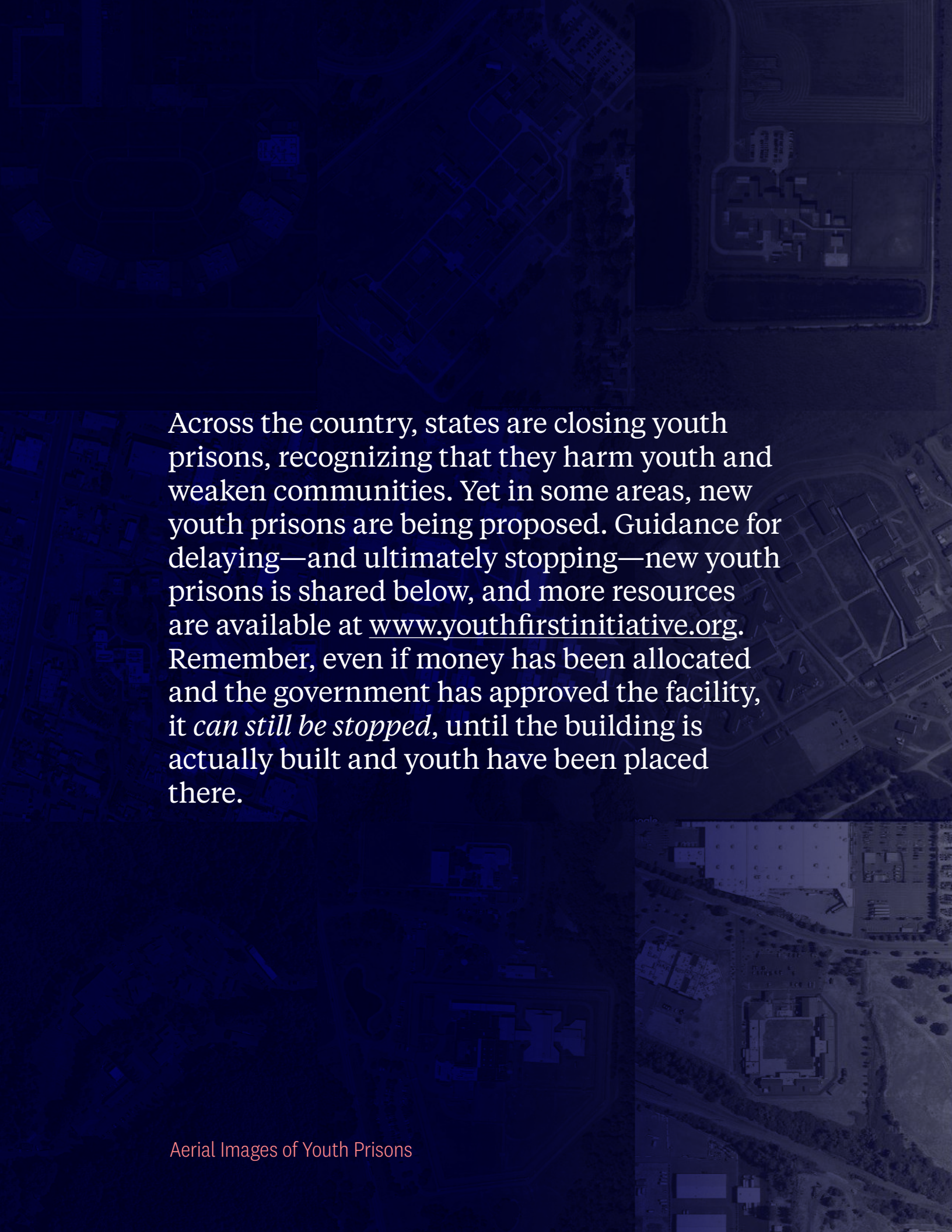


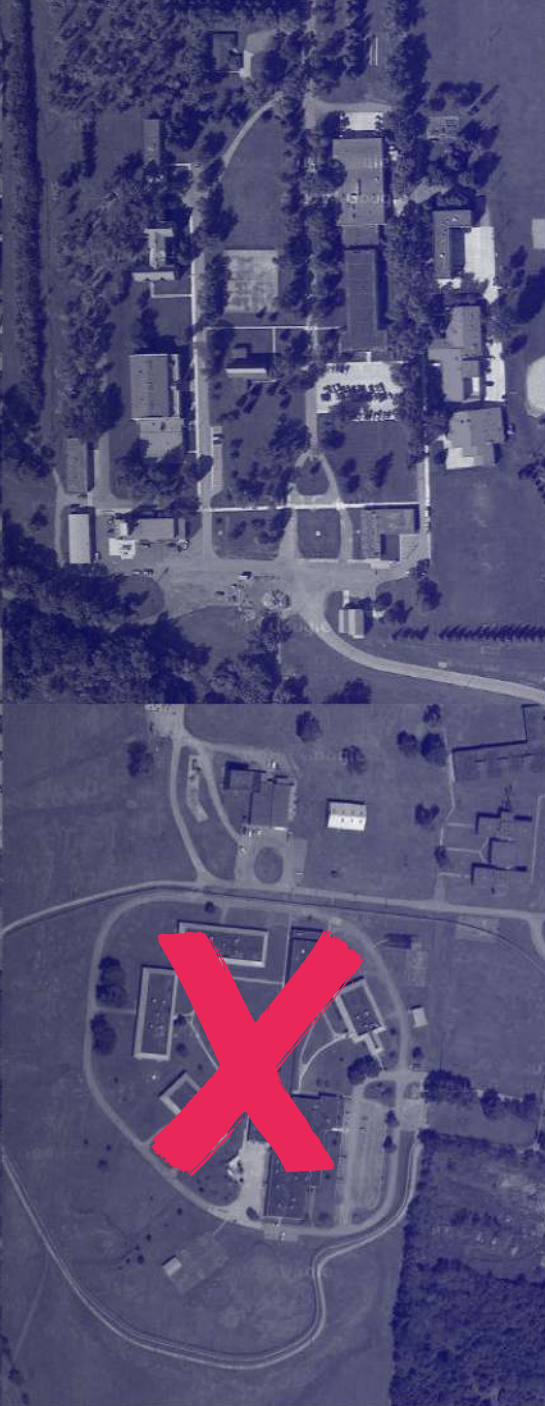
No New Youth Prisons

Strategies for Stopping Construction
of New Youth Prisons





Across the country, states are closing youth prisons, recognizing that they harm youth and weaken communities. Yet in some areas, new youth prisons are being proposed. Guidance for delaying—and ultimately stopping—new youth prisons is shared below, and more resources are available at www.youthfirstinitiative.org. Remember, even if money has been allocated and the government has approved the facility, it *can still be stopped*, until the building is actually built and youth have been placed there.



Gathering the Information You Need

- ✓ **Assess the impacts.** The specifics of the proposed facility will determine how you frame your arguments. Will the proposed location put kids further from their families and home communities? Will it result in more youth being in overly large facilities? Will it reinforce or deepen racial inequalities? Will it use up state funds that could be better spent on community-based services? Is the proposed site environmentally inappropriate for habitation, particularly for developing young people, because of mold, asbestos or other issues? (Youth prisons are often located on sites that are not “desirable” for private development, begging the question of why we’d choose these locations for youth who need the most support.)
 - To compare the proposed youth prison in your state to what experts say is best for youth, read “What is a Youth Prison” by Youth First’s Liz Ryan, available at <https://medium.com/@LizRyanYJ/locked-up-b22651d203e1>
 - Identify how the prison would harm the community at large, as well. One anti-prison campaign in Colorado noted that their rural communities were already experiencing a shortage of qualified nurses, and explained that the nurses needed for a new prison would make those shortages in other health facilities even worse. For youth prisons, behavioral health and education professionals are often a large part of staffing, so these are additional areas to consider for community impacts. In Seattle, the city faced a major homelessness crisis, so activists argued that the planned jail’s land would be better used for building homes. Remember, every square foot, or dollar, devoted to a youth prison is one that could be better used for education, job training, or other needed services.
- ✓ **Find out where stakeholders stand and why.** This includes community members and elected officials in the location where the prison will be, as well as those in the community where youth who will be sent to the facility are from. It also includes those from the communities that were not chosen or considered as a location. Finding out who is unhappy with the proposed project and why is your first step towards marshalling support. For those who are neutral or support the prison, learning their reasoning can guide your education and advocacy efforts.

