Bureau of Investigation crime reports, the National Crime Victimization Survey, the Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance Survey, and Bureau of Justice Statistics homicide trend analyses.

- **Results**
  - The report calls for policy changes that address the failure of zero-tolerance policies, understand the role of trauma and structural conditions that drive gun carrying, and advance the effectiveness of community-based approaches over punitive responses.
  - Youth exposed to community violence were 2.5 times more likely to begin carrying a gun, and those who carry guns are more likely to report gang affiliation and to overestimate how many of their peers are also carrying.
  - Zero-tolerance disciplinary policies enacted following the Gun-Free Schools Act of 1994 rest on faulty assumptions, produce no measurable safety benefits, and disproportionately harm students of color and students with disabilities.
  - Mental health treatment reduces individual violence risk, but access remains "woefully insufficient" due to social, economic, and legal barriers.
  - The comprehensive community approach recognizes that no single agency or program can provide the entire prevention solution and so the report calls for collaborative, cross-system models that break down silos between law enforcement, mental health, public health, and community partners.
- **Relevance**
  - The report's findings that youth who carry guns are more likely to have been exposed to community violence supports individualized consideration and demonstrates that a youth's gun possession is frequently a trauma response and a perceived necessity for survival , not an indicator of future violence.
  - The data showing that zero-tolerance policies produce no safety benefits and disproportionately harm youth of color gives defenders a compelling basis to

challenge categorical no-diversion and mandatory-detention policies as ineffective and potentially discriminatory.

2. Jocelyn Fontaine et al., *We Carry Guns to Stay Safe: Perspectives on Guns and Gun Violence from Young Adults Living in Chicago's West and South Sides*, Urban Inst. (Oct. 2018).
    - **Purpose:**
        - To learn directly from young adults living in high-violence neighborhoods why they carry guns, how they acquire them, how they experience policing and gun violence, and what they believe would actually reduce gun carrying and improve community safety.
    - **Methodology:**
        - This is a community-based survey of 345 emerging adults ages 18 to 26 living in four Chicago neighborhoods with high rates of gun violence (Austin, Auburn-Gresham, Englewood, and North Lawndale), conducted between November 2017 and February 2018.
        - Participants were recruited through community organizations and neighborhood canvassing. The study focused on identifying people likely to have been exposed to gun carrying and gun violence rather than a random representative sample.
        - Survey questions covered whether and why participants carried a firearm, how firearms were acquired, experiences of victimization and policing, perceptions of police legitimacy and effectiveness, and views on what would reduce gun carrying.
    - **Results:**
        - One in three emerging adults reported having carried a firearm at some point, almost always unlawfully. The overwhelming driver was self-protection: male respondents consistently identified concerns about their

own safety as well as the safety of family members and friends among the leading reasons for carrying a firearm.

- Nearly all who reported carrying guns cited fear of victimization as the reason, not aggression. More than one-third of those who reported carrying had also been shot or shot at recently, representing about 11% of the full sample. The majority (85%) knew someone who had been victimized in the past year. Those who had been shot or shot at in the past 12 months were three times more likely to have ever carried a gun than those without that trauma.
- Participants reported not trusting the police to keep the community safe and therefore , viewed carrying as a necessary substitute for protection that law enforcement was failing to provide.
- Firearms were acquired primarily through informal social networks, with respondents reporting they could obtain a gun within hours through a friend or family member.
- When asked what would deter carrying, 58% cited access to well-paying jobs as the most important factor. Peer norms (if friends didn't carry, they wouldn't either) was the second most common response. Fear of arrest was a deterrent for some, but trust in police and perceived likelihood of police intervention in their communities were not.

- **Relevance:**
  - This source demonstrates that the majority of young people carry firearms for protection, supporting the argument that the appropriate response to a young person who carries due to fear is not incarceration but rather investment in community safety that make carrying feel unnecessary.
  - This source also provides empirical grounding for arguments against mandatory arrest, mandatory detention, and categorical prosecution of possession cases involving young people in communities that experience

high rates of violence and instead investing in community-based alternatives to incarceration.

