REDUCE, REINVEST, AND DO RIGHT:

A MODEL TO ESTIMATE SAVINGS FROM REDUCING CONNECTICUT'S YOUTH DETENTION, INVEST IN NONPROFIT COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS, AND HELP COMMUNITIES THRIVE

LAUREN RUTH, PH.D.
RESEARCH & POLICY DIRECTOR

ARIANA CHRISTAKIS
RESEARCH & POLICY INTERN

RYAN WILSON
RESEARCH & POLICY ASSOCIATE

NOVEMBER 2020

CONNECTICUT VOICES FOR CHILDREN

JUST RESEARCH. JUST ACTION.

Over the last decade, Connecticut has worked to reduce its youth prison populations through the use of policy change and investments in services that serve to deter youth from justice involvement. However, Black and Brown youth in Connecticut are disproportionately impacted by the justice system, with disparities increasing as youth become more seriously involved. Additionally, Connecticut's unequal distribution of wealth and opportunities makes it less likely that Black and Brown youth have access to resources and services that set youth up for success and reduce interactions with the justice system.

Connecticut's ability to address these disparities, and efforts to reduce youth involvement in the justice system have been undercut by years of deficits, budget cuts, and finally an unprecedented national pandemic. Connecticut must therefore find innovative ways to reduce spending and invest in cost-saving measures. A rigorous and recent study determined that pretrial detention can increase the likelihood of a child or youth re-offending, and that each day spent in detention increases chances of re-offense. Thus, this report examines the marginal daily cost of keeping youth in detention and recommends ways for the state to reduce the use of detention and invest associated funds in nonprofit services that work to reduce youth crime rates.

The report contains three analyses: 1) the variable cost of keeping one youth in detention for one day, called the marginal cost of a child-day; 2) the statewide and within-city costs of operating nonprofit community organizations shown to reduce crime rates; and 3) estimates of anticipated crime reduction for adding nonprofit community organizations in Connecticut's five largest cities.

Our findings estimate the marginal cost of keeping youth in detention at $76.91 to $106.21 per child per day. We define this cost per child per day as one child-day.

We use the extremely low-end estimate for comparisons to the cost of funding nonprofits. It is important to acknowledge that this analysis of the daily cost of keeping youth in detention does have its limitations. It leaves out the cost of educating youth, the cost of detention center administration, and the cost of staffing, all of which can be reduced through large-scale policy changes.

Our analysis finds that the mean cost of running a nonprofit community organization in one of the large cities is $384,237 per year, but costs vary widely between $102 for early-stage nonprofits that operate exclusively using volunteers to millions of dollars for substance abuse and job training organizations that require skilled professionals providing research-based interventions.

- The nonprofit community organizations found most plentifully statewide and within the largest cities are those focused on neighborhood development and supporting children and youth.

- Job training organizations, which tend to have larger crime reduction effects and are in short-supply in Connecticut, have a mean cost in cities of $198,370 annually, equating to the low end cost of 2,579 child-days. This would require a 17 percent reduction of detention use to fund.

- Crime prevention programs in cities have a mean cost of about $383,215 per year, equaling 4,982 child-day costs, and requiring a reduction of detention use of about 33 percent to fund.

- Substance abuse programs in cities, which also tend to have larger crime reduction effects and are in short-supply across the state, have a mean expense of about $906,004. These expenses are equivalent to 11,780 child-day costs, which would require a 78 percent reduction in child-days.

We utilize a predictive model created by Princeton Sociology Professor Patrick Sharkey and his colleagues Gerrard Torrats-Espinosa and Delaram Takyar to predict how adding nonprofit community organizations could reduce arrest rates among both youth and adults in each of Connecticut's five largest cities. We estimate that each nonprofit community organization added to Hartford could prevent 11 arrests year-over-year, each nonprofit community organization added to New Haven could prevent almost six arrests year-over-year, and each nonprofit community organization added to Waterbury could prevent almost four arrests year-over-year. Over the years, these reductions add up to create even larger overall crime prevention effects for both children and adults. Added together with reductions through decreased re-offense due to detaining fewer children and youth, this model creates a cycle of arrest reductions and resulting fiscal benefits.

The state's ongoing failure to fully fund justice reform efforts carries several costs: it comes at the cost of the State of Connecticut's bottom line, but more importantly, it comes at the cost of our youth today, and at the cost of the potential of Connecticut's future. The report's recommendations are classified into three areas:

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO DECREASE DETENTION CHILD-DAYS

- The Connecticut General Assembly should amend the Statutes so that youth may not be held in detention pending a hearing.
- The Connecticut Judicial Branch should assess the risk and needs of youth outside of detention centers.
- The Connecticut General Assembly should raise the minimum age of juvenile court jurisdiction at minimum to age 12, and preferably in-line with 2019 United Nations recommendations of raising the minimum age to one greater than age 14.
- The Connecticut Judicial Branch should stop admitting youth to detention for misdemeanors and violations.
- The Connecticut Judicial Branch should not admit youth with fewer than five referrals to juvenile court to detention.
- The Connecticut Judicial Branch and Department of Children and Families should partner to create appropriate processes and services to ensure that no child or youth spends more than two weeks in detention, and to maximize federal funding.
- The Connecticut General Assembly should amend the Statutes such that a research-based combination of risk level and prior offenses is used to determine appropriate placements for youth.
- The Connecticut General Assembly should amend the Statutes so that judges may not re-admit youth to detention as the result of substance abuse and addiction.
- The Connecticut Judicial Branch and Connecticut General Assembly must deliberately address racial disparities in detention and diversion.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO INVEST FUNDING SUCH THAT CONNECTICUT REDUCES ARRESTS AND SERVES COMMUNITIES

- The Connecticut General Assembly should tie benefits realized through policy changes to investments in nonprofit community organizations within statute.
- Connecticut should create a holistic reinvestment plan that includes making policy changes to create fiscal benefits from both the adult and youth carceral systems and reinvestment in nonprofit community organizations.
- Connecticut should invest in structured day programs as an alternative to keeping youth in detention centers.
- Connecticut should invest in programs like Youth Advocate Programs, Inc. (YAP) alternative to detention programs.
- Connecticut should fully fund implementation of the Community-Based Diversion System.
- Connecticut should invest in programs other states use to prevent youth carceral involvement.
- Connecticut should invest in more nonprofit community organizations in Waterbury, which has only 14 nonprofit community organizations associated with arrest reduction.
- Connecticut should invest in more nonprofit community organizations focused on substance abuse treatment and intervention.
- Connecticut should invest in more nonprofit community organizations focused on job training and workforce development in cities.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE THE TRANSPARENCY OF JUSTICE COSTS

- The Hartford and Bridgeport Boards of Education should include within their annual budgets a separate analysis of funding spent on children and youth in the detention centers.