

Broken Promises Broken System

10 Reasons New York City Should Close the Spofford Youth Jail

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The Correctional Association of New York is a non-profit policy analysis and advocacy organization that focuses on criminal justice and prison issues. It is the only independent organization in New York State with the legislative authority to visit state prisons and report its findings to policy makers and the public.

The Correctional Association's Juvenile Justice Project develops and promotes sensible solutions to juvenile crime. The Project carries out research, public education, coalition-building, and advocacy efforts aimed at reducing youth incarceration in New York and at promoting public investment in community-based alternative programs.

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Foreword

This policy brief was written by Malikah J. Kelly, aged 18, a member of the steering committee of the Justice 4 Youth Coalition, a citywide coalition of young people working to stop the over-incarceration of youth in New York City. In addition to being a youth leader in the Justice 4 Youth Coalition, Malikah worked for two years as a youth organizer for the Juvenile Justice Project at the Correctional Association of New York. The Juvenile Justice Project engages in policy research, advocacy, coalition building, and community organizing aimed at reducing the use of youth incarceration and promoting more fair and effective juvenile justice policies.

A central goal of the Justice 4 Youth Coalition is to include young people who have been affected by youth incarceration policies in the public debate about juvenile justice policy. Young people who have been involved in the city's juvenile justice system not only present valuable perspectives and insights into the failings of the system but also have the vision and energy to change juvenile justice policies and our city for the better. We hope this document will encourage juvenile justice professionals (advocates, service providers and policy makers) to involve young people in decision-making about juvenile justice issues.

Although the Spofford Juvenile Center was officially renamed "Bridges" in 1999, we refer to the facility as Spofford in this document to highlight that a new name cannot erase this youth jail's notorious past, nor can it validate the city's decision to keep open a building known for its poor conditions. As part of this project, Malikah interviewed young people who had been incarcerated at Spofford as well as reviewed written materials, such as NYC Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) annual reports and news articles about Spofford.

Malikah first came up with the idea to write a policy brief about Spofford in the summer of 2002, after DJJ decided to cancel a \$64.6 million plan to add secure detention beds to the Crossroads and Horizons detention centers. This decision was a significant victory for the young people and advocates who had mobilized against the city's plan to build more juvenile jail space. However, the city used the canceling of this expansion plan to oppose a long-standing call from community groups to close the troubled Spofford detention center. DJJ officials claimed that they could not permanently shut down Spofford because they did not have enough space at the other two detention centers to accommodate its secure detention population.

Thus, the purpose of this policy brief is to challenge the assertion that the city cannot shut down Spofford unless it builds new jail space to replace this outdated jail. In fact, juvenile crime has declined steadily over the last decade and the city's three secure youth jails are operating below capacity. This paper recommends that New York City take deliberate steps to further reduce the number of young people who are detained in the city's youth jails. Reforming the city's detention policies and practices will enable the city to decrease its detention capacity, save tax dollars, and more effectively address juvenile crime and recidivism.

As outlined in this paper, city officials recognized years ago that Spofford was not an acceptable place to house children and made plans to close the troubled jail and replace it with two smaller facilities. However, in reopening Spofford in 1999, the city missed an important opportunity to make its juvenile justice system more humane and effective. We urge the city to renew its commitment to shut down Spofford and undertake a larger effort aimed at reducing youth incarceration.

Most importantly, closing Spofford would give New York City the ability to redirect juvenile justice resources to effective programs that build healthy and safe neighborhoods. Juvenile justice officials should work with community groups and young people to reinvest public money in proven prevention programs, alternatives to incarceration, and other community-based programs that benefit youth from disadvantaged communities in New York City.

In sum, this paper urges city leaders not only to make good on the promise to close Spofford but also to enact juvenile justice policies that seek to fulfill the promise of all of New York City's youth.

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Acknowledgements

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Mishi Faruqee, Director of the Juvenile Justice Project, helped edit this document and Amadou Diallo did design and layout. Three members of the Justice 4 Youth Coalition, Andre Holder, TreZure Taylor and Liz Clairisier, provided concluding thoughts. I would like to thank Andre and Liz for participating in interviews, as well as Chino Hardin, Moses Weah, Shaking Graham, Bilal Karriem, and Paul Jones, all members of the Justice 4 Youth Coalition.

