

To: City of New Orleans, Office of Criminal Justice Coordinator Tenisha Stevens

From: National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform (NICJR)

Re: Recommendations on Allocation of \$4.45 million in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Funding for Juvenile Justice Programming and Services

Background Context: Data Analysis

Following a pandemic-related decline in 2020, arrests of youth in New Orleans appear to be increasing. The New Orleans Police Department (NOPD) made 833 juvenile arrests in 2022, an increase of 4% from the previous year.¹ Approximately 95% of the young people arrested were Black,² a sizable disparity in a parish with an overall juvenile population that is 70% Black.³

While the majority of arrests appear to be primarily driven by property offenses, firearm possession and incidents involving firearms were not uncommon. Slightly more than 20% of the juvenile arrests in 2022 involved illegal possession of a firearm by a juvenile. Illegal carrying of a weapon, use of a firearm in robbery, and/or armed robbery were also alleged in 5–8% of juvenile arrests.

All of these firearm-related charges are sizable increases from prior years; in 2021, slightly less than 10% of juvenile arrests involved possession of a firearm, and less than 3% of arrests involved armed robbery. While it is too soon to know if the increase in gun-related incidents is an aberration or part of a meaningful trend, the overarching patterns regarding juvenile arrests in New Orleans remains the same: *The vast majority of juvenile arrests are for relatively non-serious conduct; however, there is a small percentage of youth in New Orleans who are involved in or at risk for involvement in much more serious conduct.*

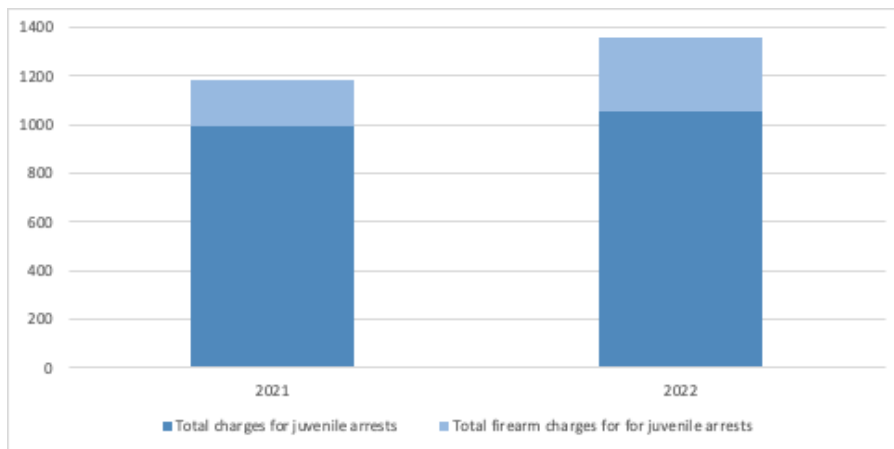


Figure 1. Firearm charges have increased in frequency and as a percentage of total charges in juvenile arrests⁴

¹ New Orleans Police Department direct correspondence.

² [With an overly punitive juvenile justice system, New Orleans is failing its children - Tulane Hullabaloo](#)

³ https://cityofno.granicus.com/MetaViewer.php?view_id=7&clip_id=3698&meta_id=506228

⁴ Because many arrests include more than one charge, the number of charges shown here is higher than the number of juvenile arrests.

Data from the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court (OPJC) corroborate these trends.⁵ Out of 406 juveniles petitioned from January 1, 2021 to November 22, 2021, 77% (or 312 youth) had only been arrested once, while an additional 15% (61 youth) had been arrested twice. Taken together, this means that almost 90% of all young people petitioned by the District Attorney’s (DA) Office have only one or two arrests, and the vast majority of petitions filed are for young people who do not appear likely to persist in delinquent conduct. On the other hand, 8% of youth petitioned had been arrested three or more times. This small number of youth (33 young people) accounted for almost a quarter of all petitioned juvenile arrests in Orleans Parish.

