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## **New Report Shares Lessons Learned from Youth Justice Visioning Sessions Across Texas**

**AUSTIN, TX** – The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC), a nonpartisan advocacy organization focused on building coalitions and advancing solutions to end mass incarceration in Texas, held a series of community visioning sessions across Texas, from July through October 2018, to answer this question: **What do young people need to avoid justice system involvement and lead successful lives?**

Texas is in the midst of a youth justice system transformation. After years of turmoil, the Texas Juvenile Justice Department is in the process of implementing short- and long-term reform goals aimed at creating a model system that is more efficient, effective, and trauma-informed. The agency's plans include a \$37 million legislative appropriations request, which would allow for additional trauma-informed training, family reentry specialists, and alternative placements to decrease populations in the agency's five remaining secure facilities.

However, as lawmakers have been separately contemplating how to address issues in those five secure youth lockups, one proposal would move all youth into a single, former adult prison that would be retrofitted to detain these youth.

"A proposal to send youth to a shuttered state jail flies in the face of best practices in youth justice, and runs counter to the core desires of those closest to the system," said Lindsey Linder, Senior Policy Attorney at TCJC and the report's author. "If true youth justice transformation is to take hold and be successful in Texas, the voices of Texas residents—particularly those most affected by youth incarceration—must be part of the reform conversation."

During each of TCJC's visioning sessions, participants offered insight into system justice involvement, often the product of lived experience as a system-impacted youth or as the parent of a system-impacted youth. Each attendee was also asked to identify the top three things they would change about the Texas' juvenile justice system. According to TCJC's report, the top priorities identified by attendees of the youth justice visioning sessions are:

- 1. Raise the age of juvenile jurisdiction**
- 2. Build a more rehabilitative youth justice system**
- 3. Reform harsh sentencing for youth**
- 4. Close youth prisons**
- 5. Invest in alternatives to justice system involvement**
- 6. Provide more counseling/mentorship/peer support for youth**
- 7. Provide more support for families**

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## Report Shares Lessons Learned from Youth Justice Visioning Sessions

These themes can help illuminate the particular challenges facing residents in different communities throughout Texas, and can provide a roadmap for transformational reform based on their vision for a brighter future.

Jose Flores, Youth Justice Policy Analyst at TCJC, has lived experience with both the youth and adult criminal systems in Texas: “It is so important for the Legislature to listen to our communities when implementing policy, as these are the youth and families whose lives are being impacted for the worse by the justice system’s failures.”

In addition to elevating the voices of those who attended the visioning sessions, the report offers a range of policy solutions to divert youth away from the justice system and invest in strategies that would foster healthier families and safer communities. They include keeping kids out of adult prison facilities, both by raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction and by investing in alternatives to incarceration; and continuing juvenile system regionalization by expanding funding for smaller, local therapeutic facilities and community-based programming, where kids’ underlying needs (including mental health, substance use, trauma, and behavioral issues) can be addressed in the least restrictive setting—and closer to home.

*To learn more about the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition and download a copy of the report, visit [www.TexasCJC.org](http://www.TexasCJC.org).*