



April 2018

Youth First Initiative Resources

Youth First is a national advocacy campaign which seeks to end the incarceration of youths by supporting state decarceration initiatives and the reinvestment of those funds into community-based alternatives for rehabilitation. The Children's Defense Fund (CDF) is one of Youth First's national partners¹ as the initiative is in line with CDF's Cradle to Prison Pipeline[®] campaign, which works to substitute the prison pipeline with a pipeline to success for every child.

What Resources Does Youth First Offer?

1. **Interactive Web Tools:** With the #The50000 campaign (a reference to nearly the 50,000 children currently incarcerated in the U.S.), Youth First has released two web-based tools to spread key information to advocates all over the nation.
 - **Racial and Gender Disparity Map:** Allows viewers to see the race and gender break down state-by-state of youth incarceration. See here at: <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/the54000/race-interactive>.
 - **Locating Oldest and Largest Youth Prisons Map:** Provides information on 80 different facilities in the U.S. that were either established more than 100 years ago or have more than 100 beds in them. See here at: [http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/the54000/facilities\(2015Guide\)](http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/the54000/facilities(2015Guide)).
2. **Breaking Down the Walls Report:**² Examines how five states and the nation's capital re-envisioned youth justice and shut down dozens of youth prisons around the country:
 - **California:** A group of advocates, attorneys, and youth living in California Youth Authority prisons led a campaign to end abusive facility conditions and close youth prisons, which at the time, detained approximately 10,000 youth. They fought for nearly a decade (1992-2012) and drastically reduced the number of children detained in prisons.³
 - **Louisiana:** Attorneys, national juvenile justice advocates, activists, imprisoned youth, and their families joined together to successfully close Tallulah, a youth jail that abused and starved more than 2,000 youth behind bars.
 - **Mississippi:** After years of sexual, physical, and mental abuse in what the Department of Justice reported as the worst prisons the federal government

¹ Youth First Initiative. "Who We Are." Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/who-we-are/>.

² Youth First Initiative. "Breaking Down the Walls." Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/breakingdownthewalls/>.

³ California legislation has been instrumental in reducing the number of incarcerated youth. The Juvenile Justice Realignment Act was critical in reducing this number by limiting the types of offenders who could be committed to state youth correctional institutions. Available at <http://www.cjci.org/Education1/California-s-Farrell-Litigation.html>.

had seen in 20 years, Mississippi led a campaign to shut down a youth prison, two detention centers, and a prison for children tried as adults.

- **New York:** Activists and youth organizers used momentum from preventing the expansion of youth jails and creating more community-based alternatives to start a campaign that closed 20 state prisons.
- **Texas:** Texas advocates led legislative campaign crafted by a collaborations among lawmakers, advocates, youth, and their families that moved beyond reforming abusive facilities and focused on closing these facilities completely. As a result, landmark legislation has transformed the Texas juvenile justice system, and reduced the number of children living in prisons.⁴
- **District of Columbia:** The campaign not only successfully closed Oak Hill, a costly, inefficient, and inhumane youth prison, but also established a smaller, more rehabilitative facility, a cabinet level agency to increase oversight for accountability, and increased availability of community-based services.

3. **Unjust: LGBTQ Youth Incarcerated in the Juvenile Justice System Report:**⁵ Sheds light on how LGBTQ youths in the system face bias in adjudication, are overrepresented in youth prisons, mistreated and abused in facilities, and lack supportive services upon release. This injustice results in forty percent (40%) of incarcerated girls identifying as LGB. Youth of color are also disproportionately affected as they represent roughly eighty-five to ninety percent (85-90%) of all incarcerated LGBTQ youth.
4. **Decarceration Campaign Toolkits:**⁶ *Ready to Launch: A Campaign Starter Toolkit to Close Youth Prisons* provides a 12-step guide to launch a campaign to end youth incarceration in one's own state. The topics range from getting started, engaging people, how to launch a campaign, and examples and resources for strategies, activities, and tactics.

Additionally, Youth First provides a toolkit for legislative advocacy - *Toolkit for Youth Justice and Electoral Advocacy*. This toolkit gives readers information about why and how participating in state and local elections can influence and educate policymakers who make decisions on where, when, and why youth are incarcerated.⁷

5. **Jim Crow Juvenile Justice:**⁸ Focuses on the legacy left behind by the 13th Amendment, which abolished slavery except for people convicted of a criminal offense.⁹ It explains a brief history of the effect of the 13th Amendment and how people of color, particularly black men, are overrepresented in prisons today.

⁴ More about the landmark legislation that has transformed Texas' juvenile justice system. Available at: <https://www.texascjc.org/adult-juvenile-justice-system-reforms-texas>.

⁵ Youth First Initiative "Unjust: LGBTQ Youth Incarcerated in the Juvenile Justice System." Available at <http://lgbtmap.org/file/lgbtq-incarcerated-youth.pdf>.

⁶ Youth First Initiative "Ready to Launch: A Campaign Starter Toolkit to Close Youth Prisons." Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/ready-launch-campaign-starter-toolkit-close-youth-prisons/>.

⁷ Youth First Initiative "Toolkit for Youth Justice and Electoral Advocacy." Available at <http://www.youthfirstinitiative.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/YF-Electoral-Toolkit-2017-Version.pdf>.

⁸ Youth First "Jim Crow Juvenile Justice." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hgXWK7-1ZM>.

⁹ Youth First Initiative. "Jim Crow Juvenile Justice." Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7hgXWK7-1ZM>.