

RICHARD THOMAS
MAYOR

March 31, 2017

Carl E. Heastie
Assembly Member - District 83
LOB 932
Albany, NY 12248

RE: Raise The Age

Dear Assembly Member Carl E. Heastie,

I write to you today to urge your support for Governor Andrew Cuomo's proposal to raise the age upon which juveniles in the New York State criminal justice system are treated as adults. New York is an outlier when it comes to the treatment of juveniles. 48 other states recognize the societal harm associated with applying strict criminal responsibility laws to young adults. New York joins North Carolina as the only two states in the union who consider teenagers to be adults when entering the court system.

As Mayor of the City of Mount Vernon, I am acutely aware of the negative impacts that a city experiences when young people are directed towards the school-to-prison pipeline and not given opportunities to mature, be educated, or rehabilitate themselves for past mistakes. A smart society invests in educating its children not in jailing them.

Last year, my office produced a white paper detailing some of policy investments we believe our state elected leaders could make that would permit transformative change in the way we treat our young people. We believe that investing in STEM education, after-school programs, and vocational opportunities will show and show young men and women that there is a responsible path to success. Mount Vernon is bringing back School Resource Officers into our high and middle schools enabling one-on-one daily mentorship opportunities with law enforcement. The policy paper outlines the progressive changes that will give our children a chance to seize the American dream. Thank you for taking the time to review the enclosed information. My team and I are available to discuss this important matter.

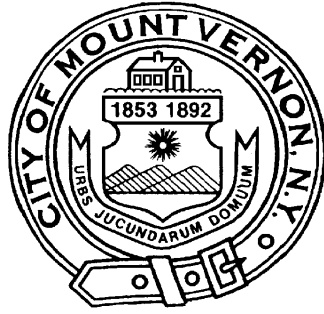
Respectfully,



Mayor Richard Thomas

CITY OF MOUNT VERNON, NEW YORK ♦ OFFICE OF THE MAYOR ♦ CITY HALL - ROOSEVELT SQUARE ♦
MOUNT VERNON, NEW YORK 10550 ♦ (914) 665-2300 ♦ WWW.CMVNY.COM

“The City of Hope”



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A Juvenile Justice Reform Issue Brief by Mayor Richard Thomas

Albany Should Mandate a Second Chance for Juveniles

The City of Mount Vernon has a serious crisis on its hands. Our teenagers and young adults are missing. Over the past four decades, incarceration rates in this country have risen to astronomical heights in comparison to other industrialized nations. Most of those incarcerated are poor, black and male. It's not a coincidence that Mount Vernon sends the most people to jail in Westchester County. As you read this, there are thousands of people from Mount Vernon who call the Westchester County Correctional facility in Valhalla their home. Governor Andrew Cuomo recently announced reforms to New York's juvenile justice system. As legislators in Albany convene for another session, we look forward to them working collectively with the Governor to pass legislation and funding solutions that will prioritize prevention over punishment.

I. The Problem

Cold, hard facts confirm that our youth, mostly brown, are losing their future. In April 2015, the *New York Times* released a report titled "1.5 million missing black men," which highlighted the following:

- 17 missing black men for every 100 black women.
- 1 missing white man for every 100 white women.

- In cities with sizable black populations the average is between 25 and 40 missing black men for every 100 black women.

Specific to New York, approximately 309,000 people between the ages of 12 and 24 were incarcerated in 2014.¹ The amount of young people locked up is exceedingly high, the cost to keep them behind bars is equally as staggering. According to a 2012 report by the Vera Institute, the estimated average annual cost to incarcerate an adult is \$60,076, much lower than the 2010 Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) report numbers which estimates the cost to incarcerate a juvenile at \$266,000.^{2 3} The cost to keep troubled teens behind bars is a four times the amount to incarcerate an adult. Perhaps, “cost effectiveness” may be the main contributing factor as to why many youthful offenders find themselves transferred to an adult facility?

