

# The Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative

## Improving Outcomes for Youth under the Supervision of Nevada's Juvenile Justice System

### Background

Recent efforts of state and local leaders working with juvenile justice advocates to reduce the number of youth who are incarcerated have yielded impressive results: the juvenile incarceration rate has been cut in half nationwide over the past decade. However, reducing recidivism for youth involved with the juvenile justice system has proven to be a challenge for many states. California, Arizona, and Texas, for example, report that approximately half of youth in the juvenile justice system who are released from state custody are reincarcerated within three years of release. An analysis of approximately 60,000 youth in Texas found that even after the state had increased spending on community-based supervision and services by 68 percent, recidivism rates did not improve.<sup>1</sup>

*As is the case for many states, there are fewer youth involved with Nevada's juvenile justice system now than at any other time in the last decade, and the majority of those youth are supervised in their own communities, which research shows leads to better outcomes.*

- Juvenile arrests in Nevada decreased by 47 percent between 2006 and 2014.<sup>2</sup>
- Dispositions to juvenile probation declined by 22 percent between 2011 and 2015, while admissions to detention facilities for gross misdemeanor and felony offenses declined by 18 percent.<sup>3</sup>
- Commitments to the Division of Child and Family Services (DCFS) for delinquent offenses decreased by 54 percent between 2006 and 2014.<sup>4</sup>

*Nevada devotes significant state and local resources for youth under system supervision, yet is unable to determine whether its investments are having a positive impact.*

Approximately \$61 million is spent annually on supervision and services across Nevada's two largest counties (Clark and Washoe), in addition to approximately \$28 million at the state level. Yet neither the state nor the majority of local supervision agencies regularly track recidivism rates or other outcomes for these young people. As a result, policymakers, judges, and juvenile justice agencies are unable to determine whether Nevada is using state and local resources effectively

to strengthen public safety and help youth who are involved with the juvenile justice system to transition to a crime-free, productive adulthood.

*Following a national competitive process, the U.S. Department of Justice selected Nevada as the only state in the country to receive technical assistance to assess its juvenile justice system and help the state implement strategies to improve outcomes for youth under system supervision.*

In November 2015, The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center hosted a 50-state forum focused on improving outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. At the forum, the U.S. Department of Justice's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) charged the CSG Justice Center's National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC) with providing technical assistance to help states adopt statewide strategies to improve outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system. Nevada—through the leadership of Governor Brian Sandoval, First Lady Kathleen Sandoval, Supreme Court Justice Nancy Saitta, and Speaker of the Assembly John Hambrick—was one of 18 states to request support from the CSG Justice Center through participation in the Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative (SJJII). The SJJII is designed to guide states in adopting a more cost-effective, comprehensive set of statewide strategies based on the latest available research on “what works” to reduce recidivism and improve other outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system. Nevada was selected by OJJDP for participation in the SJJII and will serve as a model demonstration site for other states.

*In 2016, Governor Sandoval issued an executive order establishing the Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative Task Force to oversee the SJJII, with the goal of learning more about the performance of Nevada's juvenile justice system and what steps can be taken to strengthen public safety and improve outcomes for youth.*

The Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative Task Force consists of representatives from the three branches of government along with state and local juvenile justice and other system stakeholders. The task force, co-chaired by First Lady Sandoval and Supreme Court Justice Saitta,

oversees Nevada's SJJII. Under this task force's direction, the CSG Justice Center will conduct an extensive data analysis of Nevada's juvenile justice policies, practices, and resource allocation, from diversion through reentry. The CSG Justice Center will also convene focus groups and interviews with system stakeholders across the state to learn more about system challenges and identify priorities for improvement. Key priorities for system assessment include determining whether youth are matched to appropriate supervision and services; the services that youth receive are effective; and data on youth outcomes are tracked and used to guide policy and funding decisions. Based on findings from the analysis of these and other issues identified by Nevada stakeholders as impacting outcomes for youth, the CSG Justice Center will work with the task force to develop policy options for consideration in the 2017 legislative session to address Nevada's key juvenile justice challenges.

## The Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative Approach

### Step 1: Analyze quantitative data

Under the direction of the Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative Task Force, the CSG Justice Center will conduct an extensive analysis, based on data availability, of referral, intake, diversion, detention, disposition, county probation, youth camps, DCFS commitments, Youth Parole Bureau (YPB) releases, as well as programs, services, recidivism, and other outcome data, to establish a comprehensive picture of statewide juvenile justice trends.

### Step 2: Review policy and practice

To complement the data analysis, CSG Justice Center staff will facilitate focus groups and interviews with key constituents across the state to garner their perspective and recommendations on system challenges and strategies for improvement. Structured discussions will take place with staff working on the front lines of Nevada's juvenile justice system, including prosecutors; defense attorneys; judges; law-enforcement executives; probation and youth camp staff; and DCFS and YPB staff. Further, the CSG Justice Center will review state regulations and agency policies to examine the extent to which Nevada's juvenile justice policies, practices, and resource allocation align with what the research shows is effective in improving outcomes for youth. Key findings from the data analysis and focus-group discussions will be presented to committee members.

### Step 3: Present system-improvement recommendations and adopt new policies

In collaboration with CSG Justice Center staff, the Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative Task Force will review the key findings of the data analysis and focus groups to develop policy options focused on using resources more efficiently to reduce recidivism and improve other outcomes for youth involved with Nevada's juvenile justice system. Subsequently, CSG Justice Center staff will support Nevada state leaders to formalize and enact these recommendations through legislation and appropriation changes.

1. Tony Fabelo et al., *Closer to Home: An Analysis of the State and Local Impact of the Texas Juvenile Justice Reforms* (New York: The Council of State Governments Justice Center, 2015).
2. "Crime in Nevada," Nevada Department of Public Safety, General Services Division, accessed 23 June 2016, <http://gsd.nv.gov/About/UCR/Crime-In-Nevada/>.
3. As reported by county juvenile probation departments to DCFS Juvenile Programs Division in annual Disproportionate Minority Contact report submissions.
4. DCFS Biennial Reports, <http://dcfs.nv.gov/Tips/Reports/Biennial/>.

## Funding for the Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative

The Statewide Juvenile Justice Improvement Initiative is a project of The Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center's National Reentry Resource Center (NRRC), funded by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, and conducted in partnership with the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. The CSG Justice Center is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. Staff provides practical, nonpartisan advice and evidence-based, consensus-driven strategies to increase public safety and strengthen communities. Established by the Second Chance Act, the NRRC provides education, training, and technical assistance to states, tribes, territories, local governments, community-based service providers, nonprofit organizations, and corrections institutions involved with reentry.