3. Lois K. Lee et al., *Firearm-Related Injuries and Deaths in Children and Youth: Injury Prevention and Harm Reduction*, 150 American Academy of Pediatrics e2022060070 (2022).
   - **Purpose:**
     - The American Academy of Pediatrics' (AAP) updated their official policy statement on firearm violence as a pediatric public health crisis, recommending a harm-reduction approach.
     - AAP calls on pediatricians, policymakers, and communities to implement evidence-based, multi-level interventions at the individual, household, community, and policy levels.
   - **Methodology:**
     - This systematic literature review and policy statement by the AAP Council on Injury, Violence, and Poison Prevention synthesizes peer-reviewed epidemiological research, public health intervention literature, and existing policy evidence on firearm injury and death among children and adolescents.
     - The statement updates prior AAP guidance and is accompanied by a technical report with the underlying evidence . The harm-reduction framework is drawn explicitly from the Haddon Matrix model of injury prevention, which is the same framework that produced the regulatory, engineering, and behavioral interventions responsible for dramatic declines in motor vehicle mortality.
   - **Results:**
     - The AAP policy statement documents that firearms are the leading cause of death for children and youth ages 0 to 24 in the United States, surpassing

motor vehicle crashes, a shift attributed in part to rising firearm suicide and homicide rates among youth ages 15 to 24.

- The policy statement notes significant disparities in firearm death and injury by age, gender, race, ethnicity, and geographic region, with most firearm suicides and homicides occurring among males and youth ages 15 to 24.
- The statement's core recommendations reject a purely criminal system response in favor of layered harm-reduction interventions such as: safe storage counseling (programs that encourage practices such as storing firearms unloaded and in a locked location and storing ammunition separate from the firearm) and universal lethal-means counseling (programs that educate families on the risk of self-harm and suicide) in pediatric clinical settings; community-based violence intervention programs; school-based investment in mental health services rather than police; minimum age purchase laws; universal background checks; permit-to-purchase requirements; and substantially expanded federal funding for firearm violence research.
- The AAP explicitly frames firearm violence as a preventable public health crisis requiring the same evidence-based, regulatory, and community-centered response infrastructure that successfully reduced motor vehicle deaths, not as a criminal problem requiring more incarceration or punitive consequences.

- **Relevance:**
  - The AAP's harm-reduction framework demonstrates that the appropriate response to a public health crisis is prevention, treatment, and environmental modification, not punishment.
  - The AAP's institutional authority is uniquely powerful because it is explicitly non-partisan and grounded in clinical practice, making it credible to audiences skeptical of criminal or juvenile legal system reform advocacy.

- The statement also provides medical authority for the argument that community investment, mental health resources, and violence interruption programs are evidence-based tools for keeping young people safe.

4. Pilar Bancalari, Marni Sommer, Sonali Rajan, *Youth Exposure to Endemic Community Gun Violence: A Systematic Review*, Columbia Teachers College Adolescent Research Review (2022).
   - **Purpose**
     - To synthesize and assess the state of evidence on indirect exposure to community gun violence among low-income urban Black and Latine youth (ages 2-18) in the United States, a population disproportionately impacted by endemic gun violence.
     - To explore the literature on the prevalence, physiological, and psychological impacts of indirect exposure to community gun violence on low-income Black and Latine youth in urban areas
     - To identify subsets of urban youth by age, gender, and race that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse impacts of community gun violence, and to explore associated risk and protective factors.
   - **Methodology**
     - The authors conducted a review of peer-reviewed literature using four databases: PubMed, Web of Science, ProQuest, and SCOPUS.
     - The authors operationalized indirect gun violence exposure based on existing literature to include seeing or hearing gunfire; knowing someone who has been shot or carries a gun; and being aware of gun violence in one's community.

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- Inclusion criteria required: peer-reviewed articles published in English after 1995; focus on community gun violence and low-income youth living in urban areas.

- **Results**
  - Indirect exposure to community gun violence is far more prevalent than direct victimization: nationally, 17% of youth ages 14-17 have heard gunshots or seen someone shot; among urban African American 6-7-year-olds in Detroit, 84% had witnessed gunfire, 26% had witnessed a shooting, and 14% had seen a dead body.
  - Black youth ages 0-19 are nine times as likely to die by gun homicide as their white counterparts, reflecting how racial disparities in exposure are compounded by disparities in victimization.
  - Exposure to gun violence triggers a stronger physiological stress response than exposure to non-firearm violence; adolescents who feared injury or death during an incident were approximately nine times more likely to develop depressive symptoms.
  - Younger children (ages 2-9) exposed to gun violence are more likely to exhibit internalizing symptoms (depression, anxiety, PTSD); older youth are more likely to exhibit externalizing behaviors (aggression, delinquency) as a result of desensitization over time, and these behaviors that are frequently mislabeled as "problematic" rather than recognized as trauma responses.
  - Even when young people are not directly victimized, exposure to gun violence in their communities may increase their perception of personal risk, as gunfire is often unpredictable and can result in serious injury or death. Chronically exposed youth develop normative beliefs about violence and maladaptive cognitive frameworks, including fatalism and poor executive functioning, that increase risk-taking and aggression.
  - Gun violence perpetrators and victims frequently comprise overlapping subpopulations.

