

Imprisonment not always the answer

Report lays out compelling new ways for handling young-offender cases

BY MAI FERNANDEZ
AND PATRICK MCCARTHY

For decades, fueled by fear-mongering labels like “a generation of super-predators,” the United States turned to an ever-increasing reliance on adult-like prisons as the go-to response when young people break the law. This overreliance on incarceration resulted in an explosion in the number of youth behind bars. And we know that black and brown youth were, and are, much more likely to face incarceration for similar behavior than their white peers.

Thankfully, policymakers and others all over the country have begun to make smarter choices. They are responding to research, experience and common sense, all of which tell us that the most effective responses to get young people who have broken the law back on track can be in their own community. Over the past two decades, we’ve seen rates of juvenile incarceration more than halved while

the juvenile crime rate has plummeted — demonstrating that we are not forced to choose between locking up more kids and being safe. In fact, treating kids close to home reduces recidivism, thereby keeping us all safer.

In an increasing number of states, this progress is opening possibilities for fundamentally rethinking juvenile justice. We believe including the voice and perspectives of victims of crime is essential in this rethinking. A new report, “Smart, Safe and Fair: Strategies to Prevent Youth Violence, Heal Victims of Crime, and Reduce Racial Inequality,” lays out a blueprint for designing a new approach. Informed by research and conversations with crime victims, it provides ways to shape a more effective, just and humane juvenile justice system — one that promotes the well-being of victims and young people alike.

Redesigning our approach to young people who break the law requires tackling several long-standing challenges.



BRANDEE DADDONA

Overreliance on incarceration has led to an explosion in the number of youth behind bars.

First, far too many young people are still locked up in brutal institutions. Rather than turning young lives around, these prisons for children are more likely to increase the odds of re-offending while simultaneously reducing the odds of educational or career success. These factories of failure don’t protect community safety, waste scarce public resources and contribute to unconscionable rates of racial and ethnic disparities. It’s past time to replace

them with programs that hold young people accountable while helping them get on a path to long-term success.

Second, most of the decline in incarceration has focused on youth who have committed non-violent crimes. For too many young people charged with a violent crime, being locked up in a secure facility remains a common response. Intuitively, this seems to make sense: Won’t locking up youth who commit violent crimes make our com-

munities safer? It turns out it’s not that simple, or true, and what we really should look at is how likely it is that a youth will commit another offense.

Despite what we hear from many politicians and prosecutors who often claim to speak on behalf of crime victims, many victims of crime are demanding change from a status quo that they see as costly, ineffective and unfair, and that does nothing to meet their needs. In fact, recent public opinion polling shows that by a margin of 3 to 1, crime victims prefer community-based rehabilitation over incarceration.

To truly reduce youth violence, help heal victims and reduce racial disparities, we must face the challenge of shifting youth out of prisons and into the community. This is a view shared by researchers, child advocates, practitioners and, perhaps most important, many victims of crime.

Mai Fernandez is the executive director of the National Center for Victims of Crime. Patrick McCarthy is the president and CEO of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. They wrote this for Tribune News Service.



St. Matthias Episcopal Church on Jerusalem Avenue in Wantagh has been vacant since April.

Landmark status for St. Matthias Church

St. Matthias Episcopal Church in Wantagh should absolutely be granted landmark status [“Revival of interest,” News, Aug. 24].

As a lifelong Wantagh resident, I always considered it a landmark for its architecture and local history. When the “for sale” signs went up, it broke my heart to think the building would be torn down. Although I am not a congregant, I have great affection for this church and pass it

every day on my way to work as an assistant in special collections at the Long Island Studies Institute at Hofstra University, where we have publications and documented information about this church and the land around it.

I hope the Hempstead Town Board votes to designate it as a historical landmark, a title it has earned for more than a century.

*Victoria R. Aspinwall,
Wantagh*

Understanding the region’s future needs

“Double track finally on track” [Editorial, Aug. 23] is correct to highlight just how critical the Long Island Rail Road’s double-track project is to the region’s future — especially when one considers the role of the new track alongside other large-scale projects being built within the metro region, including East Side Access, Third Track, and eventually, the elec-

trification of LIRR tracks farther east.

Compared to often-heated public discourse that surrounded the railroad’s third-track effort, the conversation around the double-track project was notably muted, giving Long Islanders the rare opportunity to witness a multimillion-dollar capital improvement being constructed across the center of the Island with nary a protest or lawsuit raised.

Double track should serve as a strong reminder to the elected officials, policymakers, and developers who are working to reshape suburbia in the 21st century that all planning efforts can be successful with the right mix of consensus, fiscal support, and community engagement.

With the right approach, big things can still be accomplished on Long Island.

*Richard Murdocco,
Syosset*

Editors’ Note: The writer

writes about Long Island land use at TheFoggiestIdea.org, and is an adjunct professor in Stony Brook University’s graduate public policy program.

Nike’s decision on Kaepernick shameful

It is disgraceful how Nike did it for publicity and split our country in the process [“Colin Kaepernick’s Nike deal prompts flurry of debate,” News, Sept. 3].

I served my country during the Korean War, and I am proud of it. We respected our flag. I went in the Army when I was 17, and my mother had to sign for me. Sure, I care about lives; whether green, blue or purple, all lives matter.

But not to respect your country’s flag and stand at attention is disgraceful. I hope Nike will feel the pain where it hurts. In its wallet.

*Mark Cassuto,
Huntington*

DANIEL GOODRICH