

Statement of Concern for the Protection and
Well-Being of Children Housed in Institutions
During the COVID Pandemic – *Updated 4/3/20*

The health, safety, well-

- Explore strategies to prevent over-crowding of correctional and detention facilities during a community outbreak.
- When possible, arrange lawful alternatives to in-person court appearances.
- Consider alternatives to existing group activities, in outdoor areas or other areas where individuals can spread out.
- Note that if group activities are suspended, individuals should be provided with alternative activities to prevent boredom and maintain mental health.

3. Ensure children have educational and enrichment programming throughout their day, and especially social and emotional support, to address what may be heightened anxieties during this time. We also caution against overreliance on room seclusion, especially without some kind of access to reading materials etc., as isolation can exacerbate potential trauma and mental health issues. To combat potential isolation and social disconnection, if there are community partners exploring and/or offering remote programming (video conferencing, podcasts, etc.), we urge that this be considered by local detention centers and other institutions where children are placed. Regular, daily visits by social workers and/or other qualified staff to support youth experiencing heightened emotional and mental distress is critical.

Moreover, given that prevention is the best course of action, **safely reducing institutional population is paramount**. Supporting [efforts](#) to halt all unnecessary admissions to local detention centers where reasonable alternatives exist and to release youth (particularly those with special health conditions and those who can be safely returned home on community supervision) will reduce the likelihood of increased risk of exposure to the COVID-19 due to the nature of institutional confinement. The need to reduce reliance on congregate care is also achieved where children removed from home for safety reasons may be safely returned to shelter-in-place at home or with resource families with appropriate in-home supports. We note that the U.S. DHHS Children's Bureau [letter](#) explicitly states: "**Consider whether children may be reunified with their parents in an expedited manner if the child's safety would not be jeopardized.**" Additional resources will likely be needed to ensure alternatives to institutional care exist, including kinship supports, therapeutic foster care, in-home based treatment, high-fidelity wrap-around services, telehealth services and other remote programming, monitoring and supervision.