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- Harsher sentencing shows no statistically significant effect on gun violence reduction; the most effective interventions bolster resilience across family, school, and community ecologies and include routine screening for exposure in schools and health care settings.

- **Relevance**
  - The researchers identify young people who grow up in urban areas with high firearm exposure as a vulnerable population whose subsequent carrying of firearms or involvement in gun violence overlaps with their own exposure to violence and low sense of safety. Young people who are alleged to have committed violent offenses are also navigating repeated exposure to direct and indirect violence themselves, providing important context for understanding their behavior and needs.
  - The finding that youth who exhibit aggression after gun violence exposure are routinely mislabeled as "problematic" rather than identified as trauma-exposed is directly applicable to factors and determination in detention hearings and transfer proceedings. Many of the behaviors commonly cited against young people in these proceedings reflect trauma responses rather than evidence of incorrigibility.
  - Family support, group therapy, mental health access, and other personal resources offer the kind of evidence-basedtreatment and alternatives defenders can propose to detention or incarceration.

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B. Addressing Gun Possession in Juvenile Court

1. Richard A. Mendel, *From Punishment to Prevention: A Better Approach to Addressing Youth Gun Possession*, The Sentencing Project (2025).
    - **Purpose**
        - To examine why the youth legal systems' current approaches to gun possession cases are counterproductive and racially inequitable and identify evidence-based alternatives to punitive responses.
    - **Methodology**
        - The Sentencing Project partnered with the Gault Center to conduct a national survey of public defenders and other juvenile legal system professionals, receiving 74 completed survey responses from respondents in 34 states and the District of Columbia.
        - The report also analyzed Federal Bureau of Investigation weapons arrest data (1995-2023) and National Center for Juvenile Justice court statistics (1985-2021) to track national trends.
    - **Results**
        - The most recent National Survey on Drug Use and Health (in 2023) showed that carrying a handgun was more prevalent among white youth than Black youth, and equal between Non-Hispanic white youth and Latino youth. Youth in rural and smaller metro areas were also more likely to carry handguns than youth in larger metro areas.
        - Many youth carry guns based on a perceived need for self-defense or out of fear and past trauma, not to threaten or victimize others. Only a small fraction of youth who carry guns use them to commit violent crimes.
        - Juvenile court responses to gun possession have grown more punitive: detention rates in weapons cases rose from 28% to 44% between 2012 and 2021, while detention rates for all other offenses held flat.

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- Black youth comprised 51% of weapons possession arrests in 2023 (up from 36% in 2010) and 49% of youth court weapons cases in 2021 despite representing only 15% of the youth population. White youth (52% of the population) accounted for just 27% of weapons cases.
- In many jurisdictions, first-time youth offenders with no prior history who posed no threat are categorically denied diversion, automatically detained, charged with felonies, and/or transferred to adult court.
- These punitive responses are ineffective and counterproductive, producing the very outcomes they are intended to prevent. Research indicates pretrial detention increases the likelihood of later incarceration and transferring youth to adult court increases recidivism. On the other hand, diversion consistently produces better outcomes than formal processing.
- The most promising strategies to support youth involved in cycles of gun violence involve community violence interruption efforts and cognitive-behavioral interventions.

- **Relevance**
  - The report's central finding is that categorical, punitive responses to youth gun possession are both racially disparate and empirically counterproductive, giving defenders a data-supported framework to contest mandatory detention, automatic formal processing, and adult transfer in individual cases.
  - The report provides several alternatives to shift away from punitive responses to gun possession including: developing tailored gun diversion programs, developing and funding community violence interruption efforts, investing in cognitive behavioral interventions for youth at high risk of gun violence, and adopting common-sense rules to limit young people's access to firearms.