✓ **Identify key decision-makers.** One of the first questions you must answer is “who has the power to stop this facility from being built?” This could be significant public figures like the Governor or key legislative committee head, but it can also be a county planning board, city council, county executive, or even a local agency official (e.g., if the site can only be developed with a zoning variance, or sewer line extension). Your campaign should work to influence as many different decision-makers as your resources will allow, and try not to expend too much energy on groups that are involved with the process but hold little decision making power (e.g., contractors that are doing the physical work).

✓ **Focus on funding.** Make sure you are able to gain and share a full picture of the costs of the proposed new prison, as well as who is paying for it, and who is benefitting. The price tag discussed by those pushing the facility may simply be construction costs and may not include ongoing operating costs. Pay attention to who will have to pay each cost, and include all those paying for the facility in your advocacy.

- Common “hidden costs” of prisons include environmental impacts (or remediation costs), interest on any loans, costs to make the site usable (e.g., extending water/sewer lines or roads to the property), transportation (bringing families for visitation, and taking youth to court hearings), and opportunity costs (e.g., lost income from selling or using the property for another purpose).
- Construction costs for youth prisons are often part of state or municipal capital budget plans and are different from annual expense budgets. Learn about the capital budgeting process in your state or locality and how to advocate to reallocate capital funds to other construction projects that benefit under-resourced communities (such as renovating schools or building community centers instead of prison construction).
- States or localities often use bonds to finance prison construction. Research the terms of the bond and whether the bond involves private financing or public debt. Determine whether there are ways to influence the bond holders or terms.

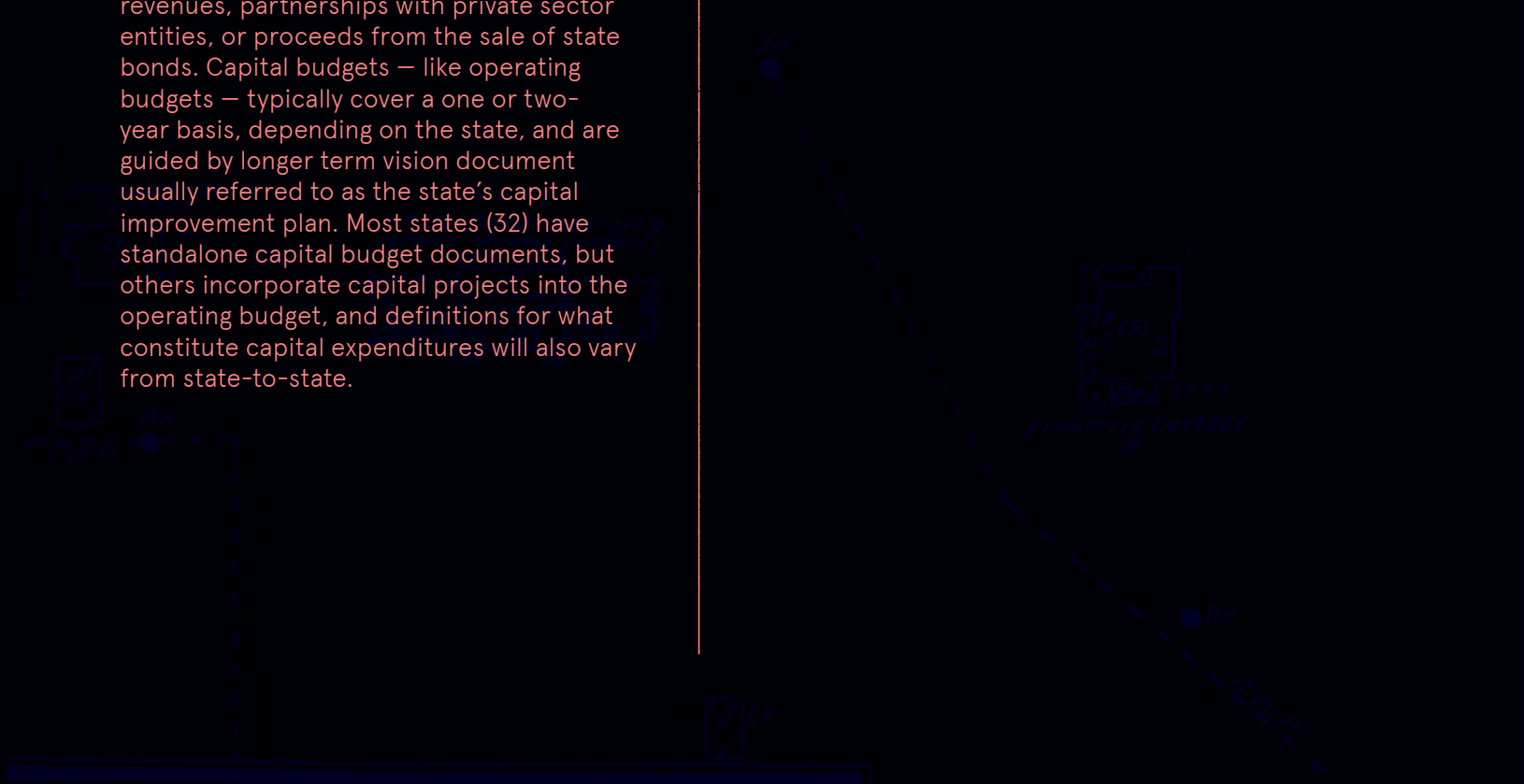
✓ Operating Budgets and Capital Budgets: The Facts

