

State of Youth Justice

2023-2024



CONNECTICUT
JUSTICE
ALLIANCE

☎ 203-814-8452
✉ media@ctja.org
🌐 www.ctja.org

Founded in 2001, the [Connecticut Justice Alliance \(CTJA\)](#) is a youth/adult partnership on a mission to end the criminalization of youth. Made up of a dedicated team of Justice Staff and Justice Advisors, CTJA works to disrupt and dismantle the pathways that funnel children and youth into the legal system, advocating for their empowerment and for community-based support for young people and their families (#InvestInMeCT).

CTJA is led by Executive Director Christina Quaranta and Policy Director Iliana Pujols. Alongside them, are the Justice Advisors (JAs), people under the age of 25 -years-old, who have direct experience with the legal system. Their input serves as the driving force behind CTJA's policy and advocacy agenda. JAs are owed credit for the successes celebrated in this report.

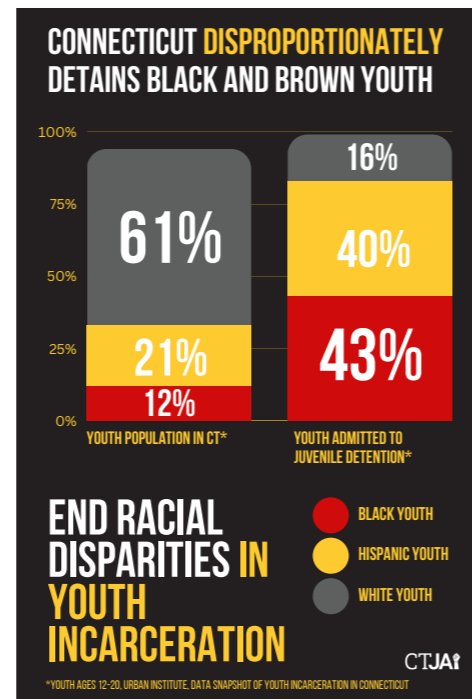
Continued Inside

Continued from the cover

The best people to work on ending the criminalization of youth, are those that have experienced it in their daily lives. Our goal is to amplify their voices and have the JAs be recognized leaders in the movement to end the criminalization of youth in Connecticut.

In 2023, the Connecticut Justice Alliance secured a fiscal sponsor, Social & Environmental Entrepreneurs (SEE), amplifying our financial stability and reach. This allows us to advocate for even more transformative policies in the upcoming 2024 legislative session and overall expands the reach that our work can have.

In this report, we will explore the accomplishments and obstacles of 2023 and look ahead to our priorities for 2024. Together, we must continue to abolish systems that oppress, we must support and uplift young people, and we must extend the promise of a successful future to all.



Where in the world is CTJA?



Oslo & Bergen, Norway

Iliana worked with UConn's International Justice Exchange program and joined them in a trip to Norway to visit and understand the country's humane youth justice system. She hopes Connecticut can implement policies of gentle rehabilitation. CTJA now sits on the International Justice Exchange's Steering Committee.

legislators and legal system experts. Christina emphasized youth leader/legislator partnerships, while Tenille shared her experiences as a Justice Advisor, promoting community voices and authentic collaboration with youth.



Oakland, California

Iliana attended the American Youth Policy Forum's Learning Journey

event, focusing on evidence-based solutions for inclusive education, particularly for marginalized students.



McAllen, Texas

Christina spoke to the National Press Foundation at a conference in Texas, about the harmful narratives in crime and justice reporting and the impact on youth.



Hartford, Connecticut

Christina attended President Joe Biden's speech on gun reform at the University of Hartford,

highlighting the urgency of addressing gun violence in America and honoring its victims.



Santa Fe, New Mexico

The National Conference of State Legislatures united

Collaborative Impact

Strengthening Community Through Partnerships, Donations, & Volunteering

Since 2001, collaboration has been the backbone of CTJA's success. In 2023, we strengthened existing partnerships and forged new alliances with organizations and individuals that share our commitment to justice and equity. Thank you to all of those who have partnered with us!

CTJA is excited to explore new opportunities for collaboration and coalition-building. We believe that collective action is the key to driving meaningful and lasting change throughout Connecticut.

Volunteer with CTJA Today by Becoming a Member of the Justice Coalition

Becoming a volunteer as a [Justice Coalition](#) member at CTJA is an empowering and rewarding experience. As a Justice Coalition member, your role is to support CTJA's mission through advocacy, education, and outreach efforts. You will have the opportunity to work alongside like-minded individuals who are passionate about making a difference in Connecticut's communities.

