

RAISE the AGE | NY

Rolling Back Raise the Age Will Not Make New York City Safer

City Must Invest More Deeply in Youth and Communities to Reduce Gun Violence

January 24, 2022. We appreciate that the [Blueprint to End Gun Violence](#) released today by Mayor Adams names that gun violence is a public health issue, and includes empowering violence interrupters through the City's Crisis Management System, as well as expanding the Summer Youth Employment Program, health and mental health care, and other critical supports. However, the Blueprint also calls for rolling-back the Raise the Age law by making it easier to prosecute 16- and 17-year-olds as adults in criminal court. The Mayor's proposal reflects a [misunderstanding](#) of the way the Raise the Age law works and threatens to bring back failed, racially biased policies of the past.

New York spent decades treating children as adults in the criminal courts with no correlation to reduced crimes rates. The facts are that during the first eighteen months of the Raise the Age law, shootings in New York City remained the lowest they have been in decades, even as arrests and incarceration of 16- and 17-year-olds declined. Only after months of COVID-19 infections, deaths, and lockdowns, did gun violence increase in New York City, as it did in many cities around the country where criminal justice reforms had not been enacted. And while we must address this recent rise as part of community recovery from the COVID crisis, it is important to recognize that the numbers are still far lower than the rates of gun violence in 2000, when 16- and 17-year-olds were all prosecuted as adults for all criminal charges, even the most minor.

The pandemic has compromised the safety and stability of families, highlighting and exacerbating existing inequalities and disproportionately impacting youth of color. As we recover from the collective trauma of the COVID-19 crisis across New York, this is the moment for a bold new vision for youth justice for more resilient and safer communities—not to bring back failed policies of years past.

Yes, we must act, but we can't pursue strategies that dilute effective reforms and fail to get at the root causes of violence through short-sighted legislative roll-backs. To address youth gun violence, we need a public health, anti-poverty response. Mayor Adams's Blueprint includes some of these responses but must go further—and must not undermine effective strategies by undoing needed reforms.

Last week, the Raise the Age campaign put out a bold [Youth Justice Agenda for New York](#), endorsed by over 50 youth, community, and civil rights organizations statewide. This agenda includes:

- Robust expansions of Cure Violence and other violence interrupter programs
- Employment training and pathways to living wage jobs
- Comprehensive civil legal services
- Investments in green spaces, safe and affordable housing, and accessible public spaces.

There is an urgent and pressing need to invest in our City's youth and communities. These investments cannot wait—we urge the Mayor to provide details about the immediate investments he will make in the City's Crisis Management System, Summer Youth Employment Program, and to improve access to mental health supports in the community. We urge him to work with trusted community based providers on implementing these public health responses to gun violence now. Critically, this initial commitment should be a starting point and a more robust plan must be put forward in the Mayor's Preliminary Budget to demonstrate how his administration intends to put the needs of youth and communities front and center in efforts to achieve a safer New York City for all.

Children's Defense Fund-NY | Citizens' Committee for Children of NY | Youth Represent

The Raise the Age NY Coalition includes organizations from across New York, including formerly-incarcerated youth and their families, child advocates, service providers, faith leaders, legal services groups, and unions. Together, we helped pass the Raise the Age law to end the practice of automatically charging all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults.