

CONNECTICUT  
**JUSTICE  
ALLIANCE**

# **ANNUAL REPORT**

2025



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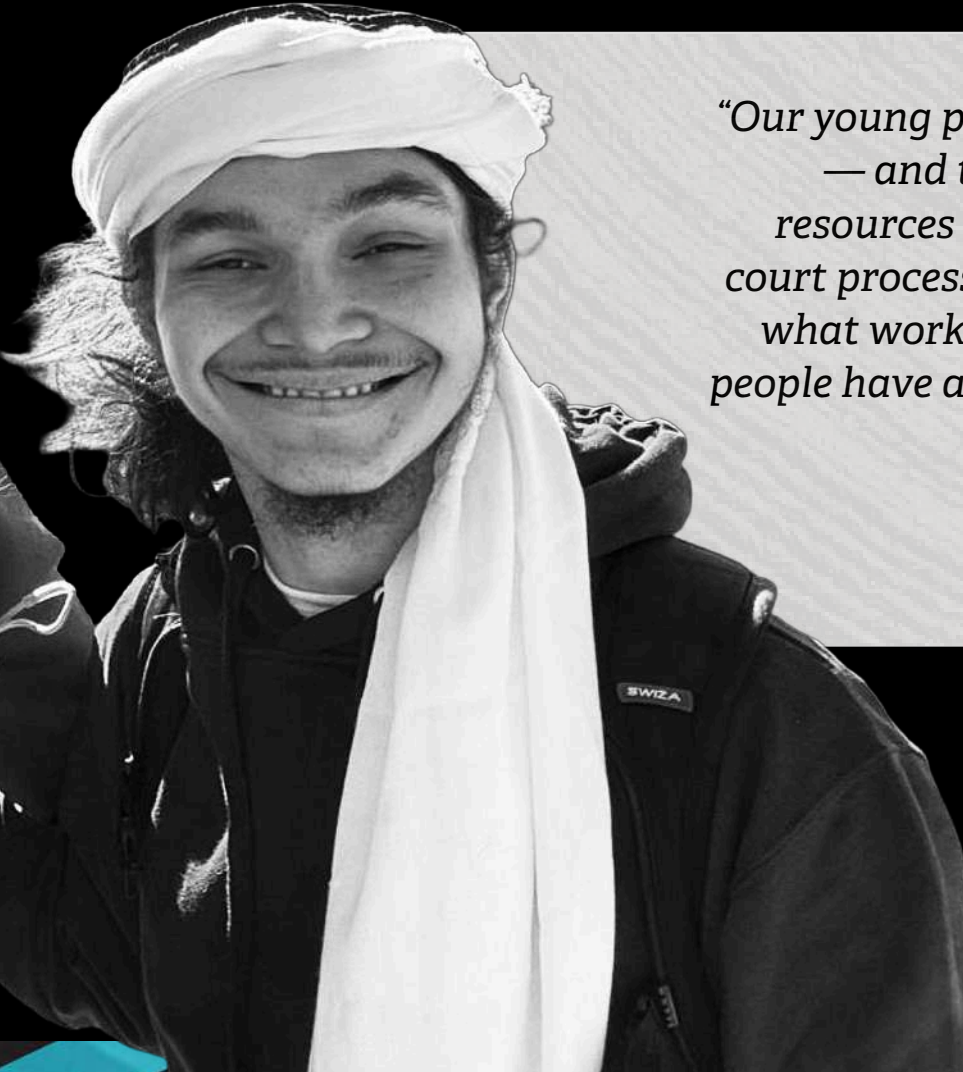
# DEDICATED TO PERCY BERRY

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This report is dedicated to Percy Berry, a Justice Advisor with the Connecticut Justice Alliance and a beloved friend to our team. Percy brought light, laughter, and courage to every space he entered — including the State Capitol, where he offered his lived experience not just as testimony, but as a guide for how to improve the lives of others.