The operating budget is the state's fiscal blueprint for general government operations. Operating budgets cover investments in a range of areas include elementary and higher education, healthcare, corrections and environmental programs. Depending on the state, a budget provides funding for either a one- or two-year duration. Operating budgets are funded by a combination of resources from the federal government, state tax dollars (largely income and sales taxes) and other state revenues sources — for example, lottery proceeds or various fees and charges for state services. The process of crafting a state operating budget starts well before legislative session and involves many actors, including state agencies — who make budget requests to the state budget office, the Governor's office which presents an initial budget to the legislature, and state legislators who are responsible for passing a budget for the Governor to sign.

In a similar fashion, states must also make decisions on how to fund capital projects such as roads, bridges, and buildings like hospitals or youth prisons. States use all various revenue streams to fund capital projects including general state tax revenues, partnerships with private sector entities, or proceeds from the sale of state bonds. Capital budgets — like operating budgets — typically cover a one or two-year basis, depending on the state, and are guided by longer term vision document usually referred to as the state's capital improvement plan. Most states (32) have standalone capital budget documents, but others incorporate capital projects into the operating budget, and definitions for what constitute capital expenditures will also vary from state-to-state.

✓ Dig into the local details

Learn about all of the city/county planning elements that go into building in your jurisdiction, and identify advocacy points around those. For example, all new buildings need permits, need to meet use requirements set out by zoning rules, need to have electricity, water, and sewer access, cannot violate any hazardous materials restrictions (e.g., asbestos). Although the facility may be being paid for with millions of dollars in state funds and built by the state, there are many pieces of the process that need to be approved, funded and/or carried out locally. Even the small amounts of local funding required for the facility to be built can be halted through advocacy efforts, thus stopping the prison from being built.



✓ Do more research

Your state's juvenile justice agency may publish an annual report that details the number of youth incarcerated in each existing facility, their average length of incarceration, their charges, and their demographics. These data points can help you highlight a lack of need for new beds, overuse of incarceration, or racial disparities. Reviewing recordings or notes from state and local government meetings can also yield helpful information.

- Local nonprofits can also be great information sources—some campaigns have found organizations focused on budgetary issues to be a good complement to their own youth and justice expertise.
- National organizations such as Youth First, the Justice Policy Institute and the Center on Budget and Policy Priorities also publish reports that can help make your case.