I would like to give special thanks to Kathleen Feely, a former deputy commissioner of the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), who is currently a Senior Fellow at the Annie E. Casey Foundation, and Tasha Eales, her assistant, for agreeing to be interviewed for this project and for sending us numerous articles and information on Spofford Juvenile Detention Center.

I would also like to acknowledge Rose Washington, a former commissioner of DJJ and director of Spofford, and current Executive Director of the Berkshire Farm Center and Services for Youth, and Elsie Chandler, an attorney with the Neighborhood Defender Service of Harlem, for the insightful information they provided on detention and court policies.

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Broken Promises, Broken System

10 Reasons New York City Should Close the Spofford Youth Jail

Introduction

Spofford Juvenile Center (a.k.a. Bridges) is a secure youth detention facility in the Hunts Point area of the Bronx. It is currently used for intake of newly arrested youth and as a holding center for youth that have been sentenced and are waiting to be transferred to state facilities operated by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). For almost 50 years, Spofford has been a source of criticism and controversy, and is well known for its brutal effects on youth, their families, and their communities. The city's continued investment in Spofford diverts resources from alternatives that would better serve youth. Instead of continuing its use of Spofford, the city would save more money and benefit more youth by closing Spofford. Though the city canceled a \$64.6 million plan to expand Crossroads and Horizons Juvenile Centers, \$8 million remains in the Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) capital budget for yet another renovation of Spofford.

This policy brief aims to highlight the effects of detention on young people, from a young person's perspective, and to recommend ways that New York City can create a more effective, fair, and humane juvenile justice system. Youth and community activists have long argued that any effort to reform the juvenile justice system in New York City must involve the permanent closure of the Spofford jail. This paper presents the following reasons why New York City should close the Spofford youth jail:

- 1. The city made a promise to close Spofford.**
- 2. Spofford is a bad place for young people.**
- 3. Spofford harms young people and lessens community safety.**
- 4. Spofford is a waste of public money.**
- 5. The city should fix schools, not Spofford.**
- 6. Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth are targeted in jail.**
- 7. Youth of color are disproportionately locked up at Spofford.**
- 8. Virtually all children jailed at Spofford are from poor neighborhoods.**
- 9. It is more effective to send a young person to a community-based alternative program than to Spofford.**
- 10. The population at Spofford is down.**

A Brief History of Juvenile Detention in New York

In the late 18th century, juvenile crime was a rare phenomenon. When a young person committed a crime, society believed it was the parent's responsibility to reprimand and correct their child's behavior. However, towards the beginning of the 19th century, attitudes toward the treatment of juvenile crime changed. While it was once believed that state action against juvenile crime would be an interference in the personal matters of the family; the state began to be seen as a possible means to help rehabilitate troubled youth, not necessarily punish them.

In the early 19th century, the New York Society for the Prevention of Pauperism began lobbying for a separate juvenile facility and in 1824 the New York State Assembly constructed the House of Refuge for juvenile delinquents. The House of Refuge was operated for 35 years by the Society for the Reformation of Juvenile Delinquents.

In 1865, the New York State Legislature enacted the Disorderly Child Act, which stated that if a parent or guardian filed a complaint against their child, a warrant for a child's arrest could be issued, and the child would be sent to the House of Refuge. The Disorderly Child Act represented a move away from parental authority and allowed youth to be detained for "disorderly conduct," not necessarily committing a crime. In 1902, New York created a separate court system that allowed all cases involving youth to be heard by a juvenile justice court.

Towards the late 1920's, the Children's Court Act of New York City changed some previous laws concerning juvenile detention. One such change was the merging of the categories of criminal activity, disorderly conduct and truancy under the larger heading of juvenile delinquency. Other detention facilities were opened, including the Hanavah Lavenburg Home, the Youth House, and the Manida Juvenile Center.

In 1957, the juvenile detention population had soared, creating extreme overcrowding in the existing facilities. The overcrowding was most serious at the Youth House, and the facility moved to a new location in the Hunts Point area of the Bronx. The boys' facility was initially called the Spofford Youth House, and the girls' facility was called the Manida Juvenile Center, but both eventually came to be known as Spofford Juvenile Center.

During the 1970's, New York City's Human Resources Administration and the Department of Probation both attempted to run Spofford, but did not make any successful reforms. To help solve some of the problems in the facility, New York City's Mayor, Ed Koch, created a Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) in 1979, which began operating Spofford and the city's non-secure facilities. Paul Strasburg, the first commissioner of DJJ, made decentralizing Spofford a priority. This plan called for the replacement of Spofford with small, community-based facilities that were more accessible and less institutional.