Percy embodied justice. He lived it. Although he has passed, his words continue to guide us, and the legacy of his work will continue to reach kids across the state for years to come.

Rest in power, Percy.



*“Our young people do not need to waste time — and the state does not need to waste resources — by putting them through the court process. We should instead be funding what works and ensuring all of our young people have access to resources we know will be successful and sufficient.”*

## **PERCY BERRY**

written testimony on Connecticut's  
handcuff restriction bill (SB1542)

**To celebrate  
Percy's memory, visit  
[ctja.org/Percy](https://ctja.org/Percy)**

# A NOTE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear friends, partners, and advocates,

For CTJA, 2025 was a year of triumph, challenge, and heartbreak. We pushed harder than ever to keep Connecticut kids out of the legal system, and to protect those within it. We forged new connections, brought new voices into the conversation, and built up our staff to do even more in the future.

Inside the walls of Manson Youth Institution, we held sessions with young people to listen and advocate for the resources they need. In turn, they provided valuable input on how to help kids like them avoid the legal system through policy change and community investment.

In communities across Connecticut, our Justice Advisors led vision sessions, not just to imagine a different future, but to build it. They conducted research, attended trainings to develop their organizing skills, and drew attention to our mission through the press and social media.

And at the State Capitol, we won reforms that will make children safer by restricting how and when they can be restrained and handcuffed by law enforcement. Our success this year has laid the foundation to

build power and shape the change we need to end the criminalization of kids.

Our success was driven by young people. By youth who have lived through the system and refuse to sit quietly while other children suffer. By our Justice Advisors who are on the frontlines of changing our laws. By organizers, advocates, researchers, and artists coming together in coalition. And from supporters of CTJA who make our work possible.

This year, we've proved that justice is worth fighting for. It's something we build — through truth, compassion, and a whole lot of hard work. And we're not done building.

Thank you for standing with us, listening to young people, and believing in what's possible.

Onward,  
**Christina Quaranta**  
Executive Director, CTJA



# MANY VOICES SAME VALUES

What youth justice partners  
say about CTJA, youth justice,  
and Connecticut's future

## WHEN I THINK OF CTJA, I THINK OF...

grassroots energy on behalf of kids.

all kids achieving their full potential.

a team who cares about young people, fairness and justice, and who hold a deep seeded value that all people deserve second chances and opportunity rather than punishment.

## YOUTH JUSTICE IS...

meeting kids' needs without their having to ask or be punished for our not meeting them.

healing, restorative, and an opportunity for growth.

recognizing young people's potential for growth and ensuring systems are focused on transformation, healing, and true accountability.

## IN THE FUTURE, YOUTH WILL...

insist on change.

be driving decisions about investments that matter for them.

be supported by systems that prioritize opportunity over punishment where they will.

be free to dream because they are supported, protected, and believed in.

## CONNECTICUT IS BETTER WHEN / BECAUSE...

all children have the foundation and opportunity they need and deserve to thrive.

we stretch to do best by kids.

it invests in young people and prioritizes prevention and community based interventions that lead to safer communities and stronger outcomes for children and families.



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# 2025 RECAP

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# Legislative Wins

## Restricting the use of handcuffs and restraints on kids:

This year, Connecticut took an important step forward for youth justice: lawmakers passed legislation restricting the use of handcuffs on children. For years, CTJA and our allies have raised the alarm about young people being unnecessarily restrained — sometimes in schools, sometimes in transit, and sometimes in the course of routine interactions with police. These practices humiliate children, escalate trauma, and reinforce harmful stereotypes about who deserves dignity.

The new law establishes clear limits: police and other authorities are now prohibited from handcuffing children in most circumstances, reserving restraints only for situations where there is an immediate safety risk. This change sends a powerful message — kids are kids, and they should be treated with care, not criminalized.