Original Plans for The NJ State School, Now Slated for Closure

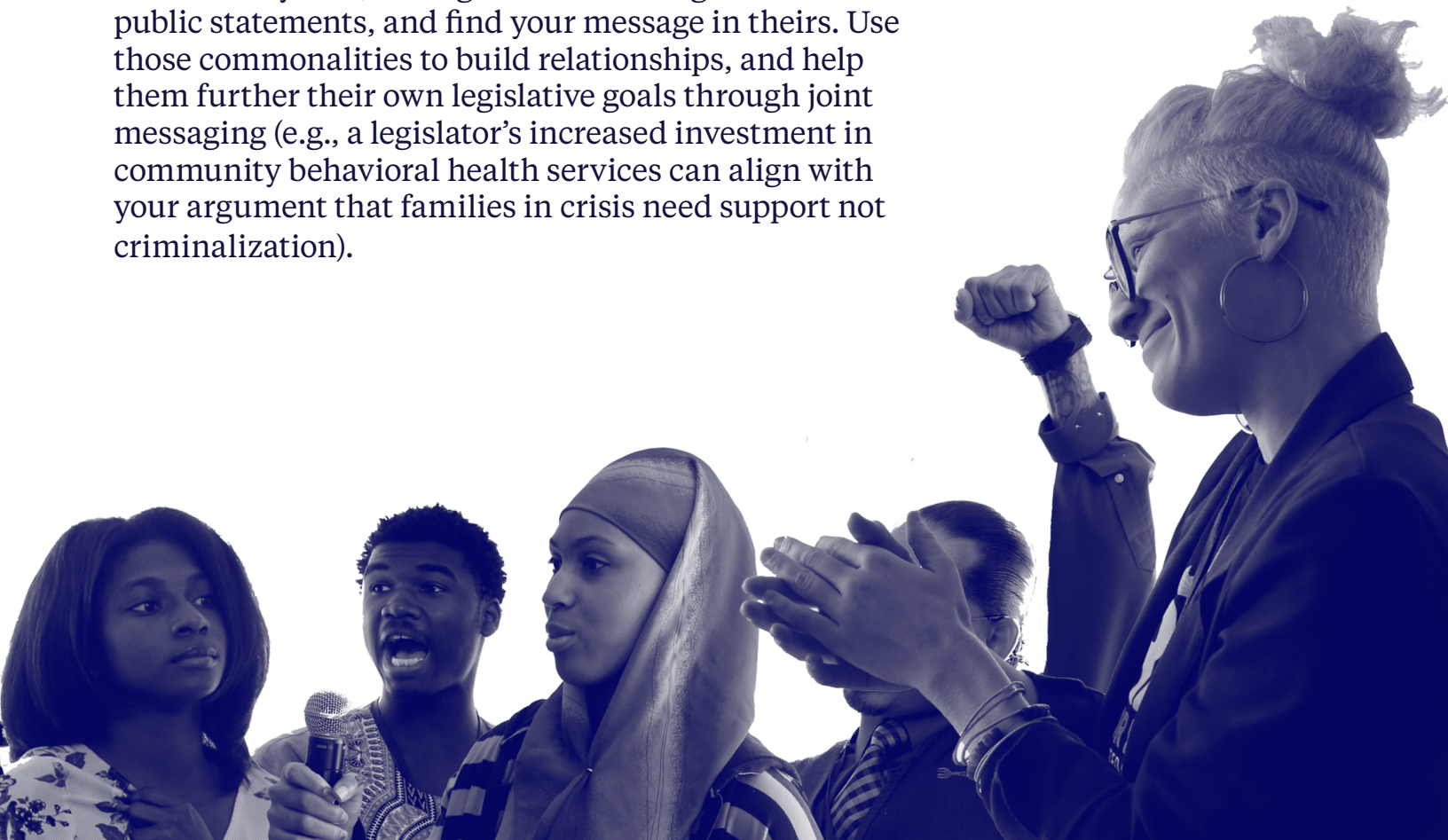
Marshalling Allies

- ✓ **Center your work around the voices and advocacy of young people, people of color, and impacted communities.** These are the individuals who often have the most energy and lived expertise to drive your work, and inspire involvement from the broader community. Even when these individuals are not constituents of the decision makers you are trying to persuade, the voices of those most impacted can carry weight, and can exert moral and media pressure. Residents of the proposed location for the prison, for example, can recognize that any new jobs or development in their town comes at great cost to the youth, as well as to the communities that losing them.
- ✓ **Build a wide base.** Youth incarceration impacts everyone in a community, directly or indirectly, so don't rule out anyone as a possible ally. Share your message as broadly as possible and generate (and maintain) involvement from as many individuals as you can. Past campaigns have benefitted from coordinated support from faith communities, healthcare professionals, lawyers, academics, and environmental advocates, as well as individual community members who did not have personal experience with incarceration, but were educated about the issues through events, social media, or press coverage. Moving beyond those who traditionally think about the juvenile justice system to bring the general public into the conversation can create a lot more accountability for policymakers and agency officials who are pushing for the prison.



