



## Respond Effectively to Children Who Get in Trouble

To Build Safer Communities and  
More Successful Kids

An efficient and effective youth justice system holds kids accountable, helps them grow up to become contributing members of their community, and increases public safety. Kentucky has made strides in improving its youth justice system in recent years, but our state has held on to practices that do not achieve the best outcomes for kids or communities. We can respond more quickly and more effectively to get kids back on track in order to create safer communities and a stronger commonwealth.

### **Common-sense shifts in practice would create a more effective youth justice system which better serves communities and puts kids back on track:**

#### **Activate the right response outside of the court system for young children**

To create safer communities in Kentucky, we must respond to children who get in trouble as early as possible and in the most effective way possible. Young children who get in trouble, especially for serious things, need serious interventions, yet the court system is not the place to address issues for little kids. The formal court process can be traumatic, negatively impact a child's development, and trap children in an increasingly difficult maze of problems.

The best solution addresses root causes and helps prevent children from getting into trouble later in life. Alternative responses should include activating the right system to respond to the needs of young children and connecting the child and family to community services that will strengthen a child's development and get them on track to becoming successful adults.

#### **Ensure that systems create a path to opportunity for kids of all races, ages, and gender**

Data tells us that within the youth justice system, we treat some groups of children more harshly than others, even though these groups do not commit more, or more serious, offenses than other children. If we want all children to grow up and contribute to their community, we must address this issue.

Some practical solutions include agencies collecting and reporting outcomes for children, ensuring employees receive training on how to best respond to all children, and taking action on crucial points in the system where kids experience different treatment.

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### **Utilize swift and appropriate community responses instead of detention, especially for children who have experienced abuse or neglect**

Currently children are detained in some instances when a swift and intensive family intervention would be more appropriate, like when parents and children fight. Rather than punish a child for family dynamics that place them at risk, social service intervention could deescalate the situation, find a safe place for the child overnight, and then begin work with the parents and the child.

To keep kids from experiencing the trauma of detention, detention should only be used when a child poses a risk to public safety or if it is the only means to ensure the child returns to court.

### **Blueprint for Kentucky's Children Solution:**

Build safer, stronger communities by effectively responding to kids who get in trouble in ways that put them on a path to a successful future.