Support CTJA's Mission

Our [new donation platform](#) allows recurring contributions, providing the opportunity for donors to make a lasting impact on the young people of Connecticut. Regular support is essential in ensuring access to justice for all. Take a moment to review our comprehensive Funders Guide, a valuable resource for those interested in supporting the work of CTJA. The guide empowers potential donors with essential information to contribute to meaningful change within the legal system.

The Justice Advisor Journey

Year 1: Aug - Oct

Onboard, learn by observation (3 month exploratory period rules apply here), build relationships, set goals, and weekly check-ins

Year 1: Feb - April

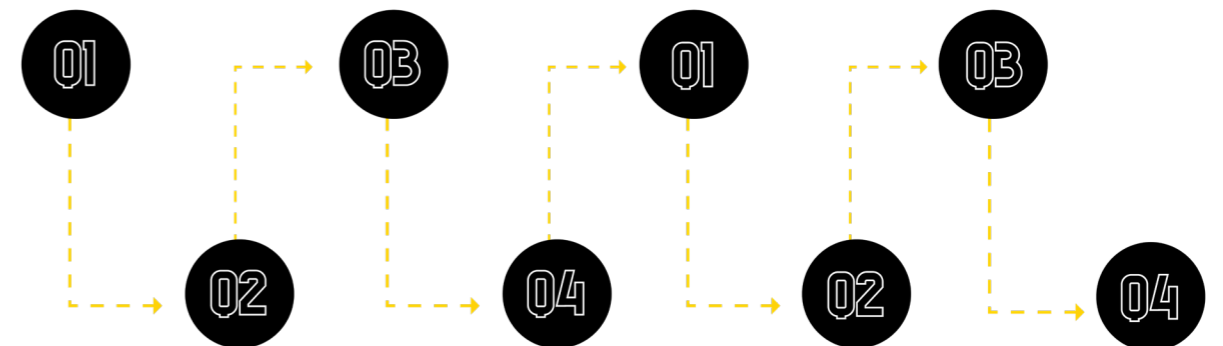
Observe and engage in legislative session, identifying some specific areas of interest, and more learning

Year 2: Aug - Oct

Focus on personal and professional development, build relationships with new JAs, get involved in more issue-specific opportunities, and identify ways to support new JAs

Year 2: Feb - April

Legislative session work, attend meetings and events, continue to support new JAs, and start to put together your POL



Year 1: Nov - Jan

Legislative session prep, explore new meetings, work closely with Sr JAs, and transition to monthly check-in moving forward

Year 1: May - July

Legislative session wrap up, annual Retreat, re-evaluate goals and align at least 1 goal related to the issue area you choose to focus on

Year 2: Nov - Jan

Legislative session prep, support new JAs via tasks/mentorship, and start to align your work with areas you still want to learn more about (meetings, events, readings, etc.)

Year 2: May - July

Legislative session wrap up, annual retreat, Presentations of Learning (POL), and final reflections before completion

2023 Legislative Session in Review

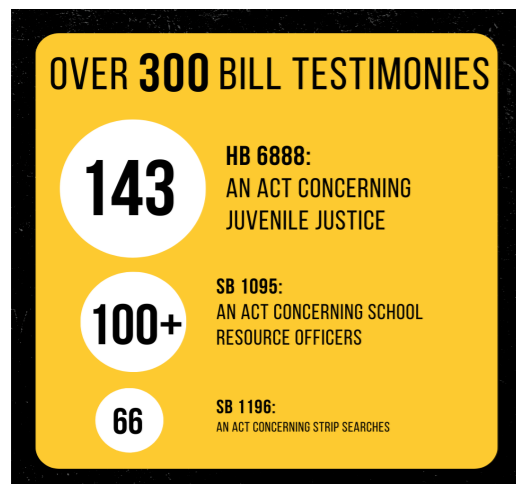


Among hundreds of bills, several key pieces of legislation shaped the direction that the state chose for how to work with some of its most impacted youth. Notably, the passage of the \$51.1 billion State Budget for Connecticut which began June 2023 and ends June 30, 2025. It includes investments in education,

nonprofits, and funding for the diversion of young people from the legal system. CTJA was granted \$75,000 in 2023 for youth violence initiatives and will use this funding towards the work of the Justice Advisors. As Connecticut looks for ways to address cycles of crime, it must understand that under-investment in staff of nonprofit providers, community support for young people, and affordable housing, to name a few issues, means that young people are unable to have their needs met appropriately. This must be addressed in order to set families and communities up for success.

On March 15, 2023, CTJA hosted a press conference at the state Capitol, where CTJA and its allies urged lawmakers to end the criminalization of young people and to invest in youth. The specific focus was on investing in Black and brown

communities impacted by the legal system and addressing root causes of crime and behavior. CTJA stressed involving young people in policy decisions and highlighted previous successful youth legal system reforms. They proposed measures that included removing those under 18 from the housing of the Department of Correction and expanding the membership of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.