- Given the human and budgetary impacts of state juvenile facilities, everyone in your state is potentially affected, so you may also be able to seek allies in geographic communities that are strategically important (e.g., represented by a lawmaker on a key committee).
- Make sure you have campaign leaders from each large population group in your target communities. For example, if there is a language that many people speak, ensure you have someone who speaks that language, or if many people have the same employer or type of job (e.g., a factory employs a quarter of the workers in a community) that you have someone from that group who can represent the campaign to their peers.
- Finding and cultivating unlikely allies is a powerful tool for gaining key insights, getting your message out to a broader audience, and exerting legislative influence: effective past campaigns have found that likely and unlikely supporters speaking up with the same message has caused decision-makers to sit up and take notice.
- Having large numbers of supporters turn out at your events not only brings attention to your arguments, but also encourages policymakers to publicly align with you.

✓ **Find legislative allies.** Look at what policymakers have already said, through introduced legislation or public statements, and find your message in theirs. Use those commonalities to build relationships, and help them further their own legislative goals through joint messaging (e.g., a legislator's increased investment in community behavioral health services can align with your argument that families in crisis need support not criminalization).



Taking Action and Communicating for Change

- ✓ **Use proven advocacy and community organizing techniques.** Developing shared mission, vision and goals statements, engaging in power mapping exercises and SWOT analysis, and other planning and action steps used in grassroots advocacy can help you get started. Also, take time to learn from other campaigns' strategies and work.
 - *Ready to Launch*, from the Youth First Initiative, covers all of this and more: <http://youthfirstinitiative.org/ready-launch-campaign-starter-toolkit-close-youth-prisons>
- ✓ **Pursue multiple strategies.** Public protests, legislative advocacy, lawsuits, zoning challenges, media campaigns, and many other efforts can undermine the building of a youth prison, and it may be difficult to predict in advance which will gain the most momentum. As your resources allow, try to have as multifaceted a campaign as possible, without stretching your campaign leaders and supporters too far.
- ✓ **Hone and spread your message.** The “why” of your argument against the youth prison should resonate with your core allies, and also educate your opponents.
 - Use your messaging to address not just the prison itself but the things that lead to over incarceration, such as de-investment in communities of color, laws that criminalize young people instead of connecting them to services, and systemic racism.
 - Existing groups and meetings can be an easy way to reach more people with less effort—coordinate with neighborhood associations, houses of worship, and other community or school groups to see if you can get on the agenda for a future meeting, or distribute materials to their members.
- ✓ **Have a media plan.** Form relationships with your local media and keep them informed at every stage, highlighting the things they are most likely to cover (e.g., an unexpected endorsement or unlikely ally, a hidden financial interest, an event with high expected turnout).
 - Reported articles and op eds supportive of your position can raise public awareness of your efforts, and can also put pressure on—or give “cover” to—key policymakers and others who you are working behind the scenes to persuade.