- The report also provides a data-informed outline for ending both the mandatory detention and transfer of youth to adult court for gun possession offenses.

2. David E. Olson, *Illegal Firearm Possession: A Reflection on Policies and Practices that May Miss the Mark and Exacerbate Racial Disparity in the Justice System*, Duke Ctr. for Firearms L. Second Thought Blogs (Jan. 19, 2022).
   - **Purpose:**
     - To examine how the "criminal justice system" responds to illegal firearm possession and to evaluate whether aggressive possession enforcement reduces gun violence or instead imposes racially disparate harms on communities without a corresponding public safety benefit.
     - This essay examines how the legal system and media conflate unlawful possession of a firearm with actual violence, and disproportionately subjects Black men to legal system involvement
   - **Methodology:**
     - This report draws from national Bureau of Justice Statistics data (arrest trends, prison admissions), original empirical research conducted by Loyola University Chicago's Center for Criminal Justice Research on Illinois and Cook County arrest and sentencing data from 2008–2019 and an Urban Institute survey of young adults in Chicago's most violence-affected neighborhoods.
     - The author uses comparative trend analysis to contrast rising possession arrests against falling overall arrest rates and examines sentencing patterns before and after key Illinois statutory changes in 2011 and 2012 that made possession into a felony that was not eligible for probation.
   - **Results:**

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- Punitive approaches to firearm possession are on the rise in the US, similar to the approaches to the drug laws of 1980–2011, including the disproportionate impact they had on Black communities.
- Nationally, arrests for unlawful use of a weapon increased 9% between 2014 and 2019 while all other arrests fell 10%.
- In Cook County, the increase was 85%, concentrated almost entirely among young Black men (79% of arrestees were Black, 92% male, 52% ages 18–24). Following Illinois's 2011 legislative change imposing mandatory prison sentences for first-time possession offenders, the Cook County conviction-to-prison rate jumped from 30% to 80%, with no comparable change elsewhere in the state.
- Importantly, of those convicted as a felon-in-possession, 74% had no prior violent felony conviction; most were convicted of prior drug, property, or possession offenses.
- Findings indicate that firearm carrying often reflects attempts to navigate real and perceived threats, limited access to legal protections, and distrust in systems responsible for ensuring safety.
- Olson concludes that possession enforcement functions as an imprecise and racially targeted proxy for gun violence reduction, sweeping up potential victims alongside actual threats, while generating felony records that impose lifelong collateral consequences disproportionately on Black youth.
- Police target illegal firearm possession as a proxy for addressing firearm violence in communities, sweeping up individuals who are not involved in "violent" offenses. Police conflating firearm carrying with violent behavior ensnares young people who carry firearms because of fear, prior victimization, or perceived threats rather than an intent to commit violence.

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- **Relevance:**
  - For youth defenders challenging simple possession prosecutions or mandatory transfer provisions based on simple possession, this essay supplies both the data and the causal logic to challenge assumptions that simple firearm possession alone demonstrates dangerousness or predicts future violence. It encourages courts to distinguish rather than conflate firearm possession from firearm violence in its legal analysis.
  - The essay summarizes empirical evidence that enforcement of illegal firearm possession disproportionately affects Black communities, widening the net to involve many individuals who carry firearms for self-protection rather than to commit violent crimes, the same supported basis for firearm carrying in white communities.
  - It also provides data and explanation to support the argument that individualized considerations and community investment addressing victimization, trauma, and distrust are more likely to reduce gun carrying than mandatory incarceration.

3. Helena Soe-Lin et al., *Miami-Dade County Juvenile Weapons Offenders Program (JWOP): A Potential Model to Reduce Firearm Crime Recidivism Nationwide* (2020).
   - **Purpose:**
     - This retrospective analysis evaluates the recidivism rates of the Miami-Dade Juvenile Weapons Offenders Program (JWOP), court-mandated program for youth adjudicated for non-violent weapon-related offenses and assesses its potential as a replicable national model for reducing youth firearm recidivism without incarceration.
     - The program is a multidisciplinary intervention including violence education, behavioral modification, and social mentoring.

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- The program was developed by a neurotrauma nurse at Ryder Trauma Center in collaboration with the County State Attorney's Office and with support from the Office of the Public Defender.