Reason #1: The city made a promise to close Spofford.

"It took the power of the community to close Spofford."
— Shaking Graham

The city's promise to close Spofford was a result of a sustained community-led campaign involving young people, Bronx residents, and advocates. Two new, state-of-the-art facilities were to replace Spofford. These facilities would have a design similar to that of a community center, completely different from the long, winding halls and dim lighting that were characteristic of Spofford. In 1998, the NYC Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) opened the Crossroads Juvenile Center and Horizons Juvenile Center, built at a combined cost of \$70 million, and closed Spofford. However, the city's detention population was also rising at this time. Thus, the city made the controversial decision to lease the Vernon C. Bain Barge from the NYC Department of Correction and use it as an intake facility for young people entering DJJ secure detention. Months later, due to public criticism over detaining youth on a jail barge, DJJ chose to renege on its promise to permanently shut down Spofford and spent \$8 million to renovate the facility. In December 1999, DJJ renamed the jail, Bridges Juvenile Center, and opened it as an intake facility.

With the reopening of Spofford, the city had more juvenile detention beds than ever. However, in 2001, the city again sought to further expand its detention capacity by 200 beds, at a cost of \$64.6 million. Ultimately, the city decided to cancel this plan, largely as a result of the mobilization of youth and community organizations against it. However, the \$64.6 million proposal and the continued use of Spofford represent the city's lack of political will to use more effective and cost-efficient alternatives.

Reason #2: Spofford is a bad place for young people.

"Being at Spofford was very depressing and scary."
— Chino Hardin

The conditions at Spofford have a strong psychological effect on a young person that is detained there. The building's physical design consists of long dark hallways, barred windows, and cell block style rooms. Spofford residents must use open showers and toilets. They receive clothing and underwear that have already been used and the facility is known for its poor sanitation. In 1997, *The Daily News* reported that the dining hall at Spofford is "overrun by roaches that invade the food."¹ The rooms are small and narrow and do not allow for circulation of fresh air. "I was so horrified . . . it was not a place I thought children should be" said a former DJJ official.² The physical space at Spofford does not accommodate the needs of youth, and does not allow for adequate programming.³

Hostility from staff and residents also contribute to the damaging effects of locking up a young person at Spofford. Some Spofford staff members are known to be brutal in their treatment, inflicting verbal and physical abuse on the residents. In the words of one young person, "Staff was totally mean. I used to think they be looking for a reason to manhandle some of the kids."⁴ Another young person reported that, on certain occasions, staff would allow residents to go to other units and start fights.⁵ *The Daily News* reported a case in which a Spofford counselor was fired for sexually assaulting a 15-year-old girl whose hands and feet were shackled.⁶ In a single year, there were over 50 attempted suicides reported.⁷ Despite physical improvements of the facility, youth incarcerated at Spofford continue to be exposed to physical violence and gang activity. One young person interviewed felt that he needed to join a gang for protection while he was in the jail because of the violent atmosphere.⁸

Reason # 3: Spofford harms young people and lessens community safety.

"I saw a lot of gang activity when I was at Spofford, and for some reason, I liked it."
– Andre Holder

Regardless of the crime with which a young person may be charged, incarceration will not contribute to their rehabilitation. Spending time in detention separates youth from their families, and from their communities and exposes them to a negative culture that they may not have encountered otherwise. Secure detention creates an extremely dangerous atmosphere for youth. The assumption that a young person who spends time in detention will be "scared straight" is faulty; time spent in detention only teaches a young person how to "be a better criminal." Incarcerated youth are likely to experience violence, from both residents and staff, and also become exposed to gang activity. When a young person's safety is threatened, he or she becomes more inclined to react violently out of concern for protecting him or herself.

Being incarcerated also creates more problems for young people upon their release. Youth can be released from DJJ's custody at any point in the year; therefore they may face difficulty reenrolling in school, particularly if they are released in the middle of the academic semester. In some cases, a young person may not be able to return to the school he or she attended before being incarcerated, due to administrative issues or personal needs. Once enrolled in school, a young person coming out of detention may also face problems catching up to the rest of his or her classmates and becoming familiar with that school's curriculum. Though the schooling in detention is provided by the Department of Education, there is not a strongly established curriculum, students are not able to take Regents examinations, and they only earn a fraction of a credit for each class. Because of these factors, detention makes it very easy for a young person to fall behind academically. It is also challenging for young people to find employment or community programs upon their release from detention.