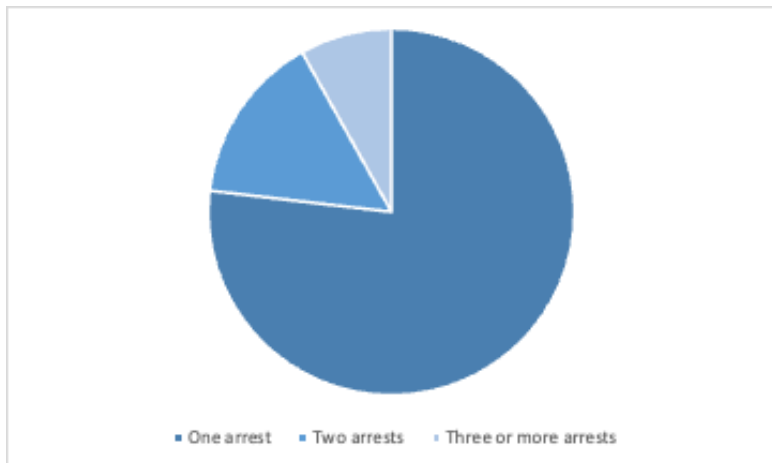


Figure 2. The majority of youth in the New Orleans Juvenile Court are only arrested once

Despite the fact that most juvenile arrests are for relatively minor conduct and most petitioned juveniles are not rearrested, the DA’s Office petitions the majority of cases. From January 19, 2019 to July 31, 2022, 78% of all juvenile intakes resulted in a petition being filed; looking only at more recent trends, from January 1, 2022 to November 4, 2022, 68% of intakes were petitioned by the DA’s Office. This is important for a number of reasons.

First, there is a sizable body of research showing that for most young people, minimizing involvement in the justice system leads to better outcomes than does formal processing.⁶ Second, these lower-level cases with youth who are unlikely to reoffend constitute a large workload for a juvenile justice system that has reported a significant strain on its resources. Prior to COVID, Judges at the Orleans Parish Juvenile Court conducted more than 9,500 proceedings per year. Based on the last data shared by the Court, they were on track to surpass this number in 2022; given the general increase in juvenile arrests since 2021, it is likely that the volume of juvenile court proceedings will increase further in 2023. In this context, diverting low-risk youth away from traditional processing will not only benefit those youth, but will also allow the court and other juvenile justice system agencies to better focus their resources on the smaller number of youth with more serious needs.⁷

⁵ [Orleans Parish Juvenile Court Special Meeting Presentation - January 24, 2022](#)

⁶ [Gatti, U., Tremblay, R. E., & Vitaro, F. \(2009\). Iatrogenic effect of juvenile justice. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 50\(8\), 991–998.](#)

⁷ In a 2022 meeting, the Bench also recommended diverting more low-risk youth to help address capacity issues and increase focus on high-risk youth. See [“Orleans Parish Juvenile Court Special Meeting Presentation - January 24, 2022”](#)

Background Context: Stakeholder Interviews

In June and July 2023, NICJR interviewed approximately 20 community and juvenile justice system stakeholders to better understand their perspectives on service gaps, capacity needs, and challenges to service delivery in Orleans Parish (See Appendix for full list of interviewees). Below is a summary of consistent themes that emerged from those interviews.

Accessible mental health services are a primary concern. Consistently, access to high quality, community-based mental health services was identified as a challenge. Stakeholders noted that untreated youth and family trauma is a serious issue in New Orleans. Specifically, challenges were identified in the limited number of licensed clinicians and practitioners, accessing quality services via Medicaid, and capacity limits within existing organizations.

Stakeholders identified a need for data that provides a clearer picture of both individual and community-level needs and risk factors. In particular, there is a desire for some form of standard population-level assessment of youth needs and risks, as well as a standard, evidence-based tool for assessing individual risk and needs as youth enter the juvenile justice system. However, there was concern about assessment without adequate follow-up in connecting young people to community resources/programs including housing, education, mental health, employment, and other intervention and prevention resources.

