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## **Youth Incarceration Sees Dramatic Drop in the United States**

**Decline signals opportunity for alternative, more effective  
responses to court-involved youth**

Providence, RI (February 27, 2013) – The national Annie E. Casey Foundation released a report highlighting the decrease in youth incarceration over a 15-year period in the United States. This downward trend, revealed in data from the U.S. Census Bureau’s Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement, has accelerated in recent years, and has reached a 35-year low.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Snapshot* indicates that the number of young people in correctional facilities in the U.S. on a single day fell from a high of 107,637 in 1995 to 70,792 in 2010. “Correctional facilities” are defined in this *Snapshot* as both long-term facilities, such as training schools or juvenile justice residential placements, and short-term facilities, including detention.

The number of children at the Rhode Island Training School or a juvenile justice residential placement fell by 42% between 1997 and 2010 (from 426 to 249). Rhode Island is in the top third of states with the most decline.

“Juvenile justice systems have a range of options for monitoring and rehabilitating youth offenders,” stated Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “Alternatives to incarcerating youth, such as programs that are community-based, intensive, and involve the families of the youth, have been shown to be more successful in preventing recidivism and more cost-effective than incarceration.”

Nationally and in Rhode Island, most youth held in secure confinement are held for nonviolent offenses — such as low-level property offenses and technical probation violations — that are not clear public safety threats.

“Locking up young people has lifelong consequences, as incarcerated youth experience lower educational achievement, more unemployment, higher alcohol and substance abuse rates and greater chances of run-ins with the law as adults,” said Bart Lubow, director of the Foundation’s Juvenile Justice Strategy Group. “Our decreasing reliance on incarceration presents an exceptional opportunity to respond to juvenile delinquency in a more cost-effective and humane way — and to give these youth a real chance to turn themselves around.”

The *Snapshot*, which follows the Foundation’s 2011 report *No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*, indicates most states and the District of Columbia mirrored the national decline, according to data from the U.S. Department of Justice’s Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. Several even halved their youth incarceration rates. Still, the rates vary dramatically by state: In 2010, a young person in South Dakota, which has the highest incarceration rate, was 11 times more likely to be locked up than one in Vermont, which has the lowest.

Although the nation’s five largest racial groups saw decreasing numbers of youth who were incarcerated, the data show that youth of color were disproportionately incarcerated. African Americans were nearly five times as likely to be locked up as their white counterparts, and Latinos and American Indians were two to three times as likely.

The *KIDS COUNT Data Snapshot* suggests several ways to continue promoting less reliance on incarceration and improve the odds for young people involved in the justice system. These include restricting incarceration to youth posing a clear risk to public safety; investing in alternatives that effectively supervise, sanction and treat youth in their homes and communities; and encouraging states to seek community-based alternatives to locking up kids.

The new *Snapshot* features the latest data for states, the District of Columbia and the nation, as does the KIDS COUNT Data Center, home to comprehensive national, state and local statistics on child well-being. The Data Center allows users to create rankings, maps and graphs for use in publications and on websites, and to view real-time information on mobile devices.

“Rhode Island has been making improvements to our juvenile justice system, by working toward identifying alternatives to incarceration for youth who do not require a secure facility,” said Bryant. “The newest Rhode Island data since 2010 (the cut off for data used in the *Snapshot*) has shown a continued decline in the number of youth at the Rhode Island Training School or in juvenile justice residential placements.”

Data on youth involved with the juvenile justice system in Rhode Island is available in *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*, which can be found at [www.rikidscount.org](http://www.rikidscount.org).

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*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.*

*The Annie E. Casey Foundation is a private national philanthropy that develops solutions to a build brighter future for children, families and communities. For nearly two decades, the Foundation has supported efforts to reform the juvenile justice system, primarily through its groundbreaking Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, a model adopted by a nationwide network of about 200 jurisdictions in 39 states and the District of Columbia. For more information, visit [www.aecf.org](http://www.aecf.org).*

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