Furthermore, once young people have been incarcerated, it is very likely that they will be rearrested after their release. The extremely high recidivism rates suggest that incarceration does not address the needs of youth nor does it ensure community safety. Forty-seven percent of youth released from DJJ custody return to detention within a year and 76% of youth released from OCFS facilities return within 3 years.¹⁰ Meanwhile, 91% of youth successfully complete the Department of Probation's Alternative to Detention (ATD) program. Based on these statistics, it is clear that alternative programs are much more effective in addressing the needs of young people.

Reason #4: Spofford is a waste of public money.

"Spofford is a grave expense for New York City and uses up resources that should be used to address the needs of the city's communities."
– TreZure Taylor

The costs of secure detention in New York City are astounding. To hold one person in secure detention costs \$358 a day, or \$130,670 per year. DJJ spent approximately \$70 million to construct two new juvenile facilities and an additional \$8 million to renovate and reopen Spofford after the facility's brief closure in 1998. DJJ currently spends \$14 million annually to operate Spofford, and also budgeted \$7.2 million for another renovation of the facility in the FY2003 budget.

In contrast, education and community-based programs, which are more effective alternatives, are far less expensive. The Department of Education spends \$10,694 per year to educate one student in the public school system. Community-based alternative-to-detention programs run by non-profit organizations cost between \$9000 and \$14,000 a year per participant. In addition, the Department of Probation's Alternative to Detention (ATD) program costs only \$27 a day, a small fraction of the cost of secure detention. However, due to the city's current fiscal crisis, funding for alternative programs and education, as well as other social services, is being dramatically reduced. By closing Spofford, the city would be able to restore this lost funding, and save \$14 million in operating costs each year.

The city's investment in juvenile detention diverts resources from other important alternatives. With the \$130,670 the city spends on incarcerating one young person, at least 10 youths could be sent to community-based alternative programs and 12 young people could be educated in the city's public schools. That same amount of money could also be used to pay for 10 young people to receive a 4-year education at one of the CUNY colleges.

Reason #5: The city should fix schools, not Spofford.

"Our school needs more text books, erasers, chalk, chairs and desks... Sometimes, we have to share with other classes."
— A student at I.S. 129 (excerpt from Justice 4 Youth Coalition school survey)

If Spofford were closed, the \$7.2 million allocated in the capital budget for renovating the facility could be used to improve physical conditions in the city's public schools. The Justice 4 Youth Coalition, a youth-led coalition comprised of several community organizations, formerly incarcerated youth, students and other community members, surveyed several schools in New York City in early 2003. 84 out of 100 students surveyed said that the physical structure of their school did not encourage them to learn and 86 out of 100 students surveyed said that their schools needed capital repairs. These repairs included better ventilation and lighting, and repaired walls and ceilings (77 out of 100 students reported that their schools had cracked, leaky ceilings, damaged walls, and poor lighting).

The \$14 million spent annually for operating Spofford could be used to bring more supplies into schools that are lacking. 69 out of 100 students surveyed reported that their school lacked basic equipment, such as up-to-date computers, decent textbooks, desks and chairs. Money spent to operate Spofford could be better used to restore the funding that has been cut from the Department of Education, the summer youth employment program, and after school programs. These are all feasible options that can only be made possible if Spofford is shut down.

Reason #6: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered youth are targeted in jail.

*"I am treated with constant discrimination and both physical and verbal abuse...
Today a staff person called me a 'stupid f---t'... I feel like I live in hell."*
— excerpt of a letter from a young person in detention

While juvenile detention does not meet the needs of youth in general, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) youth are particularly alienated while in the system. A study done by the Urban Justice Center found that LGBT youth comprise 4 to 10 percent of the juvenile detention population¹¹. Many LGBT youth face social stigma and family problems that lead to their involvement in the juvenile justice system. In school they may face taunting and criticism, and oftentimes, physical violence from other students. LGBT students are more than twice as likely to have a fight at school, and three times more likely to be threatened or physically hurt at school. They are also more likely to skip school out of concern for their safety.¹²