Stakeholders support restorative approaches as a trauma-responsive tool for youth and parents. New Orleans benefits from having local capacity to provide restorative approaches to addressing youth conflicts, behavioral concerns, and offenses within the juvenile justice system. However, there are funding gaps for restorative programs, existing programs are underutilized, and there are currently missed opportunities for referrals to these programs at all stages in the continuum.

There is a need for greater community-based services overall, as well as infrastructure for connecting youth to those services. Community-based and nonprofit stakeholders offered particular feedback on the need to prioritize locating services at the community level and developing the capacity of community-based providers, rather than directly running all programs through the traditional juvenile justice system. These stakeholders identified multiple benefits of community-based services, including long-term sustainability of infrastructure, a higher level of credibility, and the development of trust with youth and families. Current challenges include a lack of staff training, inconvenient and limited service locations, limited capacity, and gaps in the types of programming available. In particular, stakeholders noted gaps in positive youth development programming, truancy-based programs, evidence-based gun violence intervention programming, and programming entry points outside of justice involvement.

There is a lack of effective communication and coordination. Stakeholders at all levels identified challenges in communication and coordination that impede effective and comprehensive service delivery. There is a need for regular and ongoing coordination, data sharing, and evaluation of service effectiveness between juvenile justice system stakeholders (including OPJC), the Mayor's Office (including all relevant city agencies), schools,

community-based providers, and the community along with meaningful opportunities for youth and family feedback on services and gaps.

National Context: Evidence and Research on Effective Interventions for Young People

While this memo does not contain an exhaustive overview of existing bodies of research, there are some principles informing the following recommendations that are grounded in a robust evidence base. To be explicit, these are that:

- As stated above, there is a sizable body of research showing that for most young people, minimizing involvement in the justice system leads to better outcomes than does formal processing⁸.
- Resources and more intensive interventions should be targeted at the smaller number of young people who come into more frequent contact with the court system.
- “Assessment Centers” that provide a centralized point of intake and assessment for juveniles who are arrested or come into contact with the justice system can be effective in both diverting youth from formal case processing and better connecting them to community-based services, interventions, and mental health supports. This requires such centers to be appropriately staffed for service referral and integrated with community services.⁹
- Intensive community-based programs can be more effective than youth incarceration.¹⁰ These programs should be rigorous in their approach, including: intensive staff training, development, and supervision; a model and evidence base for services and programming provided to youth; and a capacity for evaluation and/or the ability to track data and outcomes to measure effectiveness and success.
- Models exist in other jurisdictions that have demonstrated success and can inform the development of effective programming for justice-involved young people in New Orleans. These include but are not limited to:¹¹
 - Credible messenger mentoring programs, which employ people with a history of justice involvement to provide intensive support to youth and families, in conjunction with other services (NYC; Washington, DC)
 - Mentorship and wraparound services that include cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), an intervention that works with youth to change both their thinking patterns and behaviors (Boston, Chicago)
 - Restorative justice processes, which can be employed for even serious and felony-level offenses, assuming both offender and victim support for participation (Alameda County, CA; New York City)

⁸ [Gatti, U., Tremblay, R. E., & Vitaro, F. \(2009\). Iatrogenic effect of juvenile justice. *Journal of Child Psychology and Psychiatry*, 50\(8\), 991–998.](#)

⁹ See the Vera Institute’s [evaluation of the Calcasieu Parish, LA model](#)

¹⁰ [The Annie E. Casey Foundation. \(2011\). No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration. Baltimore, MD: Richard Wendel.](#)

¹¹ Jurisdictions listed parenthetically are places where results of these interventions have been evaluated. For a selection of overviews of these programs, see [Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration | Sentencing Project](#), [Community-Based Alternatives to Incarceration for Youth | Columbia Justice Lab](#), [A Positive Youth Justice System | NICJR](#)

