

# Restorative and Transformative Justice for Youths and Communities Pilot Program Bill:

# WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW



## What does this new law accomplish?

On August 11, 2021, S-2924 was signed into law appropriating \$8.4 million to create a two-year pilot program that will develop restorative and transformative justice hubs in Camden, Newark, Paterson and Trenton. The law was drafted in response to the over 100 youth who were released from youth prisons due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The purpose of these hubs is to provide youth who have been released from youth prisons with rehabilitative treatment in their communities through enhanced reentry services, and also to engage at-risk youth to prevent them from entering the criminal justice system. The law is effective immediately.

This program will provide an effective alternative to youth incarceration. Ultimately, it's up to New Jersey's lawmakers to decide whether they want to expand this program and close the state's wasteful and ineffective youth prisons.

## Have similar programs been effective?

This program is modeled after successful programs located in Chicago, Illinois, and Oakland, California. The Chicago program has been successful in reducing rearrests by almost 50% and the Oakland program has reduced school suspensions by 87%.

## Why is this pilot program necessary?

This program empowers communities to keep themselves safe. It uses restorative justice principles to bring individuals who have been harmed, community members and youth who have committed harm together to discuss the harm that was done and explore solutions to address the root cause of that harm. Restorative justice presents an alternate avenue for addressing harm and encourages active participation in the restorative process to facilitate stronger community relationships and community-driven public safety.

The program also employs transformative justice principles to address conflicts and harms at the individual level, community level and within broader social structures. Transformative justice works to build alternatives to our current systems and transform the conditions that help create acts of violence or make them possible.

## What is a restorative and transformative justice hub?

A restorative and transformative justice hub is a physical community center where youth can participate in programs and treatment provided by one or more community-based service providers. With the assistance of trained facilitators, hubs will be a place for youth to feel heard, to feel safe and to resolve conflicts. The law also provides funding for enhanced reentry services to be included in the hubs to support young people returning to their home communities from incarceration.

## Will a hub be in my city?

For this two-year pilot program, the hubs will only be located in Camden, Newark, Paterson and Trenton. These cities were chosen because they have high rates of youth incarceration. Ideally, based on the success of the pilot, the program will be expanded to all 21 counties.

## When is this program going to start?

The pilot program will most likely be ready to accept youth in 2022 or 2023. First, the Juvenile Justice Commission must draft rules and regulations for how the pilot program is going to be run and how the \$8.4 million is going to be awarded to service providers. This process will take about four months from the bill signing. Second, the Juvenile Justice Commission must host public meetings in each of the four pilot cities. Third, there will be a months-long grant process where service providers will have to make proposals detailing how they are best able to use the funds to serve youth within the hubs.

## I am a service provider. How can I get funding to work in a hub?

After the regulations have been adopted by the Juvenile Justice Commission, information sessions will be hosted in each city to discuss how service providers can get involved with hubs. In the meantime, providers should consider partnering with other area service providers to discuss preparing joint applications to work in the same hub. During the bidding process, preference will be given to local providers. Once contracts are awarded, providers may be required to undergo training in restorative and transformative justice practices.

## How do youth get access to the hubs?

Youth will be able to access the hubs through referrals from the Juvenile Justice Commission, county Youth Services Commissions, courts, public defenders, prosecutors, law enforcement, clergy and community stakeholders.

## What specific types of services will be available in this program?

This program will connect young people with wraparound services – including support services for housing, education, family counseling, life skills, financial literacy, debt elimination, job readiness and employment. The next phase of the program will ideally include enhanced mental health services connecting youth with care to address trauma, depression, anxiety and other conditions at no cost to youth and families. For more information, see the Institute's mental health toolkit, *Investing in Youth Not Incarceration*.

## How much of the funding will go to administrative costs vs. the program providers?

No more than eight percent of the program funding will be used by the Juvenile Justice Commission for administrative purposes and no more than 15 percent of the program funding will be used by the County Youth Services Commissions for administrative purposes.

Service providers will be expected to produce a final report for accountability.