- The media landscape is changing in many communities; take advantage of the competition between publications, and don't forget to work with newer and non-print media outlets.
- ✓ **Be creative and memorable.** Once you've brought together a group of passionate people dedicated to stopping the prison, including youth, take advantage of their creativity and excitement to develop "out of the box" ideas and events that will really reach your community members (and generate great media coverage at the same time)!
- Hold events where community members can learn in person about what's going on. Activists have held events ranging from a Festival of Resistance (with workshops, games, and signage) and a youth hip hop contest, to candidate forum, sit ins, rallies, concerts.
- ✓ **Be ready to offer alternatives.** To achieve the best outcomes for youth, you'll need to be able to identify not just *why* the proposed prison is wrong for your community, but *what* would work better. This should include both ways to reduce the number of youth becoming involved in the youth justice system, and how to respond to those youth who are arrested and enter the justice system. To stop a new youth prison from being built, this may also include a discussion of how to offer secure care (to the very small number of youth who need it) in small, community-based settings that can actually contribute to youth rehabilitation.
- Advocating for limits on who can be incarcerated (e.g., based on age or offense) and how long you can be incarcerated for can lower the projected number of youth in custody, making it easier to argue against new facilities.
- ✓ **Make it easy to take action.** If you are asking supporters to call elected officials, provide phone numbers and talking points; if you are asking them to organize a direct action, provide step-by-step directions for planning and carrying it out. Provide opportunities for youth to directly share with policymakers what they want for themselves and their peers, e.g., through a postcard- or letter-writing event or social media campaign. (Good examples of action toolkits are available from the No New Youth Jail campaign at <https://nonewyouthjail.com/toolkit/>.)
- ✓ **Be youth-specific in your advocacy.** Highlight the ways youth are different in your arguments against youth prisons. For example, successful campaigns have highlighted the fact the the juvenile justice system is supposed to rehabilitate, not simply punish, youth, the fact that adolescents' brains continue to develop well into their twenties, and the fact that youth are entitled to an education that they may not be getting in prison.

- Make sure that you are using youth-specific data to support your positions, for example have youth crime rates been dropping (showing that new beds are not needed) or does your state have high recidivism rates for youth who've been incarcerated (showing that that approach is not working)?
- ✓ **Use arguments *for* the new facility to develop your arguments *against* it.** Your messaging must include countering false dichotomies or narratives generated by prison supporters. If proponents are arguing that prisons are needed for “safety,” you can share data about decreases in youth crime, or re-offense rates for youth who have been committed to your state’s existing prisons. If conditions of confinement at an existing facility are terrible and someone argues that the new facility would be an improvement for youth, you can challenge the notion that a cleaner or newer facility is “better” for youth by addressing the (lack of) treatment youth will receive, size of the facility, and the poorer outcomes generally for youth who are incarcerated (compared to those who remain in their own communities).
- ✓ **Celebrate everything.** This may be a big, long, and hard fight, and its essential to keep morale up by recognizing small and big wins. This includes highlighting whenever your campaign is able to lift up the voices of marginalized communities. Showing your supporters that they are being heard will also help keep their energy and commitment up.

Behind the Scenes Strategy

- ✓ **Support your (volunteer) staff.** Working effectively with a mostly volunteer base requires identifying the natural leaders in each group, and ensuring that every volunteer has the buy in and training they need to contribute.
 - Volunteer leadership should be trained just as well as paid staff, and every volunteer should have access to training that will allow them to move your cause forward effectively.
- ✓ **Create fact sheets and other resources.** Develop educational materials that you can use to persuade those who do not support your position yet, and to prepare your supporters to be effective advocates. While postcards, flyers, and protest signs are an important visual tool to get your message across, you’ll also need to have documents that go deeper into the research and facts behind your arguments (in an easily accessible format).
- ✓ **Advocate for prevention.** Work to support additional service provision, diversion opportunities, and policy and practices that can keep youth from becoming involved in the justice system and/or incarcerated in the first place—it’s much easier to argue against a new prison when existing facilities are below capacity.

This resource was developed based on phone interviews with members of campaigns to stop youth jails and prisons, including the RISE for Youth campaign in Virginia, and the following sources:

How to Stop a Jail in Your Town (CURB): <http://www.curbprisonspending.org/how-to-stop-a-jail-in-your-town/>

Closing Cages: People Power Helps Stop Youth Incarceration (Truthout): <https://truthout.org/articles/closing-cages-people-power-helps-stop-youth-incarceration/>

“Derail the Super Jail” in No Turning Back (Building Blocks for Youth): http://www.cclp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/13-ntb_fullreport-pages-36-59.pdf

Readers may also find the following campaign examples useful:

CURB: 10 Alternative to a New SMC Jail <http://curbprisonspending.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/10-Alternative-to-a-New-SMC-Jail.pdf>

