
JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM ACT OF 2017

Since 1974, the *Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act* has coordinated federal efforts aimed at supporting state juvenile justice systems with a focus on education and rehabilitation. Over the years, these state juvenile justice programs have helped children develop the life skills they need to hold themselves accountable and achieve success. However, not all programs have produced the same results, and the consequences can be devastating for vulnerable youth and local communities. Last reauthorized in 2002, the federal law needs to be updated to help state and local leaders better serve at-risk youth and juvenile offenders and put them on the pathway to success.

The bipartisan *Juvenile Justice Reform Act of 2017* will:

- Set kids up for long-term success;
- Prioritize what works; and
- Improve accountability and oversight.

Setting Kids Up for Long-Term Success

- **More Effective State and Local Services** – The bill will help state and local leaders better serve at-risk youth and juvenile offenders by:
 - Improving Program Input and Planning: The legislation improves state advisory groups so state plans will reflect the views and expertise of stakeholders who are knowledgeable and active in juvenile justice and delinquency prevention.
 - Accounting for the Unique Needs of Youth: The bill ensures state plans take into account the most vulnerable juvenile populations so they can receive the help they need, such as identifying alternatives to detention, screening for human trafficking victims, and appropriately accommodating pregnant young women.
 - Providing Smooth Transitions Out of the System: It also encourages collaboration among state leaders to create smooth transitions out of the juvenile justice system through education, reentry, family engagement, and community-based services.
 - Updating “Status Offender” Policies: The legislation phases out a policy allowing children to be detained for an offense that would not be considered a crime if committed by an adult, such as truancy or running away from home. As a result, these young offenders will be able to receive community-based services and avoid potentially dangerous influences in secure confinement. States can receive hardship exemptions to provide more time to phase out the policy.
- **Flexibility to Meet Community Needs** – The bill restructures an existing local delinquency-prevention grant program to better assess and respond to unmet community needs. Under the legislation, eligible states will award five-year grants to help local leaders meet those specific needs with a focus on community engagement and coordination among existing efforts and programs. These reforms will provide state and local leaders the flexibility they need to improve public safety and offer opportunities for at-risk and delinquent youth to achieve long-term success.

Prioritizing What Works

- **Evidence-Based Strategies** – The administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) at the Department of Justice is responsible for coordinating federal efforts and developing objectives, strategies, and long-term plans related to the treatment of juvenile offenders. The bill requires the administrator to prioritize evidence-based strategies and to use current, reliable data in efforts to reduce juvenile delinquency.
- **Research and Evaluation** – The legislation calls for the administrator to issue an annual plan for research and evaluation in certain areas critical to effectively serving youth, including reentry to public society, mental and behavioral health, and secure confinement conditions. Additionally, it requires an analysis of challenges states and Indian tribes face in providing juvenile justice services. This and other information will help provide a better understanding of the best way to serve juveniles.
- **Technical Assistance and Professional Development** – Additionally, the bill requires the administrator to provide professional development resources, offer technical assistance, and issue best practices to help state and local leaders implement the law and ensure juveniles receive quality legal representation.

Improving Oversight and Accountability

- **Increased Accuracy and Transparency** – Under current law, the OJJDP administrator reports annually to Congress on specific information related to the treatment of children in the juvenile justice system, their circumstances prior to and after release, and state and local programs receiving federal funds. The bill updates the information required in the report to provide a more accurate and transparent account of juvenile justice efforts across the country.
- **Waste and Fraud Prevention** – To help limit waste and fraud in the juvenile justice system, the legislation instructs the Department of Justice to assess whether states receiving federal resources are complying with the law. The bill also includes meaningful measures to enforce compliance and oversee the use of taxpayer dollars.
- **Review of Federal Activities** – The Coordinating Council on Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is the independent federal entity responsible for coordinating all federal juvenile delinquency programs and activities. The council also reviews and reports on those efforts to ensure they are effective and align with state plans. The legislation makes changes to improve the usefulness of the council's review.