



NEW YORK STATE BUDGET TESTIMONY
PUBLIC PROTECTIONS
February 12, 2026

Submitted by Dr. Megan French-Marcelin on behalf of the NYC Youth Justice Provider Coalition
Re: Youth Justice Innovation Fund [S.643/A.8491](#)

As a coalition of community-based youth justice providers in New York City, we urge New York to help align youth justice policy with youth justice investment. Although New York City accounts for roughly half of the state’s youth justice population, our communities and organizations cannot access funding intended to support implementation of Raise the Age, due to a requirement that funds be earmarked for jurisdictions that adhere to a two-percent tax cap and a complex county plan process that is difficult for community organizations to access. The Youth Justice Innovation Fund (**S.643/A.8491**) offers a long-overdue course correction—one that directs public investment to the people, programs, and communities already doing the work to build safety and opportunity for young people in every city and county in New York.

Raise the Age was enacted to ensure that 16- and 17-year-olds would no longer be prosecuted as adults in New York State. Since the law’s implementation in 2019, youth incarceration and arrest rates have declined significantly.¹ This is in spite of the fact that the State has failed to follow through on the law’s promise to shore up funding for community-based services and supports. Of the more than \$1.71 billion appropriated to implement Raise the Age since 2017, less than one-third has been spent.²

New York City has received none of the Raise the Age funding to date, even as appropriated dollars remain largely unspent statewide and, where county plans have been approved, funding has been directed primarily toward probation staffing, detention, placement, and law enforcement. In the highest-arrest counties outside New York City, only 10 to 20 percent of approved Raise the Age spending has gone to community-based services.³ At the same time, New York City community-based providers have had no pathway to access these funds at all, leaving organizations without the resources needed to expand prevention, diversion, and reentry services.

¹ [John Jay College Research and Evaluation Center, Minor Role III: Youth Under Age 18 and New York City Violence \(New York: John Jay College of Criminal Justice, 2025\).](#)

² [Legal Aid Society, “Youth Justice Advocacy Day Advisory,” February 3, 2026](#)

³ [New York State Office of the State Comptroller, “DiNapoli Releases Report on State Spending to Implement Raise the Age Law,” press release, May 2025.](#)

The Youth Justice Innovation Fund would address this gap by dedicating \$50 million annually from existing Raise the Age appropriations to community-based organizations through a competitive grant process administered by the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services.⁴ The Fund would support a full continuum of services for youth ages 12 to 25, including prevention, early intervention, alternatives to detention and incarceration, and reentry support. It is modeled on successful statewide investments such as Project RISE, which has demonstrated that direct funding to community-based organizations using public health strategies can reduce violence and strengthen community safety.⁵

This age range is critical for community-based providers, whose most effective prevention and intervention models are designed to serve young people based on their age, circumstances, and level of need—not court status alone. Providers cannot be effective if they are forced to turn away a 15-year-old simply because they are not Raise the Age-eligible, or a younger sibling because programs are limited to serving only mandated youth. Credible messenger mentoring, and family-based models work best when they are able to serve court-involved and non-court-involved young people together, strengthening prevention, encouraging word-of-mouth referrals, and reducing deeper system involvement.

This funding would make it possible to expand the programs we know change lives. Mentoring and other credible messenger initiatives; family-based therapeutic interventions such as Functional Family Therapy and Multisystemic Therapy; trauma-informed mental health services; educational re-engagement, workforce development, and employment support; and restorative justice approaches. Research consistently shows that these community-based interventions reduce recidivism and improve long-term outcomes more effectively than incarceration.⁶

These approaches are already working in New York City. The Arches Transformative Mentoring program, which pairs young people on probation with trained credible messengers, has shown particularly strong outcomes: A 2018 evaluation by the Urban Institute found that participants were more than 50 percent less likely than a matched comparison group to be reconvicted of a felony within two years.⁷

Other New York City youth programs have also demonstrated measurable results. exalt youth works with justice-involved youth aged 15–19 at multiple intercept points, focusing on reconnection to education, career readiness, and key life skills, followed by a nine-week paid internship in which 99 percent of participants are progressing in school two years after completing the program.⁸ Youth initiatives operated by CASES' ROAR program have similarly reported high completion rates, and 91% of participants do not have any new arrests for over a year.⁹ Together, these examples reflect the depth of New York City's community-based provider network and the

⁴ [Reducing Violence and Changing Lives Through Community Intervention | Justice Matters | Bureau of Justice Assistance](#)

⁵ New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services, *Project RISE (Respond, Invest, Sustain, Empower)* [Governor Hochul Announces \\$1.5 Million in Federal Funding to Three Communities for New Juvenile Delinquency Prevention Pilot Project](#)

⁶ Richard Mendel, *Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration*, The Sentencing Project, June 2023, [Effective Alternatives to Youth Incarceration – The Sentencing Project](#)

⁷ [Matthew Lynch et al., *Arches Transformative Mentoring Program: An Implementation and Impact Evaluation in New York City*, Urban Institute, 2018.](#)

⁸ [exalt youth, “Vision,” accessed February 2026](#)

⁹ [Center for Alternative Sentencing and Employment Services \(CASES\) | Brooklyn, NY | Cause IQ](#)

outcomes that are possible when young people are supported through alternatives to detention and incarceration. This investment would allow this kind of success to be expanded and sustained in New York City and, where appropriate, across the state.

A review of approved Raise the Age spending in the ten counties outside New York City with the highest youth arrest rates shows that, even where funds have been accessed, the vast majority have been directed toward carceral and supervisory costs rather than community-based services. In these counties, only a small share of approved Raise the Age funding has been allocated to prevention, diversion, and other community-based supports, while the remainder has been used to sustain detention, placement, probation staffing, and law enforcement infrastructure. This pattern demonstrates that the current funding structure has failed to meaningfully shift investment toward the services most effective at keeping young people out of the justice system.

The consequences of this approach are concrete and harmful. When Raise the Age dollars are used primarily to reinforce existing system responses, opportunities to build community-based capacity are lost—resulting in fewer prevention programs, limited alternatives to detention, and constrained reentry supports in communities with the greatest need, particularly Black and Brown communities, and missed opportunities to intervene before deeper system involvement. In New York City, where community-based providers have had no access to Raise the Age funding at all, this failure is compounded, leaving organizations unable to scale proven approaches despite serving a significant share of the state’s justice-involved youth. The Youth Justice Innovation Fund offers a necessary correction by creating a direct, dedicated pathway for investment in community-based organizations that are best positioned to deliver effective, equitable youth justice outcomes.

We urge the New York State Legislature and Governor Hochul to support full funding for the Youth Justice Innovation Fund in the FY2026 State Budget. We also encourage continued partnership with youth leaders, advocates, and community-based providers to shape implementation in ways that are transparent, equitable, and grounded in lived experience.

Every day, we see how community-based support can change a young person’s trajectory. As one participant shared, “This is the first place I ever felt someone had my back without trying to lock me up.” That is the vision at the heart of this request—not just fewer arrests, but stronger communities where young people are supported rather than punished.

New York has changed the law. Now we must fund the future. We welcome the opportunity to work in partnership with the State Legislature to deliver on the full promise of youth justice reform.

Respectfully submitted,
NYC Youth Justice Coalition