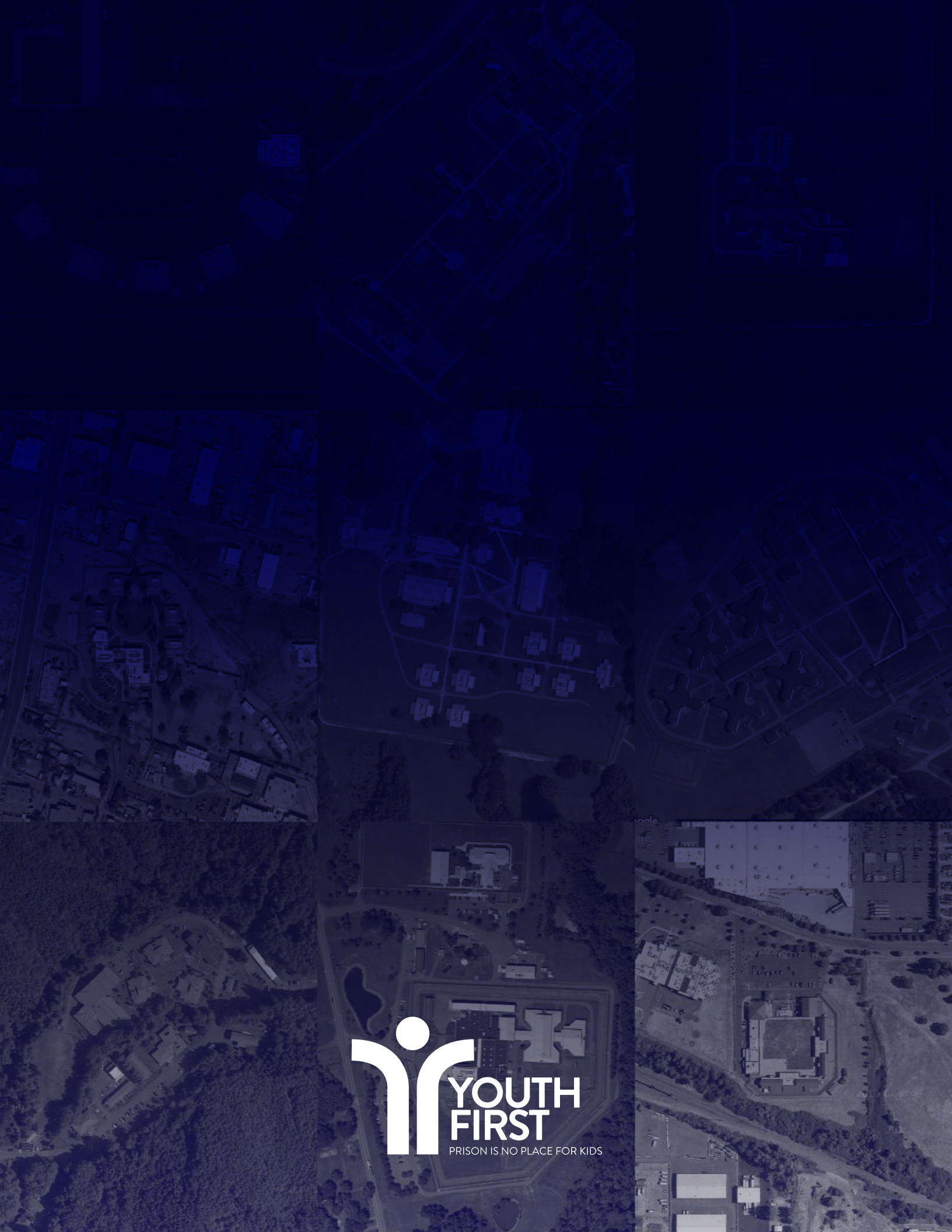
CURB: 10 Reasons to Fight the SMC jail <http://curbprisonspending.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/10-Reasons-to-Fight-the-SMC-jail.pdf>

Youth First thanks these individuals and groups for their time and expertise, and for their tireless work to end youth incarceration.





Aerial Images of Youth Prisons



**YOUTH
FIRST**

PRISON IS NO PLACE FOR KIDS