- **Methodology:**
  - The authors reviewed Florida Department of Juvenile Justice records from 2008 to 2016. The analysis identified youth between 13 and 17 years old convicted of firearm-related offenses and subsequently enrolled in JWOP, then divided them into program completers (those who finished the full 100-hour curriculum) and non-completers.
  - The cohort was followed prospectively for 6 and 12 months from time of graduation ("completers") or last class ("non-completers"), with records cross-referenced with the Florida Department of Justice criminal record system.
  - The program's effectiveness was measured by new arrests, defined as recidivism, for any criminal charge and separately for any firearm-specific charge.
- **Results:**
  - Six hundred youth participated in the program with an 85% overall completion rate over its lifetime.
  - Participants who completed the program experienced significantly lower recidivism than those who did not complete it. Six months after participation, completers were about 39% less likely to be charged with a new offense (20.1% vs. 32.9%). For firearm-specific offenses, new charges among completers was less than half that of non-completers (10.1% vs. 22.4%).
  - The program's positive effects persisted over time. At 12 months, one-half of non-completers had been charged with a new offense while only one-third of program completers had (33.6% vs. 50.0%). For firearm-specific offenses,

new charges among completers remained substantially lower than those who did not complete the program(18.6% vs. 33.9%).
- The authors note that these outcomes compare favorably against the 40–50% recidivism rates faced by participants in other youth firearm violence programs.
- The authors acknowledge limitations including a twelve-month follow-up ceiling, the absence of a randomized control group, and a study population limited to males.

- **Relevance:**
  - The program's success is attributed to a rehabilitative model that builds young people's skills and addresses their individual circumstances rather than relying on deterrence or punishment. It achieved significantly lower recidivism through individualized, developmentally responsive interventions focused on decision-making, self-reflection, and practical skill development not punitive legal frameworks.
  - Consistent with broader research, the authors note that other punitive approaches emphasizing surveillance or discipline are not associated with lower recidivism and may worsen outcomes, reinforcing the value of developmentally responsive interventions.
  - These findings support defense arguments that developmentally appropriate, individualized interventions are more likely to promote rehabilitation and public safety than punitive sanctions. They also reinforce proposals for community-based, public health framed programs that build skills, strengthen protective factors, and respond to each young person's unique circumstances rather than relying on increased surveillance or incarceration.

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C. Community Based Prevention Strategies: Restorative Justice, Diversion, and Alternatives to Incarceration

1. Terrell Thomas & Rachel Eisenberg, *Centering Youth in Community Violence Interventions as Part of a Comprehensive Approach to Countering Gun Violence*, Center for American Progress (May 13, 2024).
    - **Purpose:**
        - To highlight the importance of taking a comprehensive approach to gun violence to meet the needs of young people.
        - To discuss a publichealth and community-centered approach to youth gun violence grounded in community violence intervention (CVI) programs as an alternative to enforcement-driven and punitive responses, with particular attention to the disproportionate impact of gun violence on Black and Hispanic youth and the importance of both prevention and intervention to break the cycles of violence.
    - **Methodology:**
        - This policy brief report includes a literature review, national data analysis, and two in-depth program case studies.
        - The national data analysis draws on Sentencing Project analysis, Centers for Disease Control (CDC) data, and law enforcement statistics to identify youth gun violence data trends, highlight the racial disparities in victimization by gun violence, and frame the problem of gun violence within the societal factors that create it.
        - The CVI framework discussion synthesizes CDC-endorsed and evidence-based violence prevention strategies and existing literature on the effectiveness of violence interruption programs.
        - The report highlights the programmatic evaluations of two effective community-based programs, Los Angeles's Gang Reduction and Youth

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Development strategy and Chicago's Choose to Change program (a partnership between Youth Advocate Programs and Children's Home & Aid)..