CTJA is proud to have contributed to this victory. Our team lobbied lawmakers, provided testimony, organized community partners, and amplified the voices of young people with first-hand experience. Their courage and truth-telling helped lawmakers see that Connecticut kids deserve better.

We also know this is not the end of the work. Implementation, oversight, and training will determine the success of our efforts. CTJA will continue to monitor how the law is put into practice, call out violations, and push for accountability to ensure that no child is subjected to unnecessary restraints. Most importantly, this win proves that change is still possible, even as the rhetoric around crime becomes more toxic. We will continue to fight back on behalf of every child until Connecticut has achieved true justice.



Unanimous vote of support in the State Senate

# **Budget Wins**

**Lawmakers included important funding and support for diversion programs and youth services in the new two-year state budget.**

## **Some highlights include:**

- Nearly \$10 million for Juvenile Review Boards, Connecticut's primary diversion alternative to court involvement
- Over \$70 million for Juvenile Alternative Incarceration, a community-based alternative to detention
- \$11 million for youth violence prevention programs
- Continued funding for afterschool programs and youth sports in high-need areas
- \$300,000 for the Children's Law Center, which advocates for youth in family court
- New state directives to develop a youth diversion policy and training curriculum
- Requirements to report on the effectiveness of youth diversion and reentry efforts
- \$500,000 for disconnected youth programs
- \$6.4 million for services to homeless youth



# Coalition Building

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In pursuing legislation to raise the minimum age of arrest, CTJA has been able to better understand what it takes to build new and lasting alliances with community members, organizations, educators, and lawmakers, across the state. Through organizing, we learned a common theme and belief: kids should be treated like kids, with the care and support they need to grow into empathetic and responsible adults. The continued growth of this movement gives us confidence that through community we will achieve the changes Connecticut needs — and that every child deserves.





# Vision Sessions

Vision Sessions are youth-led community conversations that bring together Connecticut residents — especially those directly impacted by the youth legal system — to share experiences, challenges, and hopes for change. For one to two hours, CTJA’s Justice Advisors create space for honest dialogue, listening to young people, families, and community members while also helping them understand how the system works and how it impacts their lives.

Unlike panels or lectures, Vision Sessions are collaborative and grounded in lived experience. They bridge personal stories and public policy, allowing participants to shape solutions alongside those leading reform.

The conversations not only educate and mobilize communities, but also guide CTJA’s priorities. Insights gathered from Vision Sessions ensure that lawmakers, agencies, and advocates are informed by the real expertise of those who know the system best. They also offer Justice Advisors an opportunity to demonstrate leadership — showing what it means for directly impacted youth to drive change from within their own communities.

# Research & Data

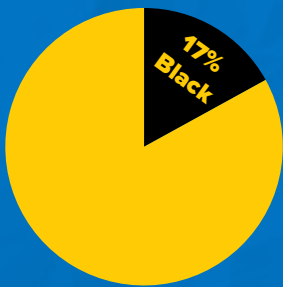
**Sentencing Project:** Black youth in Connecticut were placed in confinement at a rate 17.2 times higher than white youth in 2023.



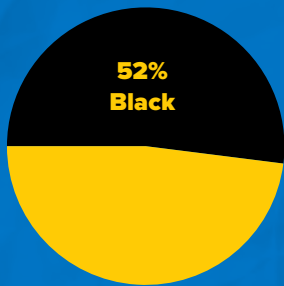
Scan for more



**Prison Policy Project:** 52% of Connecticut's incarcerated youth are Black, despite being only 17% of the population.



Connecticut Population



Connecticut Incarcerated Youth

Scan for more



**Kids under 18 were arrested 5,041 times in Connecticut in 2024.\***

**Youth crime is at historic lows.**

Arrests of kids under 18 in Connecticut have dropped **76%** since 2010.\*

Delinquent referrals fell from nearly 13,000 a decade ago to an estimated **5,000** in 2025.§