The home environment also affects the fate of LGBT youth. Parents who reject their child's sexuality can have a great impact on their child's behavior. Rejection by the family may cause an LGBT youth to become involved in certain self-destructive activities, including substance abuse, rebellious behavior, and suicide attempts. Approximately 26% of LGBT youth are forced to leave home as a result of conflicts over their sexual orientation and 40% of homeless youth are believed to be LGBT.¹³ Homeless youth are generally more likely to become involved with the juvenile justice system by committing survival crimes, such as prostitution, robbery, or selling drugs, in order to provide for themselves. Also, homeless youth can be arrested for "false impersonation," or lying to the police about their age or place of residence.¹⁴

LGBT youth also suffer from many misperceptions once they are in the system. Youth who are not openly LGBT may be classified as such due to certain stereotypes. A boy who is slightly effeminate or a masculine girl may be labeled as gay or lesbian, but youth who do not fit these stereotypes may be overlooked. Also, many people who work with

LGBT youth in the juvenile justice system often associate them with sex offenders, which may cause them to be isolated or treated differently than other residents.¹⁵ Staff often lack training on how to address the needs of LGBT youth, which adds to the already hostile environment an LGBT youth faces in detention. Facility staff need to be aware of and sensitive to the needs of LGBT youth, and how their needs may differ from the needs of heterosexual youth.

There is also a scarcity of sentencing options that are appropriate for LGBT youth. Some LGBT youth may be placed in a more restrictive setting than their charges warrant, simply due to the judges' concern for their safety. In other cases, LGBT youth may be forced to reside in a facility's special housing unit, in which they are virtually isolated from the rest of the population. This segregation reinforces social stigma and the idea of unequal treatment of LGBT youth.

Reason #7: Youth of color are disproportionately locked up at Spofford.

"We live in a society where for some people "You are innocent until proven guilty" while for others you are in handcuffs before you can even say "What did I do wrong?"... For youth of color, "We are GUILTY until proven innocent."

— Liz Clairisier

"If there wasn't so many of us going to jail, the world would be very different. Our family roots have been cut by the prison system."

— Moses Weah

The city's juvenile detention system shows an extreme racial imbalance. While African-American and Latino youth comprise only two-thirds of the city's population, they make up 95% of the detention population. Youth of color are far more likely to come into contact with the juvenile justice system. Some have argued that youth of color's overrepresentation in juvenile detention centers is the result of their committing more crimes than white youth. However, a national study found that in 1998 the majority of juvenile arrests involved white youth, but a greater percentage of youth of color were detained for the same offenses.¹⁶ This report also found that, when charged with the same offenses, Latino youth were three times more likely to be incarcerated than white youth and African American youth were six times more likely to be incarcerated than white youth. Youth of color also stay in detention longer. In 1993, African American youth were held for an average of 61 days longer than white youth, and Latino youth were held for an average of 112 days longer than white youth¹⁷.

The most striking disparity in detention rates is among drug offenses. In 1997, drug cases involving white youth were 66% of the drug cases referred to juvenile court, but only 44% of those detained. Drug offense cases involving African American youth were only 32% of those referred to juvenile court, but 55% of those detained.¹⁸

Reason #8: Virtually all children jailed at Spofford are from poor neighborhoods.

"I started selling drugs because my mother wasn't financially stable. I had 2 brothers and 2 sisters ... she was on welfare ... it was really complicated for us."

— Andre Holder

Youth of color are incarcerated at higher rates than white youth, just as youth from particular neighborhoods are incarcerated more frequently. The communities with the highest number of youth admitted to DJJ are Harlem, South Jamaica, Bedford-Stuyvesant, Soundview, University Heights, Tremont, East New York, and the South Bronx.¹⁹ Youth from only 15 of the city's 59 districts make up over half of all admissions to DJJ.²⁰

The high incarceration rates in these areas have a definite correlation with the lack of resources in these communities. The neighborhoods with the highest number of youth entering the system also have under-performing schools, high poverty rates, poor housing, and lack programs that meet the needs of youth. Students attending schools that are lacking in resources and are unable to provide adequate education often experience a sense of academic failure and become chronically truant. Eighty percent of youth in detention suffer from learning or emotional disabilities that affect their education. Youth growing up in poor neighborhoods become more likely to commit quality of life crimes.

