

## **Juvenile Justice Systems across various U.S. states**

The U.S. justice system has changed in many ways since its start, yet it still varies from state to state. According to Penal Reform International, the minimum age of criminal responsibility ranges from as low as six to 18 years of age.

Eric Zogry was born and raised in Raleigh, North Carolina and is a board-certified specialist in criminal law at the North Carolina Office of the Juvenile Defender. He describes the justice system as “an experiment that has yet to succeed on a level that is satisfactory for most people.”

The N.C. OJD struggled in trying to pass the Raise the Age bill for the last 12 years. Finally, the bill will take effect in 2019, and 16- and 17-year-olds will stop being punished the same as adults.

“People are unaware of everything about the juvenile justice system,” continued Zogry, “especially since it is a constantly changing system.”

Diane Korf, the community programs supervisor at King County Juvenile Court in Seattle, has worked as a detention and probation counselor for over 20 years. Even she was unaware that 16-year-olds in North Carolina could still be tried as adults.

Originally from North Dakota, Korf has realized how ignorant she was about racism and its effects on people in society not only in the criminal justice system, but in other systems as well.

“We definitely have a disproportionate confinement problem here,” she said. “We’ve done a lot of work and reduced the [overall] number of youth incarcerated but we still have a problem with disproportionate numbers of people of color.”

Allie Monck, a sophomore at New York University pursuing a dual-degree in Politics and Social and Cultural Analysis, agrees that there is a problem.

“Racial disparities are beyond comprehension,” said Monck. “Especially in New York City, neighborhoods of color are policed at much higher rates.”

“When you have choices and don’t focus on the race or ethnicity of a person, then generally, people are making decisions that are not in favor of persons viewed of color,” argues Zogry.

Monck interns at JustLeadership USA, a non-profit organization working towards cutting the number of people incarcerated in half by 2030. She says the reason the organization has been so successful is because they work closely with people closest to the problem.

“If you have never been to prison and never experienced the difficulties of getting out, you have no idea what the best solution is,” said Monck. For this reason, she stresses the importance of receiving input from those recently released.

Similar to Monck, Korf wanted to make more of an impact in people's lives, even if it was less rewarding. Korf began working directly with youth through education and research-based employment training programs in order to reduce recidivism.

King County Youth Justice has partnerships with nearby high schools and works predominately with Latino youth that are at risk for not succeeding in school, even if they have not been in the justice system.

"I think [Washington] is probably doing better than a lot of other states," said Korf, "but we are nowhere near where we need to be."

The reasons for juvenile delinquency are numerous.

Zogry claimed that "the majority of youth in the North Carolina juvenile system is predominately African American males and there is no rational explanation to why that is except that people in the system make decisions based on race."

"Adverse childhood experiences, historical trauma, generational trauma, and depression all lead to higher risks of problems in school and being involved in the criminal justice system. It's like a soup: there are all kinds of factors that go in it," explained Korf.

People of color are arrested at higher rates, even though they do not commit crimes at higher rates. "White kids smoke just as much pot as kids of color," said Monck.

She continued to say that "most of it is petty offenses. A huge problem in New York is that it costs \$2.75 to swipe into the subway and a lot of kids don't have that money and they hop the train and get arrested all the time simply because they don't have enough money to get home."