

FINISH | 5

Our journey to zero youth prisons in Texas

THE | 5



Multiple crises in the Texas Juvenile Justice Department (TJJD) have led to dangerous and inhumane conditions for approximately 600 children in its care. Now, Texas lawmakers have the responsibility to do something radically different.

Many other states and counties – and even Texas in the not-so-distant past – have successfully closed youth prisons. Texas can and must take the transformational step to close TJJD's 5 state secure facilities and do it right: commit to no new builds or transfers to the adult system. Instead, state leaders should shift funding to communities and schools, which can provide children the resources they need to thrive outside of prison walls.

In October 2022, a group of young people, family members of incarcerated kids, advocates, and organizations came together to form the Finish the 5 Coalition, dedicated to creating something better for Texas children.

The Finish the 5 Coalition is urging the Texas Legislature to make three key changes:



Community Reinvestment

The Texas Legislature should invest in building communities' infrastructure to appropriately address the needs of children who would have been incarcerated, and allow recapture from closed facilities to reimburse the costs for community-based resources, including a new Office of Youth and Community Restoration at the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, investments in existing school-based tools like restorative justice, and short-term funding to facilitate the transition of children by judges and juvenile probation departments to non-institutional, non-punitive services.



Facility Closures

The Texas Legislature should resolve to shut down TJJD's 5 state secure institutions by 2030 through a thoughtful, staggered closure plan.



Policy to Decriminalize Youth

The Texas Legislature enacted bold and effective policy reforms from 2007-2011 that resulted in a nearly 50% reduction in youth incarceration, without a negative public safety impact. The Legislature should build on these solutions by enacting a host of policy changes that begin to divert kids from the punishment system altogether.

BACKGROUND: In August 2022, an investigation by the *Texas Tribune* revealed that about 600 children in Texas' 5 state secure facilities are living in dangerous and unsanitary conditions. Incident reports revealed that kids in understaffed facilities were stuck in their cells for over 22 hours a day and were unable to access bathrooms. High numbers of these incarcerated children were on suicide watch, and some had harmed themselves. "The youths' right to be free from psychological harm appeared to have been violated," inspectors wrote.

Help close Texas' youth prisons

Join the *Finish the 5 Coalition*



FINISH THE 5

Join the statewide movement mobilizing to close Texas' 5 youth prisons!

WHO

A youth-led coalition of young people, families of incarcerated kids, experts, advocates, and more

WHY

To convince state leaders to close Texas' 5 youth prisons, invest savings in communities, and decriminalize kids through policy

HOW

Through direct action, research, policy advocacy at the Texas Legislature, public awareness campaigns, and more

WHEN

Virtual meetings on Wednesdays at 4:30pm

Learn more and sign up to join our next meeting:



TexasCJE.org/Finish-the-5

After reports revealed dangerous and inhumane conditions within Texas' 5 state secure youth prisons, organizations including the Texas Center for Justice and Equity (TCJE), Austin Liberation Youth Movement (ALYM), and Coalition of Texans with Disabilities (CTD) convened a youth-led coalition of Texans dedicated to closing all 5 facilities by 2030. The growing Finish the 5 Coalition will advocate at the Texas Legislature and beyond to create a better future for the state's most vulnerable youth.

TEXAS' YOUTH PRISON CRISIS BY THE NUMBERS

5 prisons

Texas' 5 juvenile prisons are located in Edinburg, Gainesville, Giddings, Mart, and Brownwood. Texas also operates other youth facilities, including halfway houses.

23 hours

Kids have been trapped in cells for up to 23 hours a day, unable to leave to use the bathroom. They used lunch trays and water bottles to relieve themselves.

45 percent

The share of incarcerated kids on suicide alert has risen to almost half of the total population. Kids have self-harmed using pen springs and pieces of metal.

10 years

Kids as young as 10 years old can be sent to juvenile prisons in Texas, warehoused in small cells far from their loved ones and support networks.