- Family-focused therapy models such as multisystemic therapy (MST) and functional family foster therapy (FFT), evidence-based practices that target the family unit for engagement (Nationwide, including Louisiana)
- Community-led diversion programs that encompass strategies listed above such as restorative justice and intensive mentorship but enlist a neighborhood council of respected local community leaders (i.e., business owners, clergy, crime survivors, family members of incarcerated youth) to develop an individualized community plan for each youth (Oakland)
- Community violence interruption models to address gun violence that use “violence interrupters” to intervene and de-escalate conflict, operating in neighborhoods, schools, or hospital sites (NYC, Indianapolis)

Recommendations for Allocation of \$4.45 Million in ARPA Funding

NICJR’s understanding of the ARPA funding is that it must be obligated by the end of calendar year 2024 and expended by the end of calendar year 2026. As such, the below recommendations assume a start date of early 2024 for contracts, and a 24 month period of funding. This correlates to an approximate level of \$2.225 in funding annually over two years, at which point the City of New Orleans would need to identify baseline funding sources for programming and services to continue. Some of the upfront costs of new program implementation (such as training) may be reduced moving forward in subsequent years.

Recommendations for Programming: The recommendations for programs below were developed through identification of nationally evaluated programs and interventions, identified needs and service gaps on the ground, and recommendations and existing proposals from local stakeholders and providers (when aligned with both evidence on effectiveness and identified need).

| Program | Description | Estimated Annual Cost and Agency/Vendor ¹² |
|-------------------|--|---|
| Assessment Center | Centralized point of intake and assessment operated by Orleans Parish Juvenile Court for individualized assessment of youth needs including mental health, trauma, substance abuse, and community risk. Purpose is to develop a more effective mechanism for both immediate diversion and referral to community services. Relevant models exist in both Calcasieu and Jefferson Parish that should be visited. | \$335,000 / Orleans Parish Juvenile Court |

¹² There appear to be multiple methods for procurement under ARPA funding that both meet the required need to abide by procurement rules and can bring services online in a timely fashion. Recently released procurements for gun violence reduction efforts in New Orleans may serve as a potential model for juvenile justice and youth-focused programming.

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|---|--|--|
| <p>Intensive Mentorship / Credible Messenger Program for Youth on Probation and for Diversion</p> | <p>Nonprofit/community provider-run program targeting youth on probation and diversion, including high-risk youth. Appropriate for a range of offenses including gun charges and felony-level charges. May incorporate elements from evaluated national programs including NYC's AIM Model and Oakland's NOAB Model, tailored to the New Orleans landscape and existing community assets.</p> | <p>\$500,000 / procurement for contracted nonprofit vendor</p> |
| <p>Intensive Mentorship / CBT Programming for Non-Court-Involved Youth</p> | <p>Intensive mentorship model that provides connection to community services and does not require formal court involvement. A process for identification and referral of appropriate youth and young adults should be developed in conjunction with the schools, NOPD, and other system and community stakeholders. May borrow elements of evaluated national programs including ROCA, Inc, NYC's Next Steps ARCHES Model, CBT programming, as well as potentially employ credible messengers.</p> | <p>\$250,000 / procurement for contracted nonprofit provider</p> <p>Funding for this program may require growth over time.</p> |
| <p>Restorative Justice Intervention</p> | <p>Restorative justice intervention for pre-trial diversion, when harm has occurred and there is a willingness to participate by both the offender and person or people harmed. May integrate intensive case management services, referrals, and an intensive mentorship model in the approach. A referral and communication process should be developed with OPJC and the DA to improve the referral and engagement model of programming.</p> | <p>\$300,000 / procurement for contracted nonprofit vendor</p> <p>*Note: Restorative justice interventions are also appropriate outside of justice involvement and, in particular, can be effective in school conflict mediation. NICJR understands that ARPA funding is being provided for this by the City of New Orleans' efforts to reduce gun violence, but if that changes, such programming would also be a priority.</p> |

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| Mental Health Programming / Family and Trauma Supports | Additional capacity for effective interventions available for Medicaid-eligible young people that work with the family and can support trauma. | \$500,000 / procurement for contracted nonprofit provider; additional work required to identify how to more effectively leverage Medicaid funding and for more targeted program design. |
| Total Programming Costs | | \$1.885 million |

Recommendations for Infrastructure and Coordination: In addition to developing more robust programming to address service gaps in New Orleans, it is equally important to develop an improved mechanism for coordination between all stakeholders of the juvenile justice system. This coordination should allow for ongoing evaluation of program and initiative outcomes, data dissemination and review, identification and resolution of barriers, and coordinated system improvements. This is an appropriate role for the government to play as a part of its oversight responsibility for the system and contracted providers.

