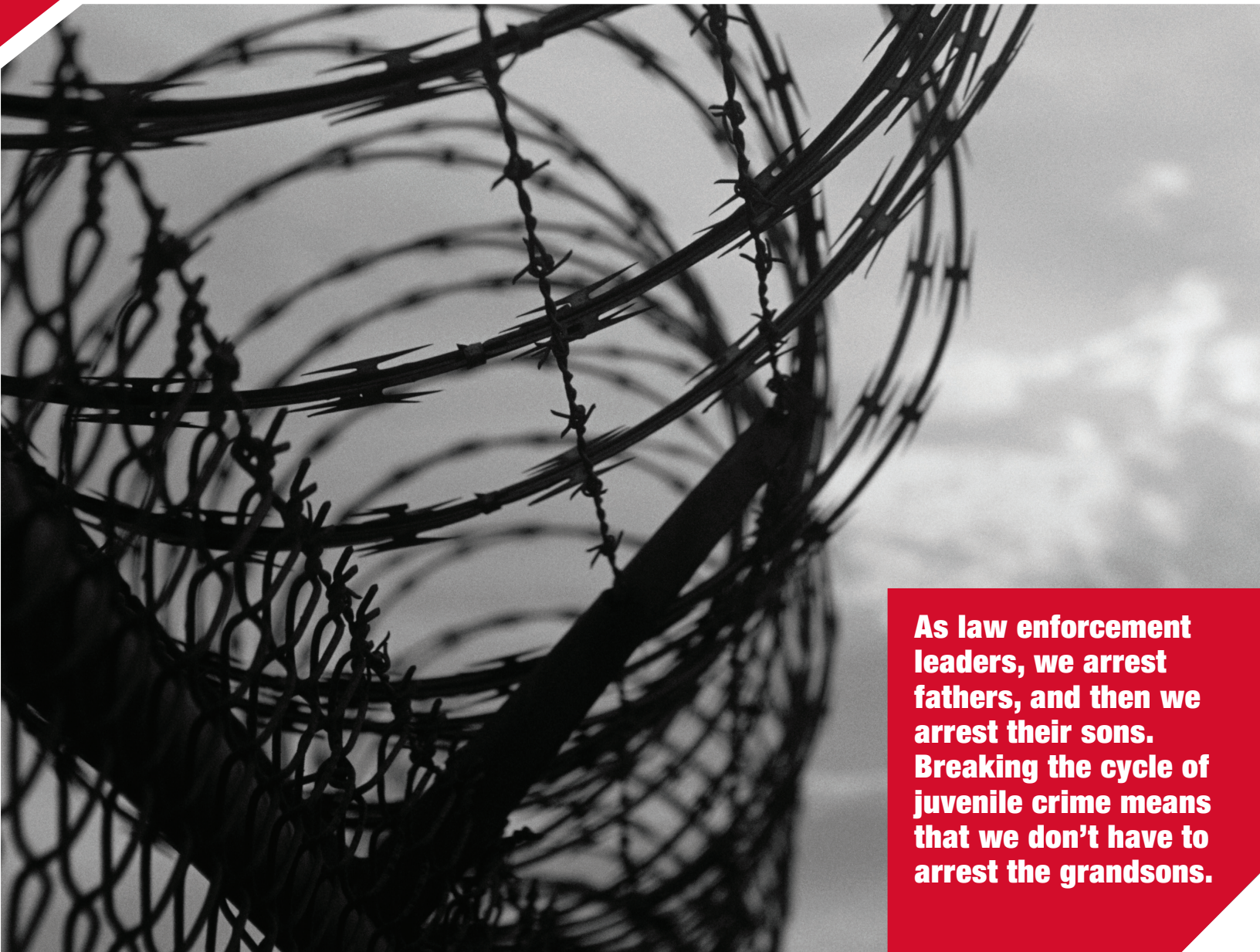


**GEORGIA**

# **NEVER IS BETTER BUT ONCE IS ENOUGH**

**The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act Can Help  
Georgia Reduce Crime and Save Taxpayer Dollars**



**As law enforcement  
leaders, we arrest  
fathers, and then we  
arrest their sons.  
Breaking the cycle of  
juvenile crime means  
that we don't have to  
arrest the grandsons.**



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## Acknowledgments

**Fight Crime: Invest in Kids** is a bi-partisan anti-crime organization of nearly 5,000 police chiefs, sheriffs, prosecutors, state attorneys general, other law enforcement leaders and violence survivors nationwide, including 72 members in Georgia. Our members believe that the best way to prevent crime is to help parents and our communities give kids the right start in life.

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# Never Is Better, but Once Is Enough

The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act can help Georgia reduce crime, protect public safety and save taxpayer dollars

**Never is better:** The 5,000 law enforcement leaders of Fight Crime: Invest in Kids, including 72 members in Georgia, have championed investments that keep youth from becoming involved in the criminal justice system as juveniles and adults.

