



## INCLUDE FAMILIES IN JUVENILE JUSTICE PROCESS, SAYS REPORT

**Justice for Families released a report Monday analyzing the areas in which the juvenile justice system lets kids down** by not actively involving families in each step of their contact with the justice system. It also lays out a “Blueprint for Youth Justice Transformation” with solutions to specific problems within the system, including the lack of parental involvement.

**The Juvenile Justice Information Exchange’s Kaukab Jhumra Smith [has more info on the report.](#)** Here’s how it opens:

**Every day, nearly 50,000 children are forced to spend the night away from their families** because of their involvement in the juvenile justice system, according to a new report.

**It’s not as if these youth have no one to care for them.** Families of young detainees care deeply about their children, but often feel helpless when their children get into trouble — especially in the face of high adult incarceration rates, zero-tolerance school policies and reduced social services, which can make it difficult for families to offer support. Add to this a juvenile court system that practically shuts out family members from receiving or offering input, and the feelings of frustration and helplessness multiply.

**These are the findings of Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice,** a report released Monday that offers a blueprint for reforms that involve family members at every step when a child gets into trouble, whether at school or in the juvenile justice system. It’s based on the belief that timely and appropriate intervention, with the help of families, can prevent the inexorable march for some children from school to juvenile court, and ease their transition from detention back into society.

**Such detention doesn’t just take an economic and mental toll on detainees and their families;** it also affects taxpayers and state budgets. Each day a youth spent in a juvenile facility cost taxpayers \$241 in 2007, the report finds. Multiplied by 64,558 youth, states across the county spent a total of \$5.7 billion for detention that year.

**Family members surveyed for the report said they frequently felt ignored at proceedings in juvenile courts,** overlooked by probation staff and shut out of their children’s lives in

correctional facilities, even when it was time for their children to be released.

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## REPORT SAYS INVOLVEMENT IN HIGH SCHOOL SPORTS PROGRAMS MEANS LOWER SUSPENSION AND SERIOUS CRIME RATES

**High schools that have high participation rates in sports programs see fewer suspensions** and major crimes on campus, according to a recent report from the University of Michigan. (WitnessLA [previously posted](#) on a similar planned study to evaluate the effect of sports programs on kids in juvie detention facilities like Camp Kilpatrick.)

Here's a clip from [U-M's article](#) on the report:

**The research includes violent behavior and attempted rape among major crimes**, and suspensions involving five or more days out of school.

**"Sport participation opportunities within a school might operate to slow down or stop more major forms of delinquency** within a school environment from occurring," said Philip Veliz, a postdoctoral fellow at the U-M Substance Abuse Research Center and the study's lead author.

**He co-wrote the research with Sohaila Shakib**, an associate professor of sociology at California State University-Dominguez Hills.

**The suspension rates also were reduced in schools with more sports participation opportunities**, but this could be related to violent crimes being more likely to result in a long-term suspension, Veliz said.

The study can be found in full (but, unfortunately, behind a pay wall) [in the current issue](#) of Sociological Spectrum.

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## THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE AFFORDABLE CARE ACT FOR THE CORRECTIONS SYSTEM

A [new report](#) from the Sentencing Project details how the Affordable Care Act could impact corrections and public safety. Here's a clip:

**Expanded Health Care Coverage — The Affordable Care Act gives states the option of expanding Medicaid eligibility** and makes prevention, early intervention, and treatment of mental health problems and substance use essential health benefits. In states that opt to expand Medicaid coverage, the Federal government will cover 100% of expenditures for the newly eligible population from 2014 to 2016, with the amount of federal funds decreasing yearly to 90% by 2020 and thereafter.

**Reducing Recidivism — Because of the role mental health and substance abuse problems play in behaviors that lead to incarceration and recidivism**, the Affordable Care Act could help states reduce the number of people cycling through the criminal justice system.

**Addressing Racial Disparities — The new legislation may contribute to reducing racial disparities in incarceration** that arise from disparate access to treatment.

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