

To: Interested Parties

From: GBAO

Date: March 19, 2019

New Poll Results on Youth Justice Reform in Pennsylvania

In a country facing political and racial polarization, criminal justice reform has been a bright spot of national bipartisanship with the passage of the Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention Act, and in several states, the enactment of criminal justice reform laws. A new poll shows that the vast majority of Pennsylvania residents support a range of reforms to the youth justice system, all with a greater focus on prevention and rehabilitation than incarceration.

The following are key findings from a recent survey of 500 adults in Pennsylvania conducted by GBAO on behalf of Youth First Initiative.

Strong Support for Proposals to Reform Youth Justice System in Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania residents strongly support a broad range of specific policy proposals aimed at fixing and reforming the country's youth justice system. Some of the top proposals include including a youth's family in treatment and rehabilitation programs, spending more on youth rehabilitation programs, and providing financial incentives to states and municipalities to invest in alternatives to youth incarceration.

Proposals	Total Favor (%)
Design treatment and rehabilitation plans that include a youth's family in planning and services.	86
Provide financial incentives for states and municipalities to invest in alternatives to youth incarceration, such as intensive rehabilitation, education, job training, community services, and programs that provide youth the opportunity to repair harm to victims and communities.	83
Increase spending on social workers and mental health counselors.	80
Increase spending on youth rehabilitation.	79



Prohibit the practice of sending young people to facilities outside of their home state and return all young people currently residing in out-of-state facilities back to their home states and communities.	75
Eliminate automatic incarceration of youth by requiring sentencing determination to be made by a youth justice agency after a hearing.	73
Require states to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system.	72
Change the punishment for probation violations, such as missing an appointment or skipping school, from incarceration to less severe forms of punishment.	71
Require intensive probation and community supervision instead of incarceration for youth who commit more serious offenses, unless they are at imminent risk to themselves or others.	71
Increase funding to provide more public defenders who represent children in court.	68

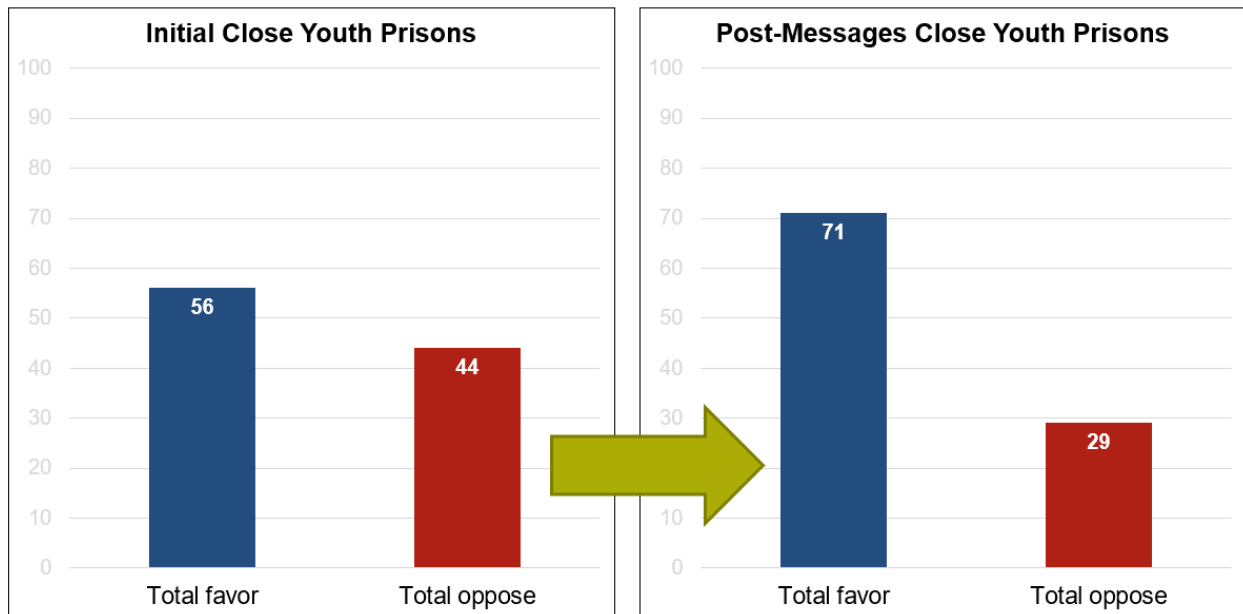
All of the reform proposals garner strong support across partisan lines, with a majority of Democrats, Independents, and Republicans supporting the initiatives. Support is very similar and strong among those who are members of law enforcement or have family in law enforcement and those without any connection to law enforcement.

Majority Support for Closing Youth Prisons

The poll also finds that 56% of Pennsylvania residents favor closing youth prisons. Support is particularly high among demographic groups most likely to interact with the youth justice system, including young men (73%).

A majority of Democrats and Independents support closing youth prisons, while 41% of Republicans support closing youth prisons. Fifty percent of liberal/moderate Republicans support closing youth prisons. The most unpopular policy we tested was building more youth prisons with only 32% of Pennsylvania residents supporting such a policy.

After Pennsylvania residents learn more about the rationale for closing youth prisons, support increases to 71%. Among Republicans, support rises to 60% for closing youth prisons.



Pennsylvania Residents Overwhelmingly Believe in Rehabilitation and Counseling

Pennsylvania residents’ strong backing of criminal justice reform is rooted in a belief that rehabilitation works best in helping youth become productive members of society, and that most youth are capable of positive change.

<i>Which statement comes closer to your view?</i>	
When it comes to youth who are in the juvenile justice system, the best thing for society is to rehabilitate them so they can become productive members of society.	When it comes to youth who are in the juvenile justice system, the best thing for society is to incarcerate them so our streets are safer.
76	24
The youth justice system should provide youth with more opportunity to better themselves.	The youth justice system should focus on punishing youth who have committed delinquent acts.
77	23

Most youth who are in the juvenile justice system are capable of positive growth, and they have the potential to change for the better.	Most youth who are in the juvenile justice system are unlikely to change for the better, and they will likely continue a life of illegal behavior.
78	22
Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system will SAVE tax dollars in the long run.	Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system will COST tax dollars in the long run.
71	29
Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education for youth who are in the juvenile justice system help prevent future delinquent acts.	Rehabilitation programs like counseling and education do little to prevent youth who are in the juvenile justice system from re-entering the juvenile justice system.
66	34

Methodology

The survey of 500 adults age 18+ in Pennsylvania was conducted February 28 - March 5, 2019 on behalf of Youth First Initiative. The sample is subject to a margin of error of +/- 4.4 percentage points at the 95% confidence level. The survey was conducted online using a web-based panel. Care was taken to ensure that the sample is representative of the Pennsylvania adult population.