**But once is enough:** Today we are stepping up efforts to stop those who commit a crime from continuing to do more harm—and halt the cycle of crime from one generation to the next. Georgia is making important changes that should bring improvements, but that change is needed because 65 percent of youth released from a Youth Development Campus (YDC) in Georgia in 2007 were found to have re-offended as a juvenile or adult within three years of release.<sup>1</sup>

That's why we're supporting the reauthorization of the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). The JJDP will encourage states to do even more to make smart use of taxpayer dollars by engaging juvenile offenders in programs proven to help steer them away from a life of crime.

## The Current Landscape: Juvenile Offenders

Placing juvenile offenders in residential facilities with other troubled youths is expensive and, in most cases, not particularly effective at reducing crime.

### Our current situation is unsustainable.

- For fiscal year 2012, funds for Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice totaled more than \$295 million.<sup>2</sup>
- There were almost 1,200 youths in 2013 served in Georgia's YDC facilities, the state's long-term, juvenile residential facilities operated by their Department of



### What we do now is costly:

Juvenile custody averages \$90,000 a year in a state operated, juvenile residential facility in Georgia vs. \$53,400 for tuition, room and board at Emory University.

### It isn't working:

In a natural experiment, juvenile offenders in custody later dropped out of school more often and committed more adult crimes than those not in custody.

### Family coaching efforts work better in most cases:

Rigorous coaching for the most serious offenders and their families cuts crime in half or more compared to placing them with other troubled youth.

### And they save money:

Family coaching efforts save \$16,000 to \$27,000 per child served.





**“We estimate the present value of saving a 14-year-old high risk juvenile from a life of crime to range from \$2.6 to \$5.3 million.”**

—Mark Cohen, Vanderbilt University, and Alex Piquero, University of Dallas, (2009)

Juvenile Justice. A year of custody costs an average of \$90,000 per juvenile in Georgia.<sup>3</sup>

- National recidivism data for juveniles does not exist, but in Georgia, past data showed that 65 percent of YDC commitments reoffended within three years of being released.<sup>4</sup>

#### **Mixing first-time and repeat offenders is usually a bad move.**

Research shows it's smarter to keep first-time offenders with few risk factors away from youths who have committed more serious or frequent crimes. This prevents them from learning more problematic behaviors and becoming typecast as delinquents.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Community services for juveniles who commit minor delinquencies and family coaching for the few, more serious offenders is more effective than custody in most cases.**

Engaging less serious juvenile offenders in interventions such as Big Brothers, Big Sisters that focus on behavior change is far more effective at reducing re-offending than custody. The same is true of interventions for more serious offenders that coach them and their parents on ways to change the youths' behaviors. These programs also work with teachers, athletic coaches and/or other community members to reinforce these positive influences. Randomized trials have proven

that such rigorous family-coaching programs can cut re-offending in half or more compared to the usual out-of-home placements.<sup>6</sup>

#### **For the very few serious offenders who need residential placement, it is not the endgame—we need to rehabilitate them, too.**

A natural experiment showed that youth in custody later dropped out of school more often and committed more adult crimes than those not in custody.<sup>7</sup> But other research shows the very few, most serious offenders do commit fewer crimes when they're sent to residential facilities (see Figure 1).<sup>8</sup> Even if they are placed in facilities, these youth still need services while they are in the facilities and when they return home to reduce the risk they will re-offend and eventually end up in adult prisons.

## **Reauthorizing JJPDA Could Reduce Juvenile, Adult Crime**

The JJPDA could encourage communities to continue backing away from simply sending offenders away from home, and provide funding for interventions with a proven impact on reducing recidivism among the types of offenders below.

#### **Youth who need some guidance but have not committed serious offenses can benefit from community programs.**

**Big Brothers, Big Sisters mentoring:** Research shows the program reduced the number of days youth skipped school by **half**, the number who admitted they **hit someone by one-third**, and the number who initiated drug use by **40 percent**.<sup>9</sup>

**Chicago summer jobs program for inner-city high school students:** A study found that participants had **43 percent fewer violent crime arrests** than youth randomly assigned to not participate.<sup>10</sup>

#### **Juvenile offenders inclined toward aggression can benefit from evidence-based coaching.**

**Aggression Replacement Training (ART)** is a low-cost, short-term coaching program for youth with aggressive or disruptive behaviors. ART teaches these youths interpersonal, anger management and

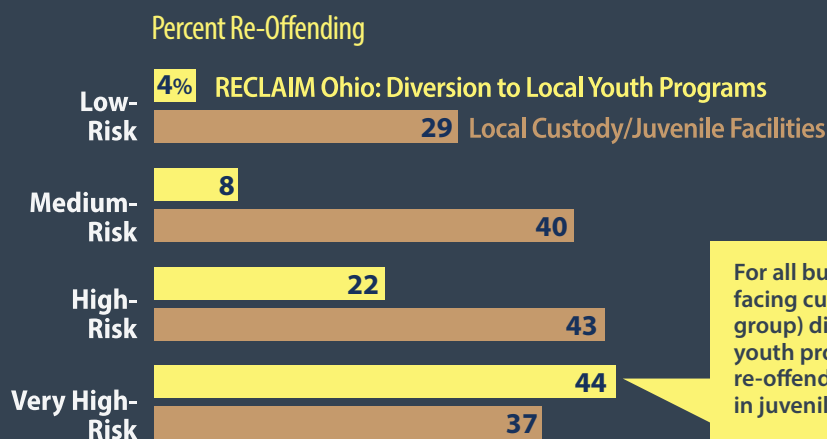
Figure 1

## Landmark Study of Juvenile Re-Offending

Diversion to local, effective youth programs **reduced the rate of re-offending** more than placement in juvenile facilities for most juvenile offenders.



