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Recommendations by AL Juvenile Task Force could save state millions

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By WSFA 12 News Staff [CONNECT](#)

MONTGOMERY, AL (WSFA) - The Alabama Juvenile Justice Task Force has delivered a set of policy recommendations that if approved and implemented could save the state millions in reinvestment money over the next five years.

According to the governor's office, the recommendations are expected to form a foundation for statutory and budgetary changes that will be considered in the 2018 legislative session. The committee conducted months of data analysis, stakeholder, outreach and police assessments before approving the following recommendations:

- Keep youth who commit lower-level offenses from unnecessary involvement in the juvenile justice system through early interventions and swift, consistent responses;
- Protect public safety and more effectively allocate taxpayer dollars by focusing system resources on youth who pose the greatest risk to public safety; and
- Improve public safety outcomes through increased system accountability and reinvestment into evidence-based programs in local communities.

"At its first meeting, I asked the Task Force to examine our state's data, gather input from Alabamians, and work together to develop a set of recommendations to make our communities safer and put youth back on the right track," Gov. Kay Ivey said. "These recommendations propose steps for reaching those important goals."

The Task Force based its recommendations on the following key findings:

- Youth who commit lower-level offenses make up the majority of the juvenile justice population, and two-thirds of youth in the custody of the Department of Youth Services (DYS) are committed for non-felonies;
- Judges and probation officers lack access to evidence-based services to hold youth accountable and strengthen families in their own communities; and
- Out-of-home beds cost taxpayers as much as \$161,694 per youth per year despite research showing poor public-safety returns, especially for youth who commit lower-level offenses.

If adopted and implemented, the officials say the recommendations are projected to reduce the state's out-of-home population of youthful offenders by 50 percent from projected levels by 2023, freeing more than \$43 million in funds for reinvestment over five years.

The task force met six times to examine Alabama's juvenile justice system data, review input from hundreds of roundtable participants, and assess national research on effective ways to hold youth accountable while reducing their chances of reoffending.

"The Task Force worked diligently to fulfill our charge to find solutions that improve outcomes for our communities and for our youth," Chief Justice Stuart said. "Our recommendations will strengthen the juvenile justice system by increasing the range of effective community-based options available to judges and juvenile probation officers across the state while focusing judicial resources on the most serious threats to public safety."

"We know there are proven ways to change Alabama's juvenile justice system for the better," said Senator Ward, who co-chaired the Task Force. "Together we can create a better juvenile justice system that shifts young people away from criminal behavior so that they do not move into the adult corrections system."

The Task Force membership includes:

- Senator Cam Ward, 14th District (co-chair)
- Representative Jim Hill, 50th District (co-chair)
- Judge Bob Bailey, 15th Judicial Circuit
- Daryl Bailey, District Attorney, Montgomery County
- Lynn Beshear, Commissioner, Department of Mental Health
- Gar Blume, Defense Attorney, Blume & Blume Attorneys at Law, PC
- William Califf, designee of Senate President Pro Tempore Del Marsh

- Derrick Cunningham, Sheriff, Montgomery County
- Christy Cain deGraffenried, Executive Director, Alabama Children First
- Representative Matt Fridy, 73rd District
- Senator Vivian Figures, 33rd District
- Judge Adrian Johnson, 2nd Judicial Circuit
- Steven Lafreniere, Executive Director, Department of Youth Services
- Jim Loop, Deputy Director, Department of Human Resources
- Cary McMillan, Director, Family Court Division, Administrative Office of Courts
- Judge David Money, Henry County Commissioner, designee of Association of County Commissions of Alabama
- Chief Justice Lyn Stuart, Alabama Supreme Court
- Dr. Kay Atchinson Warfield, Education Administrator, Alabama State Department of Education
- Andrew Westcott, designee of House Speaker Mac McCutcheon
- Dave White, designee of Governor Kay Ivey

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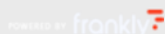
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