Reflecting on CTJA's 2023 Legislative Priorities

Opportunities for change and investment were left on the table during the 2023 Legislative Session. Despite that, the work of our partners, legislative allies, and CTJA staff led to small and meaningful changes. This is thanks to the collective power of their testimony, presence in Hartford, calls to legislators, and closed-door conversations.

Below is a list of legislative changes made in the 2023 Session and CTJA's position on the impact of those changes

HB 6888: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE (PA 23-188)

What it Does

- Develops a plan for pre-arrest diversion for low-risk children, by July 1, 2024

What we Think

Connecticut already has a robust plan for diversion of young people. The timeline is concerning because it means change in the diversion system will likely not happen until after the 2024 Session. Diversion from prisons and the legal system is the best way to increase public safety and remains the best choice for young people, especially those that are low risk.

Watch for: the plan for diversion may take time to develop. We must ensure that more children are not tangled in the legal system because of this.

CTJA, through the work of the Community Expertise Workgroup of the JJPOC, advocated for these additions for the past 3 years. Finally, the additions of these important people bring broader representation of those most impacted to the table. CTJA looks forward to working with the JJPOC to support these new members.

“These bills assume that the child's family is the problem. Instead of offering resources and support for families, this bill proposes holding a child if the parent is “unable to control” them — this is unconstitutional and offensive.”

**Christina Quaranta,
Executive Director of CTJA**



Continued...

HB 6888: AN ACT CONCERNING JUVENILE JUSTICE (PA 23-188)

What it Does

- Adds voting members to the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee (JJPOC): Two young adults, under the age of 26 years old, with lived experience in the legal system. One community member, of any age who has first- or second-hand experience with the legal system. Two tribal members, one each from the Mashantucket Pequot Tribe and the Mohegan Tribe of Indians of Connecticut.
- Requires a review and update of the plan to remove youth under 18 from the custody of the Department of Correction, due December 15, 2023.

“When we lock kids up in cages, we are not actually making people safer, and our systems are causing harm.”

Kathleen Flaherty, Executive Director, CT Legal Rights Project, Opposing HB 688g

What we Think

CTJA requested that the new members be nominated by the Community Expertise Workgroup, however, the youth nominations will be from 2 state legislators.

The state's movement on this issue must continue to take seriously the violence inflicted upon children by the system, as well as the trauma brought by delays.

To some lawmakers, it's just another session, but to these young people, it's their teenage years and 20s. We strongly encourage lawmakers to consider how devastating a 3-year delay will be to these young adults.

Those with experience in adult prisons must be a part of the process in developing what the placement, services, and resources will look like for the young people who will now be in the custody of the Judicial Branch: Court Support Services Division.

SB 952: AN ACT ON PAROLE ELIGIBILITY FOR YOUTHFUL OFFENDERS

What it Does

This bill will extend parole eligibility to people who were under age 21 when they committed the crime they are found guilty of. Previously, only those who were 18 were eligible.

What we Think

We are disappointed that this bill did not extend that eligibility to those who were 25 years or younger, as originally intended. This is harmful to the people under 25 years old in Connecticut adult prison. Connecticut's goal with incarceration should be to give new skills and curb poor decision making; lengthy sentences do just the opposite.

SB 1071: AN ACT CONCERNING DECEPTIVE OR COERCIVE INTERROGATION TACTICS

What it Does

This bill makes statements inadmissible as evidence if police threaten suspects physically, or deprive them of food, bathroom breaks, or sleep.

For children, the proposal goes even further – it prohibits police officers from making false statements about evidence, the law, or promises of leniency.

“Something is missing when we are quick to introduce our children to a system that breaks the average adult.”

Barbara Fair, Stop Solitary CT, Supporting HB 6888



What we Think

Thank you to our partners at the ACLU-CT and The Innocence Project, as well as the Office of the chief Public Defender for their great work on this bill.

Police are no longer permitted to deceive children to elicit confessions for crimes. This practice has resulted in numerous wrongful convictions in Connecticut.

CTJA in the Community



We will continue to prioritize and partner with incarcerated populations and those with lived experience in our advocacy efforts.



We are planning a series of Vision Sessions with an educational section in various locations, such as Bridgeport, Stonington, New London, Hartford, West Hartford, Wallingford, Norwalk, Stamford, New Haven, Waterbury, and Watertown.



As part of our ongoing efforts to create a more inclusive and impactful movement, we are actively exploring other event opportunities and welcome suggestions from our supporters.



