

To: Interested Parties

From: GBA Strategies

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Poll Results on Youth Justice Reform in Kansas

On the heels of recent bipartisan efforts to reform the youth justice system, the Supreme Court decision guaranteeing parole hearings for youth offenders, and the Department of Justice decision to ban solitary confinement of youth, a new poll shows adults in Kansas overwhelmingly support shifting the youth justice system from incarceration and punishment to prevention and rehabilitation. A clear 82% majority favors this shift with broad support across partisanship (81% of Democrats, 87% of Independents, and 79% of Republicans).

The following are key findings from the survey of 500 adults in the state of Kansas age 18+:

CLEAR SUPPORT FOR PROPOSAL TO REFORM THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM

Not only do adults in Kansas support this shift in general, they also support a range of specific policy proposals aimed at addressing problems with the youth justice system, including the misguided focus on incarceration, racial and ethnic disparities in the system and the shortage of public defenders.

	Total Favor (%)
Design treatment and rehabilitation plans that include a youth's family in planning and services	92
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	86
Require states to reduce racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system	75
Increase funding to provide more public defenders who represent children in court	69

For each of these proposals, support is very similar for people who say they or their immediate families have been victims of crime as for those who haven't been crime victims.

UNDERLYING VALUES FOCUSED ON REHABILITATION

Support for these proposals to reform the youth justice system are rooted in the core belief that youth who commit delinquent acts are capable of positive growth and have the ability to change for the better (82%) and a feeling that the best thing for society is to rehabilitate these youth so they can become productive members of society (84%) vs. the alternative statement that they should remain incarcerated to keep our streets safer.

When it comes to the youth justice system, adults in Kansas place a premium on rehabilitation as a means to prevent recidivism. They also believe that taking responsibility is not predicated on incarceration and that we should not incarcerate for offenses that would not be crimes if committed by adults.

	Total Agree (%)
When it comes to youth offenders, what is most important is that the system does a better job of making sure that he or she gets back on track and is less likely to commit another offense	94
Youth should not be placed in juvenile corrections facilities for offenses that would not be crimes if they were adults, such as skipping school or running away from home	87
Teaching youth who commit an offense to take responsibility for his or her actions does not require incarceration	75
Technical violations of probation and other types of supervision, such as missing curfew or testing positive for drug use, should not result in placement in a youth prison	60

In sum, the poll shows broad public support for an aggressive effort to reform the youth justice system in the state of Kansas, placing a greater focus on rehabilitation than incarceration and addressing fundamental problems created by the current system.

Methodology

The survey of 500 adults age 18+ Kansas was conducted January 19-24, 2016 on behalf of Kansans for Youth Justice. 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 18+ adult population in Kansas.