

# Agenda for Reforming Youth Policing Policies and Practices

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## Purpose

This Agenda for Reform provides policy, practice, and funding recommendations at the local, state, and national levels to reform how law enforcement agencies engage with youth. We fully support proposals aimed at reducing the overall footprint of law enforcement and increasing public investments in healthcare, housing, education, and social services for communities.

The nation's safety net has been considerably weakened and damaged for children and families. Law enforcement has been asked to step into the breach as first social responders. Ill-equipped and untrained to do so, their responses can escalate situations that do not require law enforcement involvement.

We have always supported greater engagement of non-law enforcement professionals in responding to youth in lieu of law enforcement, especially when there is no law enforcement issue to be addressed. **These recommendations are designed to ensure that police interactions with young people are equitable, reflect best practices, and protect youth.**

Our agenda proposes a series of legislative, policy, and other recommendations for youth, families, advocates, and leaders to immediately reduce the potentially damaging impacts of American policing on our most vulnerable youth. Our recommendations suggest what actions can be taken at various levels of government, including the municipalities and counties, state agencies charged with overseeing law enforcement and state legislatures.

We recognize this agenda is only a start: we welcome feedback and ideas to improve and broaden it.

***Taking action now is critical to reform the use of arrest for minor offenses and normative adolescent behavior for which other, non-criminalization responses, are more effective.***

## Municipalities & Counties Must Engage with Youth on Policing

- **Listening tours.** Conduct listening tours in which youth and their advocates explain when and where they encounter law enforcement in their daily lives, how those interactions proceed, and what they would like to see changed or improved about them.
- **Ask youth early & often.** Create meaningful mechanisms to obtain input from youth routinely and ensures police/youth interactions are effective.
- **Audit juvenile arrests.** Conduct annual audits of arrest rates of juveniles, by census track, type of charge, and time of day;
  - Use principles of community policing to problem solve with youth and community members in determining whether alternatives to arrest existed and the impacts of the arrests;
  - Determine how many arrests do not lead to prosecution or court hearings;
  - Track all arrests by age, race, gender, location and share with the public.
- **Require partnering with youth-serving agencies.** Require law enforcement to partner with youth-serving community-based organizations and diversion programs; demand that law enforcement prove every option has been exhausted before a youth is arrested.
- **Invest in under-resourced/neglected communities.** Reallocate resources and public investments into job training, housing, education, health care, recreation and other basic services in communities which have historically been over-policed and under-resourced. City councils in partnership with communities should investigate the amount of funding spent on training, specifically the range of skills being supported by municipal budgets, and how much funding is used to purchase weaponry or other equipment that replaces face-to-face contact.
- **Increase funding for youth-serving agencies.** Increase funding for social workers, youth workers, and staff at other youth-serving community-based organizations to provide services requested by residents in lieu of responding with law enforcement. Police. Engage and employ the community to support its youth.
- **Audit law enforcement complaints.** Audit law enforcement agency processes to assess the treatment of youth and their families when submitting complaints, how investigations are conducted, the duration of such investigations, and their outcome. Make audit results public.
- **Remove SROs from Schools:** SFY supports the [Dignity in Schools](#) recommendation for increasing counselors, not police, in the nation's public

schools. The regular presence of sworn law enforcement officers, also known as School Resource Officers (SROs), has contributed to the increase of arrests of youth. The resulting criminalization of youth has increased racial disparities for arrests and system involvement of youth of color, as well as youth with special needs. Schools need to be safe havens where students' mental health and social and learning needs are supported. [At the bare minimum, involvement of School Resource Officers must be conditioned on extensive and routine training, cross-training with school staff, standard operating procedures for SROs and school staff regarding when SROs may be called to intervene in matters involving youth. Oversight, transparency and accountability in terms of data collection and disclosure of the use of SROs by school staff as well as how many students are arrested and/or referred to court, as well as annual evaluations of SROs who are also asked to share their views of school teachers' and administrators treatment of students.](#)

- **Make SRO policies, practices, and data public.** Making law enforcement and school [policies and practices](#) regarding School Resource Officers, as well as arrest date, publicly available, without requiring parents to sue for the policies or data.