**68%** decrease in pre-trial detention admissions since 2013.§

**More kids are being diverted instead of pushed deeper into the system.**

Over **70%** of kids are now diverted at intake rather than processed in court.§

Court acceptance has dropped from 94% in 2017 to about **32%** in 2025.§

About **75%** of you complete probation without any re-arrest.§

**Change the narrative...**

Connecticut saw historic lows in statewide crime, including in youth trends.\*

Violent and property-related youth arrests continue long-term declines.\*

Auto-theft trends statewide are decreasing, contradicting panic-driven narratives.\*

\*DESPP, Crime in Connecticut 2024  
§ Tow Youth Justice Institute

# Youth-Led

At the heart of CTJA's work is the belief that those most impacted by the legal system must have a seat at the table, not as mascots or token voices, but as leaders shaping the future. This year, that principle has come to life through the leadership of our Justice Advisors (JAs) and the young people at Manson Youth Institution (MYI).

## Justice Advisors (JAs):

Our Justice Advisors are a diverse group of young leaders with lived experience in the youth justice system. They don't just "advise" — they lead. From testifying before legislators to meeting with agency officials, the JAs bring honesty and urgency to every conversation. They identify blind spots, propose solutions, and remind adults what's at stake when decisions are made without kids in mind. This past year, JAs played a central role in our advocacy for the handcuff bill and in shaping our campaign to raise the minimum age of arrest. Their voices cut through political noise with clarity: kids deserve dignity, care, and opportunities to grow.





**“Sharing resources, experiences, and means of support builds an impactful community consisting of individuals dedicated to this support.”**

**Layan**



**“Working on campaign stuff is like solving a rubiks cube, there’s a lot of moving parts but its something solvable.”**

**Kelton**



**“Organizing is being intentional and strategic in all decisions: building a strong base, power mapping with those in power, and fostering solidarity and coalition with other groups.”**

**Simar**



**“It is essential to ensure that the voices closest to the cause are not overshadowed by those in power.”**

**Varsha**



**“I’m proud of taking the necessary risks. I’ve learned to be a better organizer.”**

**Jordy**

## Manson Youth Institution (MYI):

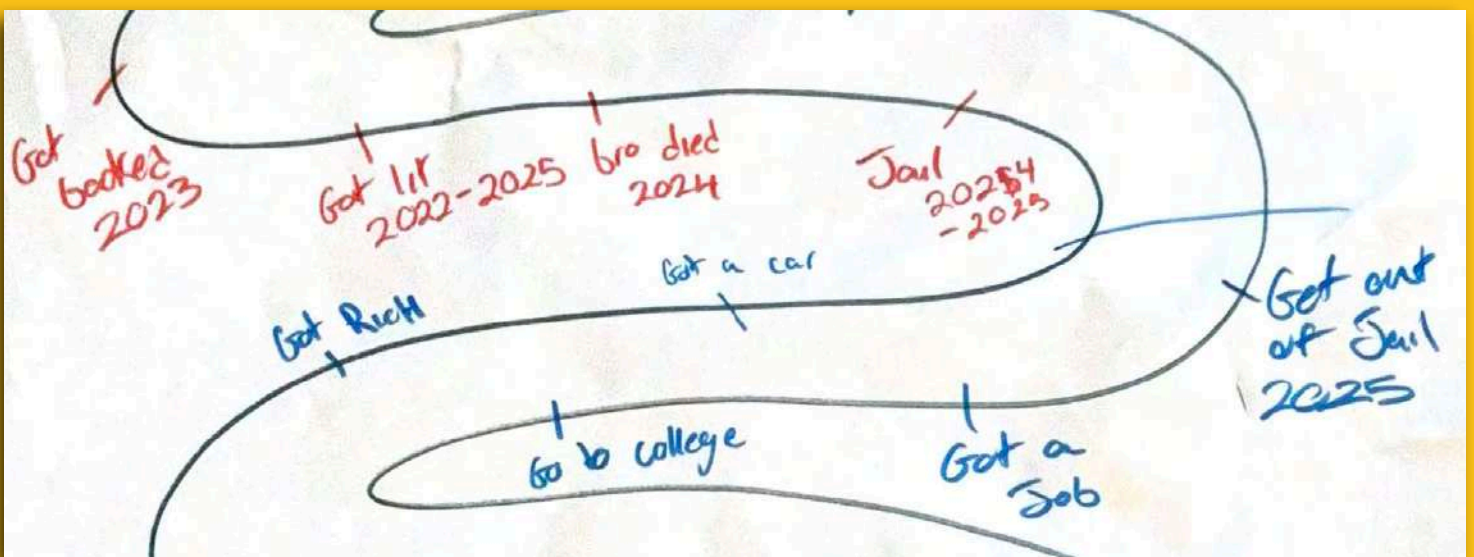
Inside the walls of MYI, young people are showing what resilience and vision look like. Through CTJA's Vision Sessions, incarcerated youth are contributing ideas for how facilities could better support rehabilitation, education, and reentry. They are candid about what hasn't worked and imaginative about what could. These sessions do more than collect input, they demonstrate that even in confinement, young people have wisdom and leadership that can inform policy. Their courage to speak openly, despite the risks, is shaping our agenda and fueling our commitment to transform the system.

