



# San Francisco's Juvenile Justice System

**From 1999 to 2016:**

**76%** decline in referrals of youth to the juvenile justice system

**85%** decline in detentions

Average daily population of juveniles has dropped from **119 to 45** young people

**83%** decline in juveniles on probation

**100%** decline in juveniles sent to the California Youth Authority/ Department of Juvenile Justice

## A Unique Moment in San Francisco's Juvenile Justice System

Today's historically low number of young people in our juvenile justice system affords us an unparalleled opportunity — and responsibility — to think creatively about the way we address juvenile delinquency.

From 1999 to 2016, San Francisco experienced a 76% decline in referrals of youth to the juvenile justice system, with 50% of that decline occurring in the last eight years. We have reduced detentions in our juvenile hall by 85% and the number of kids on probation by 83%.

## Two Decades of Progress

While juvenile delinquency has declined nationally over this period, San Francisco has taken significant steps to reform our juvenile justice system:

- **Diverting low level offenses:** In 1998, San Francisco established the [Community Assessment and Resource Center \(CARC\)](#), which serves as a single point of entry for crisis intervention, assessment, service integration and referral of arrested youth. Police bring youth arrested for misdemeanors and low-level felonies directly to CARC - not to Juvenile Hall. Community-based organizations work in partnership with juvenile probation to case manage youth without further justice system involvement. Since then, the police have also increasingly diverted youth from arrest, and the San Francisco Unified School District has adopted formal policies designed to [stop the school-to-prison pipeline](#) by using school-based, restorative strategies in lieu of justice system involvement.
- **Keeping kids in the community, supported by the community:** San Francisco's Departments of Children, Youth and Their Families, Juvenile Probation, and Public Health coordinate funding for a broad portfolio of funding for community-based organizations, building a [community-based continuum of care](#) for at-risk and justice-involved youth - from alternative education and workforce development programs to case management and home-based supervision. Youth who need to spend time in out-of-home placement are supported in their transition home through a specialized [Reentry Court](#), which connects them with community-based support.
- **Reducing our reliance on juvenile hall:** Since 2002, San Francisco has been an Annie E. Casey Foundation [Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative](#) (JDAI) site, actively working to reduce our reliance on juvenile hall through the implementation of a validated risk assessment tool, graduated sanctions, and

## Hard Challenges Remain

While our overall numbers are dramatically reduced, the cases that remain in our courtrooms are more serious. Robberies comprised only 13% of petitions in 1999, but 28% today — a 115% increase. In contrast, narcotics cases comprised 17% of 1999 petitions, but only 1% of 2016 petitions.

Moreover, as the overall numbers have declined, racial and ethnic disparities in our juvenile justice system have become even more extreme. In 1999, African American young people comprised 49% of referrals and 52% of detentions — already a grossly disproportionate amount in a time when they comprised only 13% of the city's population. In 2016, they comprised 59% of referrals and 67% of detentions — but only 6% of our population.

The District Attorney's Office, in partnership with justice system stakeholders, community organizations, and the young people and families of our City, must develop new strategies for addressing these challenges. We seek solutions that address violence, promote healing, and strengthen our communities.

## **One Solution: Restorative Justice**

Prosecutors stand at the threshold of the justice system for young people accused of a crime. We can bring a youth before a judge to face charges - or we can think differently about resolving harm and facilitating positive youth development. Restorative justice models such as San Francisco's [Make It Right](#) program offer a meaningful alternative to prosecution. Rather than court appearances and probation, Make it Right offers a young person the opportunity - in lieu of prosecution - to meet with the person harmed by their action, develop a plan to repair the harm they caused, and then complete their plan with support from a community-based case manager. Youth who complete the program are wholly diverted from juvenile court.

For more information, please contact Katy Miller, Chief of Alternative Programs, San Francisco District Attorney's Office, at [Katherine.Miller@sfgov.org](mailto:Katherine.Miller@sfgov.org).