II. The Sensible Solution

Data from OCFS indicates that mental health issues and substance abuse problems account for 74 and 76 percent of the needs of juveniles at intake.⁴ If the system remains designed to punish, then this costly generational crisis will continue to steal the future from young people who appear to make unwitting choices. Urban cities like Mount Vernon will be hit hardest, undermining relationships at home and in our schools. Other suburban communities will continue to struggle with the surprise of cheap narcotics (like heroin) sneaking into the lives of young people unless we invest in policies to address the root causes of juvenile offenses.

¹ "Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2014," Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A. and Kang, W. (2015), Online. Available: <http://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/> Accessed on January 20, 2016

² “The Price of Prisons | New York,” Vera Institute, January 2012 Link: <http://vera.org/files/price-of-prisons-new-york-fact-sheet.pdf> Accessed on January 20, 2016

³ "The Cost of Juvenile Justice," Simmonds, M., Juvenile Justice Journeys, Link: <http://www.juvenilejusticejourneys.com/the-cost-of-juvenile-justice/> Accessed on February 8, 2016

⁴ “Selected Characteristics of Youth Entering and Leaving OCFS Custody Jan.13 – Mar. 13 or In Custody on March 31,2013 and the Same Periods Last Year,” NYS Department of Office of Children and Family Services, Custody Report, Link: <http://www.ocfs.state.ny.us/main/reports/QRcust-2013-03.pdf> Accessed on February 8, 2016

We must do better. We can do better by making grants available from the Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives in the 2016 budget. These grants can be funded by moving fifteen percent of the monies from youth detention to prevention programs. This will create a sustainable flow of funding for communities to tackle juvenile delinquency on the local level.

As Governor Cuomo recommended in his 2016 State of the State and Budget Address, we must set the “Right Priorities.” To help parents protect their children, Albany should advance the following three policy goals:

1. ***Invest in and improve educational programming with a focus on reducing the achievement/opportunity gap.*** This means increased funding for: Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math (STEAM) programming which has demonstrated improvement in student engagement.
2. ***Expand support for vocational and after school programs.*** This involves matching the proposed \$55 million for the Urban Youth Jobs Program with a commitment to fund transportation needs to and from locations. Investments in parks and environmental stewardship could also assist in broadening the scope of alternatives.
3. ***Invest in Community Engagement Programs particularly SNUG and School Resource Officers.*** Pro-social and asset-based youth development programs have been successful in providing positive outcomes for youth faced with multiple risk factors.

III. CONCLUSION

Reducing the flow of young people to prison *is* the right priority. Helping young people secure a second chance at life is a more important building block; however, we need Albany to strengthen the partnership with

the local level by funding mandates that matter at home. The bottom line is parents need alternatives just as much as their children and compassionate policies could make a major difference in saving futures.



The Issue



JUVENILE JUSTICE REFORM

PREVENTION BEFORE PUNISHMENT

THE PROBLEM

Over the past four decades incarceration rates of young black males has risen astronomically.



Black males are disproportionately incarcerated, resulting over 1.5 million missing from communities across the USA

A 2012 Vera Institute report estimated the average annual cost of the incarceration of an adult is \$60,076, The cost to incarcerate a juvenile is \$266,000



THE SOLUTION

Invest and improve educational programming with focus towards reducing the achievement/opportunity gap



Expand support for vocational and after school programs

Invest in community engagement programs particularly SNUG and School Resource Officers



"Reducing the flow of young people to prison is the right priority. We need the help of Albany to help facilitate funding to strengthen the choices for both parents and young adults. Those affected by the present system could benefit from a second chance solution."

Mayor Richard Thomas
City of Mount Vernon

WHAT YOU CAN DO!

Contact your local New York State Legislators:
<http://on.ny.gov/1pBhnWH>

Stay Involved!
#juvenilejusticemv
@MayorRichardThomas
Mayor Richard Thomas
cmvny.com/mayors-office/



Office of the Mayor
City of Mount Vernon

One Roosevelt Square
Mount Vernon, NY 10550

914-665-2362
cmvny.com