- **Results:**
  - Youth are disproportionately victims—not drivers—of the nation's gun violence crisis. Although youth arrests have continued to decline, gun violence became the leading cause of death for children and adolescents in 2020, with Black and Hispanic youth bearing a disproportionate burden. Black youth are 14 times more likely and Hispanic youth are 3 times more likely than white youth to die from gun violence.
  - Because, violent crime is the consequence of historic underinvestment in communities of color, a comprehensive approach to address crime and violence should direct resources back into communities of color that have been disproportionately affected and where historic divestment has resulted in a lack of proven public health and community safety infrastructure. Community violence intervention (CVI) programs are an essential component of a comprehensive public health response to gun violence.
  - Effective youth-focused CVI programs address the conditions that contribute to violence rather than relying primarily on enforcement. These programs engage youth at highest risk of victimization or violence involvement through trusted community members, education, family engagement, employment opportunities, mental health supports, and positive youth development. CVI programs have been associated with reductions in violence of up to 60% when implemented effectively.
  - Effective programs integrate violence interruption with educational support, workforce development, family engagement, neighborhood improvement, recreation, and access to community resources rather than treating violence as solely a criminal legal issue.
  - One example, the Los Angeles Gang Reduction and Youth Development (GYRD) Office case management services reduced nonviolent criminal

behavior by 22% and violent criminal behavior by 17% among participants between 2011 to 2016.

- A second example, Chicago's Choose to Change produced a 48% reduction in violent crime arrests during program participation, 38% fewer violent crime arrests one-and-a-half years after completion, 39% fewer total arrests during participation, and a 6% increase in school attendance with 32% fewer disciplinary incidents.

- **Relevance:**
  - This article presents new empirical research and synthesizes evidence supporting a public health framework for reducing youth gun violence. It then translates that evidence into concrete programmatic and policy recommendations for youth-centered CVI programming that addresses the root causes of violence through credible community messengers, trauma-informed services, and wraparound support. It is particularly valuable for its combination of the epidemiological framing (racial disparities in victimization, the refutation of the "youth crime wave" narrative) with concrete program-level outcome data.
  - The article supports a public health framework for understanding and addressing youth gun involvement, pointing to two effective and evidence-based community-based programs that address underlying factors—including trauma, poverty, limited opportunity, and community disinvestment—rather than relying on punitive responses like detention and incarceration.

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2. Jahdziah St. Julien, *Community-Based Violence Interruption Programs Can Reduce Gun Violence*, Center for American Progress (2022).
   - **Purpose**
     - To examine how community-based violence intervention (CVI) programs serve as an evidence-based alternative to punitive, carceral responses to gun violence in communities disproportionately impacted by firearm deaths.
     - To document the disproportionate burden of gun violence on Black and Hispanic/Latino youth and young adults and to demonstrate how community-centered interventions can reduce gun violence victimization, gun-related deaths, and retaliatory violence.
     - To provide policy recommendations for government investment in and support of violence interrupter programs including improved funding, training, credentialing, and evaluation infrastructure.
   - **Methodology**
     - Policy analysis and literature synthesis drawing on Centers for Disease Control (CDC) mortality data, program evaluation reports, and organizational documentation from three violence interrupter programs: South Bronx's Save Our Streets (SOS), Baltimore's Roca program, and Richmond, California's Advance Peace program.
     - Reviewed outcome data from program evaluations and independent analyses including an evaluation of Roca Baltimore conducted by an independent analysis firm.
   - **Results**
     - Gun violence is the leading cause of death for young Black and Hispanic/Latino Americans; gun-related deaths among young people rose from 6,998 to 10,186 between 2000 and 2020. Black youth and men ages 15-34 constitute a disproportionate share of those deaths despite representing only approximately 2% of the U.S. population.

- Gun violence is primarily retaliatory and interpersonal in nature -- typically sparked by conflicts among a small number of individuals -- making relationship-based, community-rooted intervention particularly well-suited to interrupting the cycle.
- Effective CVI programs must be tailored to each community's specific characteristics; no single model is universally replicable.
- Sustainable investment requires fair wages, credentialing, training, and benefits for violence interrupter staff as well as rigorous large-scale program evaluations.

- **Relevance**
  - The finding that gun violence is primarily retaliatory and interpersonal directly undermines broad public safety justifications for detention or categorical punitive responses to youth gun possession.

3. Richard Mendel, *Restorative Justice Diversion: A Better Way to Provide Meaningful Accountability for Youth*, The Sentencing Project (2026)
   - **Purpose**
     - To assess whether Restorative Justice ("RJ") diversion produces better recidivism and accountability outcomes than both traditional juvenile legal system processing and non-RJ diversion alternatives.
   - **Methodology**
     - The report draws on multi-jurisdictional program evaluations, randomized and quasi-experimental studies, and a newly released (2026) comprehensive impact study of Ramsey County, Minnesota's "(Re)Imagining Youth Justice" initiative from the Center for Healthy Youth Development at the University of Minnesota Medical School.
     - The report examines RJ diversion outcomes across multiple jurisdictions including New Mexico, Indianapolis, San Francisco, Hennepin County (MN), Ramsey County (MN), Nebraska, Los Angeles, and Vermont. In each of these

jurisdictions, the report compares RJ diversion participants against both youth processed through the standard juvenile legal system procedures and against youth placed in non-RJ diversion programs.