[Make sure you are subscribed to our newsletter and follow us on social media to stay in the loop!](#)



2024 Policy Priorities

As CTJA looks ahead to the 2024 legislative session, the organization is focused on driving policies that address the root causes of youth crime and behavior. Check out the **R.A.I.D.** plan below:

Reform: Remove Children from Adult Prison

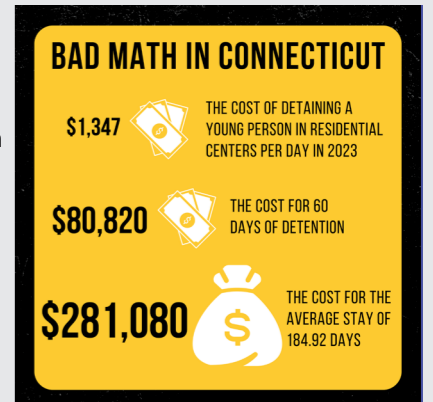
CTJA is focused on ensuring that the removal of youth, under 18, from adult prisons in Connecticut is done with input from those that are currently and formerly incarcerated. CTJA will be advocating for 4-5 placements that are small (10 beds or less), homelike, and equipped with the appropriate resources to meet the needs of young people while they are incarcerated- and to adequately address their reentry needs. In September 2023, there were 50 young men and 2 young women under age 18 held in adult prison. 20 states do not hold youth in adult prison. Connecticut must join them in a way that improves outcomes for youth and ensures safety for all.

Abolish: Eliminate the use of chemical weapons

While CTJA works alongside those that are directly impacted to remove children from adult prison, we will work to abolish the ongoing, dangerous use of chemical agent in the Department of Correction (DOC) on children. This practice is harmful to the young people who are incarcerated and the correctional officers. There are solutions that are safe and effective. Abolition comes with addition- services, improved levels of staffing, and resources for all within the DOC are necessary.

Invest: Address the root causes

Connecticut must invest in its youth and their communities, prioritizing effective solutions over incarceration. Currently, the state spends between \$842.06 and \$1,520.01 per day per bed on youth detention. In facilities located in Bridgeport and Hartford REGIONS, the cost is as high as \$1,347 per day, at an average stay of 184.92 days. (This equates to \$249,087.24 for state-run facilities and \$281,080.25 for private providers.) These high costs highlight the pressing need to shift resources towards healing and rehabilitation rather than punitive measures.



Divert: Make our communities safer

Diversion is one of the best ways to increase public safety for all community members. Rearrest rates are higher for those who have been in the adult court system, research shows that youth held in adult prison die sooner than those who were not, and diversion is able to hold someone responsible for a crime without causing them to have poor educational outcomes or engage in riskier behavior- all of which happens when young people are arrested. **One of the lesser known facts about Connecticut when CTJA talks with people is that Connecticut arrests 10 year olds.** CTJA will be pushing for the minimum age of arrest to be at least 12 years old, with a goal of 14 years old.



Donate Today

[Donate quickly and easily to CTJA by scanning the QR code to the left.](#)

In Conclusion

I started working with CTJA in 2017, and ever since then have pushed CTJA to use 'real people language' when discussing youth justice & the legal system. It's important for people to be able to understand what we are talking about. So, let's take a moment to reflect on CTJA's 2023



in a real way. We've made progress on legislative and organizational goals, made new friends and established strategic partnerships, all while staying

fiercely committed to empowering youth and addressing the root causes of youth crime.

I began this work as a Justice Advisor, someone who was closest to the problem with plenty of ideas for solutions. I encourage all of you to partner with people whose lived experience is their expertise. Think outside of the regular group of people you work with, find unlikely allies. At CTJA we are on a mission to make sure that young people are at all of the tables where decisions are being made about their lives. We want transformative policies that uplift communities and make a real difference. We want the root causes of crime to be addressed.

I could not do this work without all of you. To our awesome supporters, volunteers, and stakeholders, we want to give you a huge shout-out for your unwavering support. We see you and appreciate you.

We're all about fueling the potential of young leaders in this work and I look forward to seeing how CTJA grows in the coming year. Come say hello the next time you see me at an event, and make sure to sign up to be a part of the Justice Coalition.

Hiana Pujols

“

The best way to prevent future arrests is to stop the initial arrest from occurring in the first place. Diverting youth before arrest can minimize recidivism.

”

Erica Bromley, Youth Justice Consultant, CT Youth Services Association, Supporting HB 6888



Connecticut Justice Alliance

📞 203-814-8452

🌐 www.ctja.org

CTJA is a project of Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs (SEE) a non-profit public charity exempt from federal income tax under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. CTJA is a Project of Social and Environmental Entrepreneurs (SEE), a registered public charity, which provides non-profit status. Your donation is fully tax deductible.

THE **NARRATIVE** PROJECT