

North Carolina Task Force

for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice

WAYS STAKEHOLDERS CAN ENGAGE TO IMPROVE JUVENILE JUSTICE

Justice system involvement can have negative lasting effects on children. And with the 2017 passage of Raise the Age legislation, our state recognized that children should be treated differently than adults within our criminal justice system. This recognition is against the backdrop that a large percentage of criminal complaints originate in schools and the number of School Resource Officers is rapidly expanding.¹ By appropriately adapting school-based discipline, our state can dramatically decrease unnecessary involvement of teens in our juvenile courts for disciplinary or minor criminal matters.

At the same time, when more serious crimes are committed by a person under 21, our courts and sentencing schemes should recognize the cognitive and psychosocial differences between young people and adults.

The below recommendations (from the North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice's [December 2020 report](#)) outline solutions that you can help implement as stakeholders working with youth. The solution number corresponds to the full report, and the recommendation refers to the overarching category that each individual solution aligns with. In some cases, we have tweaked the language to reflect progress since we published our report. Finally, while some recommendations can only be accomplished statewide legislatively, stakeholders can implement local changes within their discretion consistent with the letter or the spirit of the recommendations.

Recommendation	Opportunity
Invest in Community-Based Solutions	3 & 4. Develop and fund grassroots organizations employing strategies to keep communities safe and build/fund violence prevention programs.
Prioritize recognition of mental health in schools	13 & 20. Hire behavioral health specialists in schools and fund school personnel training on mental health, first aid, cultural competence, diversity/inclusion and developmental disability.
Reenvision role of SROs, school-based discipline	21 & 22. Develop inclusive process for selecting and overseeing SRO's

¹ Juvenile Justice 2018 Annual Report, North Carolina Department of Public Safety Division of Adult Correction and Juvenile Justice, 11-12, <https://files.nc.gov/ncdps/documents/files/JuvenileJustice-2018AnnualReport.pdf>.

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	23. Support DPS & DPS efforts to collect data on school-based discipline and referrals to juvenile courts
	68. Require school administrator signature for school-based referrals initiated by SRO before submitted to juvenile court
	24 & 25. Establish and support School Justice Partnerships and coordinate with Task Force on Safer Schools State Action Plan
Stem the school-to-prison pipeline and rethink juvenile justice.	68. Accept pleas, as appropriate, in juvenile court for juveniles charged with Class D, E, and F felonies, in line with the Raise the Age Act
Reimagine juvenile sentencing	69. Replace juvenile life without parole sentencing with parole eligibility after 25 years
	113. Eliminate future use of Habitual Felony Status for individuals under the age of 21
	117. Prohibit capital punishment for people 21 or younger at the time of the offense and prohibit use of juvenile adjudication to be considered as aggravating factors.

ABOUT THE TASK FORCE FOR RACIAL EQUITY IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The North Carolina Task Force for Racial Equity in Criminal Justice, which is co-chaired by Supreme Court Associate Justice Anita Earls and Attorney General Josh Stein, was established in June 2020. For more information about the Task Force, please visit <http://ncdoj.gov/trec> or email criminaljustice@ncdoj.gov.