- **Results**
  - As of 2020, 42 states and the District of Columbia have enacted 206 statutes to support the use of restorative justice for youth. RJ diversion consistently outperforms both juvenile legal system processing and non-RJ diversion alternatives on recidivism measures across jurisdictions and offense types. Controlled evaluations of restorative justice mediation programs in multiple jurisdictions found re-offense rates were roughly one-third lower than for comparable youth who did not participate and that subsequent crimes were less severe.
  - The report also rebuts the "insufficient accountability" objection that prosecutors and courts routinely invoke. While courts traditionally define accountability in terms of punishment, the report finds that punitive processes rarely require youth to acknowledge and reflect on any harm they caused or take concrete steps to repair it. RJ diversion, by contrast, requires active participation, direct dialogue with those harmed, and concrete repair efforts: restitution, apology, and community service. These lead to greater satisfaction in the process by victims.
- **Relevance:**
  - This article provides a framework and response for addressing the question posed by courts and prosecutors when defenders argue for non-punitive outcomes: *How will there be meaningful (or "real") accountability while reducing future risk of harm?*" The report provides support for challenging the assumption that punishment is the only way to achieve accountability.
  - Multi-jurisdiction evidence establishes that RJ diversion consistently outperforms both standard juvenile legal system processing and non-RJ

diversion in reducing recidivism giving defenders a powerful, jurisdiction-spanning rebuttal to any claim that diversion is "soft on crime."

- Accountability and public safety are strengthened—not weakened—when youth are connected to supportive interventions. And RJ diversion programs can better address victims' needs by providing opportunities for acknowledgment and repair of harm.
- The statutory landscape finding (42 states and D.C. had enacted 206 statutes to support restorative justice for youth as of 2020) establishes RJ diversion as a mainstream, legislatively endorsed practice. This is useful for countering judicial or prosecutorial resistance framed as skepticism about an untested approach.

4. Benjamin W. Fisher et al., *School-Based Law Enforcement Strategies to Reduce Crime, Increase Perceptions of Safety, and Improve Learning Outcomes in Primary and Secondary Schools: A Systematic Review*, 19 Campbell Systematic Reviews e1360 (2023).
   - **Purpose:**
     - To systematically synthesize the empirical literature evaluating the effects of school-based law enforcement (SBLE), including school resource officers, police-school liaisons, and patrol officers stationed in K-12 schools, on crime and behavior, perceptions of safety and learning outcomes, and to assess whether these interventions accomplish their stated safety goals or produce unintended harms.
   - **Methodology:**
     - The research team searched 64 academic databases spanning 2009 through 2020, identifying over 25,000 initial records. After a multi-stage screening process, 32 studies met the eligibility criteria for inclusion. To qualify, a study had to use an experimental or quasi-experimental design (meaning it had to

compare schools or students with police presence against those without, rather than simply describing one group) and had to measure at least one outcome related to crime and behavior, perceptions of safety, or student learning.

- The final sample yielded 1,002 individual statistical measurements of how much police presence moved each outcome in each study. Because many studies measured multiple outcomes, the team used a statistical technique called robust variance estimation to ensure that studies reporting many outcomes did not disproportionately drive the overall findings.
- Results were calculated separately for studies that measured outcomes at the school level versus the individual student level, and across three broad outcome categories: crime and behavior, perceptions of safety, and learning. The team also tested whether findings differed depending on study design quality, data source or publication status and found consistent results across all subgroups.

- **Results:**
  - SBLE was associated with higher rates of crime and behavior problems at the school level, driven primarily by increased exclusionary discipline.
  - Meanwhile, there were no statistically significant SBLE effects on violence, weapon-related outcomes, substance use, criminal legal system contact, or any learning outcomes. While there was one positive finding that there was marginally higher perceived safety at the school level, this finding was based on only two correlational studies, leading the authors to conclude that the results should be interpreted with caution.
  - An emerging body of evidence cited in the discussion documents that the exclusionary discipline increases associated with SBLE fall disproportionately on Black students and that SBLE officers in racially diverse, lower-income schools are significantly more likely to perceive

students themselves as threats compared to officers in majority-White schools.