While the specifics of such coordination and its exact location within the City of New Orleans government structure are an appropriate determination for the Mayor’s Office to make, the responsibilities of this coordination could include:

- Convening regular meetings of community, nonprofit provider, and system stakeholders for data review and development of strategies for system improvement
- Coordinating collective training and technical assistance opportunities for local providers as well as collective capacity building for data and outcome tracking
- Integrating with existing bodies such as the Children, Youth, and Family Planning Board and the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council
- Reporting out quarterly on indicators of progress internally and to public
- Developing a structure for ongoing engagement with youth and families to provide feedback on effectiveness of overall programming, interventions and service gaps

In the long term, NICJR recommends examination of the benefits of a standing office within the Administration that can oversee and coordinate youth services. In the short term, this requires the immediate addition of at least a senior-level staff person who is appropriately staffed to coordinate and oversee this workstream. Their qualifications should include both subject matter expertise in youth and/or juvenile justice and the ability to work closely and effectively with all relevant stakeholders, including the Courts, DAs, Public Defenders, City Council, nonprofit providers, and the community.

| Support | Description | Annual Cost |
|---------------------------------|---|------------------|
| Coordination Staff | Additional capacity within Mayor’s Office for coordination and oversight | \$240,000 |
| Training / Technical Assistance | Funding to support capacity building and training for local providers in utilizing evidence-based practices, including development of a credible messenger model in New Orleans, and ongoing training and support. May include coordinated training for community providers as well as assistance to government in data collection, evaluation, and coordination of programming and services overall. | \$100,000 |
| Total Support Cost | | \$340,000 |

Total Budget: \$2.225 million annually, for a total cost of \$4.45M. The above recommendations of course do not reflect the totality of the youth justice needs in New Orleans, but they represent an immediate and potentially impactful starting point. NICJR is available to provide additional recommendations if more funds become available, to respond to feedback and provide additional context if needed, and to discuss implementation and next steps. This is an important and critical undertaking that the City of New Orleans is taking on, and we are happy to support its success however we can.

Appendix: Stakeholder Interview Participants

Troi Bechet, CEO of Center for Restorative Approaches

Beth Bousard, Director of Probation and Parole, Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice

Aaron Clark-Rizzio, Co-Executive Director, Louisiana Center for Children's Rights (LCCR)

Judge Ranord Darensburg, New Orleans Juvenile Court

Thelma French, President of Total Community Action, Inc.

Meg Garvey, Orleans Public Defenders

Michael Hickerson, Director of Family in Need of Services (FINS)

Mosi Makori, Chief Program Officer, Credible Messenger Mentoring Movement

Darrin McCall, Chief Program Officer, Youth Empowerment Project

Kristi Nelson, Regional Manager of Probation, Louisiana Office of Juvenile Justice

Elizabeth Ostberg, CEO, Educators of Quality Alternatives

Olin Parker, President, Orleans Parish School Board

Stephen Phillippi, Chair, Behavioral and Community Health Sciences, LSU School of Public Health

Dianne Puig, Chief of Operations of Juvenile Division, New Orleans District Attorney

Kristen Rome, Co-Executive Director, Louisiana Center for Children's Rights (LCCR)

Timolynn Sams, Program Director, Families & Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)

Melissa Sawyer, CEO of Youth Empowerment Project (YEP)

Gina Womack, Executive Director, Families & Friends of Louisiana's Incarcerated Children (FFLIC)

Patricia Watson, CEO, Family Center of Hope