## State public safety agencies should:

- **Require training on best practices for working with youth for all law enforcement recruits.** Promote a developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, racially equitable practices when policing youth. This training must include: understanding normative adolescent behavior, the behavioral effects of trauma and exposure to violence; de-escalation strategies; prevalent mental health issues during adolescence and crisis intervention responses for youth, the demographic factors affecting youth, recognizing and managing one's own biases. These trainings should reflect research and scholarship in best practices for ensuring positive outcomes for youth and a youth development framework.
- **Law enforcement trainings should be presented by experts.** Trainings should involve psychologists/clinical social workers who are experienced and expert in adolescent development, community members, community representatives who bring culturally competent expertise, providers of youth programming, and youth. Community experts who can explain cultural differences and culturally-competent approaches to youth must be involved.
- **Require non-law enforcement engagement with youth for recruits.** Recruits must spend time throughout their first year on the job, with young people in settings such as youth-based community serving organizations, schools, and other non-enforcement/non-surveillance settings where young people feel safe

and protected.

- **Require on-going education about working with youth.** All law enforcement officers must take a minimum of one annual in-service course that includes:
  - Updated best practices for policing youth,
  - trauma-informed policing,
  - racial equality in policing practices,
  - updates in case law regarding youth including U.S. Supreme Court law,
  - updates on statutory protections for youth,
  - the difference in the legal status protection and protections due status offenders,
  - implicit bias.
- **Create model policies.** State law enforcement agencies must create statewide developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and racially equitable policies and practices for all law enforcement agencies for all points at which police may come in contact with youth. The basic elements of model policies should be fashioned after the [Model policies](#) proposed by SFY and include:
  - Prohibit use of pat frisk when lacking reasonable or probable cause;
  - Developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed [approaches](#) to Mirandizing youth that incorporates the holding of *JDB v. North Carolina*;
  - Use of force standards that severely limit require officers to demonstrate that all other options have been exhausted;
  - Ban the use of the following tactics and weapons for use with youth: Chokeholds, Tear gas, Tasers, Hog-tying youth.
- **Enforce Model Policies: Policies are only as strong as their enforcement.** For every policy adopted, a system of enforcement and oversight must be developed with communities and youth advocates; data should be collected and made public using community participation and oversight.

## State legislatures should enact legislation to:

- **Raise the minimum age of arrest of youth to 12.**
- **Require laws that protect youth's constitutional rights.**  
Require laws that protect youth's constitutional rights at the point of interview, interrogation, and while in custody by providing immediate access of [free legal counsel immediately upon arrest](#).
- **Create strict legal standards to limit the use of force.**  
Legislate special legal standards of care and use of force for law enforcement treatment of youth, including banning the use of tasers on youth, as well as chokeholds, tear gas,

conducted electronic weapons (CEWs), restraint practices including hog-tying youth as well as “less lethal” technology including rubber bullets, tear gas, and other technologies.

- **End qualified immunity for law enforcement officers.**
- **Require public disclosure of data on juvenile arrests.**  
Require public disclosure of aggregated juvenile arrest data broken down by race, ethnicity, charge, age, and gender and tracked by outcome—prosecuted, diverted, or dismissed.
- **Prohibit data collection of youth for gang databases.**
- **Prohibit sharing data about youth or students with ICE.**
- **Require POST organizations to engage experts in creating their practices for working with youth.** Require existing Police Officers Standards and Training (POST) organizations to: involve youth, communities, child and adolescent development experts, juvenile justice leaders and system stakeholders. Ensure this diverse group:
  - Leads the effort to create and implement standards for interactions with youth;
  - Leads the effort to develop training curricula and training;
  - Create accountability mechanisms developed in conjunction with communities and youth advocates. The policies and standards must be backed up with accountability measures that are tied to hiring, firing, and promotions.