### How They Feel, What They're Building:

For many of these young leaders, being heard is powerful in itself. Young people consistently describe this work as both healing and empowering — a chance to turn their lived experiences into solutions that help the next generation.

CTJA is proud to be led by the voices of young people. Their insight is not an add-on to our strategy; it is the foundation. They remind us that justice is not abstract — it is about children's lives, futures, and communities. As our movement grows, so will the leadership of the youth who make it possible.

**Young people at MYI were asked to make road maps of their lives — what led them to this point, and where they saw themselves in the future...**



lost lil bro

now Im in manson

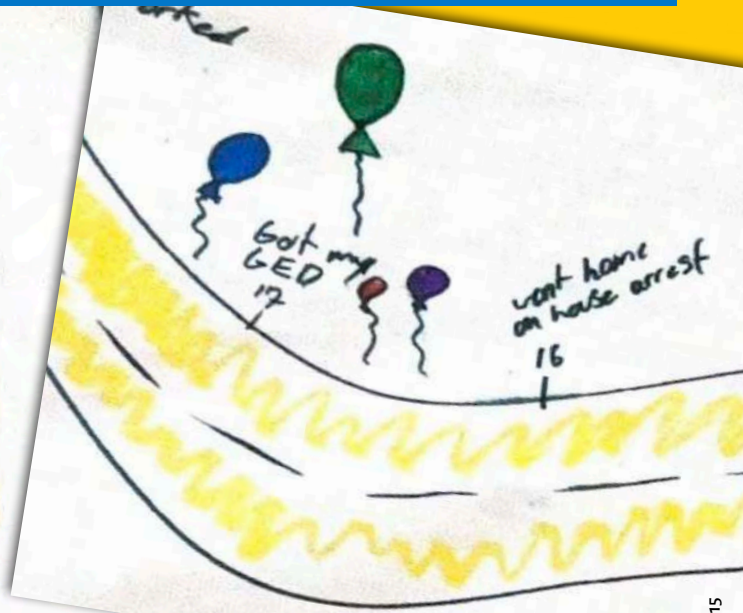
I see myself dead or in jail in 5 years

if not Im gonna have a family and marriage with my chas



**It's clear where systems failed these young people, setting them up for tragedy. And yet, they have hope for their futures and want to help other young people.**

When I was  
like 2 or 3  
my brother and  
sister went to  
jail



# THE YEAR AHEAD



**organizing**



**coalition  
building**



**advocacy**



**public  
awareness**

**GET UPDATES. DONATE. TESTIFY.  
GET INVOLVED. HOST AN EVENT.**

# CTJA

**JOIN  
US**

**CTJA.org**