In 2002, 17.3% were charged with crimes against property, which includes burglary, grand larceny, and petit larceny, and 8.4% were charged with drug crimes.²¹

In addition to these social problems, many of the young people in detention have experienced family problems. Research has shown that childhood abuse or neglect increased the odds of juvenile delinquency by 59%, and that youth who had been abused or neglected got arrested more frequently, and at younger ages than youth that had not been abused or neglected.²² Many of the girls in the juvenile justice system have experienced sexual and physical abuse. Because of the family environment a young person may come from, authorities may decide to use detention as an alternative, to protect a young person from returning to a negative home atmosphere. In such cases, young people may be detained not for their actions, but because their parent or guardian has been deemed irresponsible. Youth in foster care are also over-represented in the system. 15% of youth in detention were in foster care at the time they were arrested. They tend to be detained because they lack adult involvement at each stage in the court process, and are less likely to have a place to go instead of detention (many foster care youth are arrested in group homes).

Reason #9: It is more effective to send a young person to a community-based alternative program than to Spofford.

"After less than a year in an ATI [alternative to incarceration], I got my GED and got into college. I guess the ATI worked better than being arrested 8 times"

– Liz Clairisier

The high recidivism rates suggest that detention does not address the needs of youth. In 2003, 47% of youth in detention had been in DJJ custody at least once previously in the same year.²³ 81% of boys and 45% of girls leaving OCFS facilities are rearrested within three years.²⁴ These statistics show that youth who have been incarcerated face many obstacles in their transition back into their communities. Alternative programs can help make this transition easier.

Youth who participate in DJJ's voluntary aftercare program are much less likely to be rearrested than youth who do not participate in the aftercare program. Of youth who were rearrested in 2001, non-participants were arrested 60% more frequently than youth participating in aftercare. An audit by the City Comptroller found that if all eligible children in New York City were enrolled in aftercare, the city and state would save over \$22 million annually. However, aftercare and other post-detention and delinquency prevention programs have been severely cut. In 2001, \$660,000 was cut from DJJ's Community Based Intervention (CBI) program. Advocates argue that the city should transfer control of the aftercare program from DJJ to the Department of Youth and Community Development (DYCD), which is the city agency responsible for funding community-based youth organizations. DYCD could help community groups operate aftercare and alternative programs, particularly because these organizations are better able to work with youth and families in their local area. Youth may also be more willing to participate in programs run by a community organization, instead of DJJ because there is less social stigma.

The city's primary diversion program is the Department of Probation's Alternative to Detention (ATD) program. This program works with the Department of Education and operates sites in the Bronx, Manhattan, Queens, and Brooklyn. The program consists mainly of school classes and counseling programs. Over 94% of youth that are enrolled successfully complete the ATD program. The Expanded Alternative to Detention (EATD) program, which was designed to reduce the city's reliance on secure detention, allows youth facing more serious problems to have the option of being paroled. Unlike the ATD program, youth in EATD participate in the program during after-school hours as well as during school hours. The only 2 EATD centers are in Manhattan and the Bronx, and Family Court judges in Brooklyn and Queens have said they would be willing to send youth to EATD instead of detention, if the program had sites in their boroughs.²⁵

The Department of Probation estimates that the ATD and EATD programs save the city and state about \$2 million annually. The city spends approximately \$36 million a year on detention.²⁶ If the city were to reduce spending on secure detention and close Spofford, money would be available to expand and improve ATD and EATD programs.

Reason #10: The population at Spofford is down.

“Since these facilities are under capacity, there’s more of a reason to shut them down and focus on getting youth into community-based programs.”

— Bilal Karriem

From FY 2001 to FY 2002, admissions to DJJ secure detention decreased by 5% and the average daily population in secure detention decreased by 21%.²⁷ In addition, the average length of stay in secure detention decreased by 7%.²⁸ Though Spofford has enough bed space to hold 150 young people, the average daily population for FY 2002 was 101, and on June 30, 2002, there were only 78 young people held there.²⁹ Crossroads and Horizons have a combined capacity of 248 beds, but in FY 2002, the average daily population of both facilities added up to only 184.³⁰ In other words, there were a total of 113 empty beds among the city’s three secure facilities. The city could close Spofford and consolidate its detention population at Crossroads and Horizons. Also, given that the population for non-secure detention (NSD) has decreased, more eligible youth can be sent to NSD in lieu of secure detention.

