

# Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative Massachusetts

The Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI)  
in Massachusetts works to ensure that  
“the right youth, is in the right place, for the right reason.”

## Detention Matters

Each year in Massachusetts, there are thousands of youth who are held on bail, often in a secure detention facility, while they await trial or further court action. These young people have been charged with, but not convicted of the offense for which they are being held. Disproportionally, they tend to be youth of color. A low percentage of these youth need to be held because they are deemed dangerous or are unlikely to return to court to face trial. However, the vast majority of youth in detention have been charged with non-violent or low-level offenses. These youth are not a threat to public safety and could be held in an alternative setting.

Youth who are locked up for low-level offenses are separated from their families, schools and communities. While in a secure detention setting, they may be exposed to harmful influences, including interactions with youth who have committed more serious offenses. As the latest research tells us, a stay in detention increases the likelihood a youth will re-offend or have future involvement in the criminal justice system

## A Collaborative Mission

The Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative (JDAI) is a national public safety partnership focusing on reducing the unnecessary and harmful use of secure detention for low-risk juveniles. Our mission is to establish a more effective and efficient detention system in Massachusetts. We accomplish our mission primarily through data-driven partnerships between the court, juvenile justice agencies and other community stakeholders. We work to identify *alternatives* to secure detention, with the goal of achieving better outcomes for our youth and our communities.

## In the Commonwealth

Massachusetts has implemented JDAI in Worcester, Suffolk, Middlesex, Essex, Bristol and Hampden Counties. Cross-agency teams are working together to reduce reliance on secure confinement, improve public safety, reduce racial disparities and bias, promote more efficient use of taxpayers' dollars, and stimulate overall juvenile justice reforms at both the local and state level.

Supported by the Massachusetts Department of Youth Services, JDAI is a state-wide initiative with a Governance Committee, comprised of state agency officials as well as police and private partners. Moreover, there are seven statewide committees which seek to address issues endemic to all counties, such as improving conditions of confinement, reducing racial and ethnic disparities and using accurate data.

## Seeing Results

Prior to JDAI, in 2006, there were nearly 5000 children held on bail each year in hardware-secure detention facilities; 75% of these youth were admitted on low-level offenses. In 2013, there were less than 2000 children admitted to bail, a remarkable 54% decrease. Moreover, one third of all of these children were successfully held in non-secure or community-based settings.

## Challenges Remain

There are significant variations by geography and court jurisdiction in the use of detention across the Commonwealth. Youth of color are still disproportionately represented in the system as a whole. However, by developing our system into one that responds to each youth in a manner appropriate to their risk, JDAI gives youth involved in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system a better chance at developing into healthy, productive adults.

