

Prison Fellowship®, the nation's largest Christian nonprofit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, advocates for a restorative response to crime that recognizes the value and potential of every human life. With an emphasis on proportional punishment, constructive prison culture, and second chances, we promote reforms that transform those responsible for crime, validate victims, and engage communities.

## THE PROBLEM

### Prison inflation begins at arrest:

- The juvenile arrest rate for all offenses reached its highest level in the last two decades in 1996, and then declined 67 percent by 2015.
- In 2015, the arrest rate for youth (age 10 to 17) was amounted to **2,751 per every 100,000**.
- In 2013, the juvenile court delinquency caseload was **161 percent higher** than the caseload in 1960.

### Many juvenile intake and arrests are based on acts that would not be criminal for adults:

- As of 2013, **1 in every 6** formal cases in juvenile court were on the basis of status offenses.
- Of these, **51 percent** were on the basis of truancy charges (essentially charging a young person criminally for failure to attend compulsory public schooling).

### Over-criminalization of youth:

- Many of these referrals are due to zero-tolerance policies set by school boards or state legislatures, and address behaviors that would otherwise be handled by parents and school administrators.
- Seven states automatically try youth under the age of 18 as adults, regardless of how minor the crime.

## LEGISLATIVE SOLUTIONS SHOULD:

- Address **over-criminalization of youth by:**
  - Reducing or removing zero-tolerance policies and mandatory reporting for non-criminal behavior to law enforcement
  - Setting guidelines for the use of school resource officers
  - Raising the age at which a youth is automatically tried as an adult to at least the age of legal majority (18)
- Address **youth incarceration by:**
  - Increasing the use of small, regionally placed correctional homes for youth
  - Prioritizing therapeutic treatment and accountability
  - Enabling consistent family connection where appropriate
  - Increasing the use of risk and needs assessments at time of intake
  - Promoting fiscally sound policies and reinvesting accrued savings into a local continuum of community supervision

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