**Edward Latessa** is an expert on cutting recidivism who has consulted in 45 states and was one of the authors of this landmark study.



For all but 9 percent of the juveniles facing custody (the very high-risk group) diversion to local, effective youth programs reduced the rate of re-offending more than placement in juvenile facilities.

**Note:** While the data in this graph only refers to diversions from local custody, similar results were achieved by diverting youth from state custody.

**Source:** Lowenkamp & Latessa, 2005. Other Reclaim studies confirm these results

social problem-solving skills that can be used in many different settings. A Washington state study found that, when delivered correctly, **ART cut felony convictions within 18 months by 24 percent.**<sup>11</sup>

### More serious juvenile offenders benefit from proven family coaching.

Too often parents don't know what to do to get their troubled adolescent back on track. Research shows that hard-nosed coaching for parents on how to reinforce positive behaviors while sanctioning bad ones is **more effective at reducing crime than sending offenders to an out-of-home facility.**

**Functional Family Therapy (FFT)** provides eight to 30 hours of coaching to parents and youth together on skills that help them replace negative behaviors with positive ones. In one study, **FFT cut re-arrests in half**, and in another, participating youth were one-fourth as **likely to be placed outside their home for later crimes.**<sup>12</sup> There are 11 authorized FFT sites in Georgia. **FFT is provided to approximately 2,000 to 2,500 families annually in the state.**<sup>13</sup>

**Multisystemic Therapy (MST)** provides 60 hours of coaching for more serious youth offenders and their parents, and also focuses on reaching their teachers, coaches and/or others in their community to reinforce positive behaviors. In one randomized trial, a 22-year follow-up showed **troubled youth who did not receive MST were three and a half times more likely to be arrested for a violent felony** than those who did.<sup>14</sup> In Georgia, Community Solutions, Inc. has seven teams that provide MST services. **In 2013, MST was provided to almost 300 families in Georgia.**<sup>15</sup>

Even if youth are placed out-of-home, ART or other Cognitive Behavioral Therapy-based approaches can be effective while youth are in facilities. And once the youths return home, family therapies can improve their chances of avoiding a life of crime.

## Making Change in Georgia: Juvenile Justice Reform

Between 2013 and 2018, Georgia is expected to save almost \$85 million and won't have to open two additional juvenile residential facilities.<sup>16</sup> This is due to the state's 2013 Juvenile Justice Reform bill that limited the kinds of charges that youth can be held in a detention facility for. Now, a large portion of juvenile offenders who commit lower level offenses are being placed in evidence-based programs controlled by the courts instead of being confined in one of Georgia's Youth Development Campuses (YDCs), the state's juvenile residential facilities.<sup>17</sup>

In addition, youths are now assessed using the Pre-Disposition Risk Assessment (PDRA) both before and after adjudication to determine each juvenile's risk level for

committing additional crimes.<sup>18</sup> Local jurisdictions are now required to collect and report uniform data, including offender demographics, offense information, case outcomes, and placement decisions, in order to monitor and determine whether the policies that Georgia has implemented are achieving the desired results. This policy evaluation and uniform data collection should help to improve the recidivism rate of Georgia's youth, given the fact that 65 percent of Georgia youth released from a YDC back in 2007 obtained "an adjudication of delinquency in juvenile court or a finding of guilt in adult court for an offense committed within 3 years of release from an out-of-home facility or placement on community supervision."<sup>19</sup>

## How JJDPA Can Save Money

Confining juveniles costs an average of \$90,000 a year in Georgia—more than the \$53,400 annual cost of tuition, room and board at Emory University.<sup>20</sup> In total, more than \$295 million was allocated to Georgia's Department of Juvenile Justice for 2012.<sup>21</sup> Solid research, however, shows expensive custody can usually be avoided by using family coaching or aggression prevention efforts to cut crime more effectively.<sup>22</sup> Economists at the Washington State Institute for Public Policy—a state agency—have done extensive analysis of the data: for most juvenile offenders at risk of out-of-home placement, these programs almost always deliver better, cheaper results than sending kids away (see Figure 2).<sup>23</sup>

## Conclusion

*We need to do what we can to prevent kids in Georgia from becoming involved in the juvenile justice system in the first place. But for the kids who do become involved, we need to make sure we do even more to provide the right services to the right youth and ensure those programs are performing. While Georgia is an example for the nation, they can use more help.*

*If we can do that, there will be fewer young people in Georgia continuing down the path to adult crimes and adult prison. "Never is better, but once is enough."*

Figure 2

### Serious Family Coaching Efforts Cut Crime by Half or More & Save Money

Net Savings/Child		
Functional Family Therapy	FFT	\$27,000
Multisystematic Therapy	MST	\$16,000

## Endnotes

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