In addition, the city can reduce the population at Spofford by stopping the practice of detaining youth from outside New York City. In FY2002, DJJ held a significant number of young people from other parts of the state – including from as far away as Buffalo in Erie County. In 2002, Erie County sent young people to Spofford (almost 8 hours away) because that county’s new secure facility was still under construction. Other young people from outside New York City were held at Spofford because they live in counties that do not have secure pre-trial detention centers. In 2002, the average daily population of youth from other authorities held at Spofford increased from 0 to almost 30.³¹

Conclusion

Recommendations

1. **Shut down Spofford and convert the building into a use that benefits the community.**
2. **Use the cost savings from closing Spofford to fund alternatives to detention, after school programs and other programs that help young people succeed.**
3. **Reallocate the \$11 million in capital funds for fixing up Spofford to renovate the city's most dilapidated schools.**
4. **Create a youth oversight committee that has a real role in making decisions about policies and public spending that affect youth.**

Closing Thoughts³²

How can young people understand their wrongdoing if you just throw them behind locked doors? Young people make mistakes, but so do judges, district attorneys, and DJJ officials. We want the city and society to understand the ups and downs we young people go through. —Andre Holder

The majority of crimes committed by young people are a result of the circumstances in their lives. If the objective is to reform youth who get in trouble, then their circumstances must be reformed. Schools need to be reformed; housing conditions need to be reformed. And we need to remove the stigma young people face because they are brown and because they are poor. —TreZure Taylor

Spofford is a place that criminalizes, dehumanizes, and institutionalizes young people. What's worse is that schools are under-funded and over-crowded, while juvenile detention centers are over-funded and over-used. Currently we live in a society that puts a band-aid over a gun shot wound — a society that does not want to understand or to acknowledge the inequalities that exist. —Liz Clairisier

Footnotes

- ¹ Lisa Rein and Kevin Flynn, "Spofford Shutting Down", *The Daily News*, December 12, 1997.
- ² Phone interview with Kathleen Feely, former Deputy Commissioner of NYC Department of Juvenile Justice.
- ³ Ibid.
- ⁴ Face-to-face interview with Chino Hardin.
- ⁵ Face-to-face interview with Andre Holder.
- ⁶ Lisa Rein and Kevin Flynn, "Spofford Shutting Down", *The Daily News*, December 12, 1997.
- ⁷ Anemona Hartocolis, "The Rehabilitation of Spofford," *Newsday*, August 16, 1989.
- ⁸ Face-to-face interview with Andre Holder.
- ⁹ Face-to-face interview with Paul Jones.
- ¹⁰ NYC Department of Juvenile Justice, *Annual Report of Population Statistics*, 2003.
- ¹¹ Randi Feinstein, Andrea Greenblatt, Lauren Hass, Sally Kohn, and Julianne Rana, *Justice for All: A Report on Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Youth in the New York Juvenile Justice System*, the Urban Justice Center, 2001. p.1.
- ¹² Ibid, p.12.
- ¹³ Ibid, p.13.
- ¹⁴ Ibid, p.19.
- ¹⁵ Ibid. p.27.
- ¹⁶ Eileen Poe-Yamagata and Michael A. Jones, *And Justice for Some*, Building Blocks for Youth, April 2000.
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- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ibid.
- ¹⁹ NYC Department of Juvenile Justice, *Annual Report of Population Statistics*, 2003.
- ²⁰ Correctional Association of New York, *Rethinking Juvenile Detention in New York City*, April 2002.
- ²¹ NYC Department of Juvenile Justice, *Annual Report of Population Statistics*, 2003.
- ²² Correctional Association of New York, *Rethinking Juvenile Detention in New York City*, April 2002.
- ²³ New York City Office of the Mayor, *Mayor's Management Report*, Fiscal Year 2003.
- ²⁴ New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, *Factors Contributing to Recidivism Among Youth Placed with the New York State Division for Youth*, 1999.
- ²⁵ Correctional Association of New York, *Rethinking Juvenile Detention in New York City*, April 2002.
- ²⁶ Ibid.
- ²⁷ NYC Department of Juvenile Justice, *Annual Report of Population Statistics*, 2003.
- ²⁸ Ibid.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² These quotes, as well as all the quotes in this document, are from youth members of the Justice 4 Youth Coalition.