- **Relevance:**
  - This review provides evidence for the argument that police-in-schools strategies do not improve public safety, and that they actively harm students, particularly students of color, through racially disparate exclusionary discipline.
  - Because SRO encounters are a primary pipeline through which youth weapons possession cases enter the juvenile legal system, this review is directly relevant to challenging the enforcement-centered school safety paradigm that generates many of the possession charges the Gault Center's defenders handle.
  - The review's closing recommendation is that schools seeking to improve safety should divest from SBLE and invest instead in evidence-based alternatives.

5. Naomi E.S. Goldstein et al., *Preventing School-Based Arrest and Recidivism Through Prearrest Diversion: Outcomes of the Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program*, 45(2) Law & Hum. Behav. 165 (2021)

- **Purpose**
  - Evaluates the Philadelphia Police School Diversion Program, a pre-arrest diversion model designed to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline by redirecting first-time students in contact with the system away from arrest and toward voluntary community-based services.
  - Tests whether pre-arrest diversion reduces school-based arrests at the district level without producing increases in serious behavioral incidents.

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- Assesses whether diverted youth show lower recidivism rates than youth arrested under the prior regime.

- **Methodology**
  - Peer-reviewed empirical study with quasi-experimental design.
  - The study examined 2,302 Philadelphia public school students (67% male; 76.1% Black; ages 10-22), either diverted under the program or arrested in the year before implementation, over a two-year follow-up window. The long-term five-year analysis, reported separately by NeMoyer et al. (2023) in *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 29(4), 471-485, drew on a full sample of 3,616 students, narrowed to 427 diverted and 531 matched arrested youth for the comparison.
  - The researchers compared rate of recidivism arrest, number of arrests, and time to arrest between diverted and arrested youth. They also used district-wide descriptive statistics to examine 5-year trends in school-based arrests and serious behavioral incidents using descriptive statistics.
  - The program was implemented simultaneously across all Philadelphia schools in May 2014, in partnership with the Philadelphia Police Department, School District of Philadelphia, Department of Human Services, and other city agencies.
- **Results**
  - School-based arrests in Philadelphia declined 84% from the year before implementation to the program's fifth year (2018-2019). Serious behavioral incidents declined 34% over the same period.
  - At two years post-incident, diverted youth showed lower unadjusted recidivism than arrested youth (27% vs. 34%). After propensity score matching, however, the difference was no longer statistically significant. This is the study's most important limitation and the one most likely to be raised by prosecutors opposing diversion.

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- Five-year follow-up data (NeMoyer et al., 2023) found that matched diverted youth were significantly less likely than matched arrested youth to be arrested within five years of their referring school-based incident (40.6% vs. 48.1%, 95% CI [0.54, 0.99], p = .043)
- In a four-year follow-up, matched diverted youth were less likely than matched arrested youth to receive an out-of-school suspension for a new incident adjusted analyses (49.3% vs. 58.0%; OR = 0.64, 95% CI [0.42, 0.96], p = .034). After incorporating demographic characteristics and prior suspension history as covariates, however, diversion status was no longer significantly associated with likelihood of suspension (OR = 0.67, 95% CI [0.42, 1.04], p = .078). NeMoyer et al. (2023).

○ **Relevance:**

- The strongest argument from this study is not "diversion reduces recidivism" (because of the matching limitation referenced above). The strongest argument is that arrest is not required to promote safety. This large-scale pre-arrest diversion program reduced school-based arrests by 84% while serious behavioral incidents also declined, demonstrating that communities can move away from punitive responses without compromising safety.
- The district-wide data showed substantial reductions in school-based arrests (84%) and serious behavioral incidents (34%) following implementation of the diversion program, demonstrating that reducing arrests can occur alongside improvements in school safety indicators. This gives defenders a concrete response to “public safety” objections.
- Youth defenders should lead with the five-year arrest data and the district-wide trend evidence, acknowledge the limitations on the findings from the shorter-term in the study, and avoid citing the unadjusted two-year figures (27% vs. 34%).