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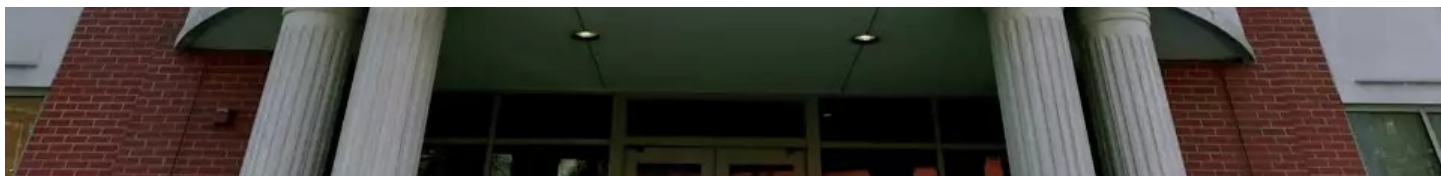
# Commentary: Raise the Lower Age needs investment to make it work

Not investing in those who provide the community- and home-based programs necessary to make Raise the Lower Age work will only hurt youth and families

By **Lucas Jacobs**

April 16, 2023





Raise the Lower Age ended the arrest and prosecution of children as young as 7 as juvenile delinquents, making New York one of only four states that have raised the lower age for delinquency arrest and Family Court prosecution to the age of 12.

Will Waldron/Times Union

New York state's lack of follow-through on its important Raise the Age initiative has been well-documented: Troubled 16- and 17-year-olds aren't being given the services they need to break out of their destructive cycle. But another important criminal justice reform, one with similar goals, is receiving less attention.

Raise the Lower Age was passed in New York in June 2021 and was seen as an important part of criminal justice reform. Raise the Lower Age ended the arrest and prosecution of children as young as 7 as juvenile delinquents, making New York one of only four states that have raised the lower age for delinquency arrest and Family Court prosecution to the age of 12. The new law went into effect on Dec. 29, 2022.

We know that the biggest predictor of going to jail is whether the person has been to jail before, and the biggest predictor for someone being in jail for the first time is having spent time in a juvenile detention center. Additionally, we know that children involved with the juvenile legal system are more likely to have mental health issues later in life.

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This doesn't mean that we are turning a blind eye to negative or illegal/dangerous behavior in young people. It means that, given more tools, we believe we can often make a difference in a young person's life — and their trajectory through life — by emphasizing programs that provide critical community-based assistance to families and children to intervene in this cycle and change the course of a life.

In addition to making lasting differences, effective programs can reduce institutional overcrowding and save New York millions of dollars for each person diverted from a life in and out of the criminal justice system.

Unfortunately, after passing Raise the Lower Age, New York never took on the other side of the equation by investing in the people providing programs and services in homes and communities.

Instead, Gov. Kathy Hochul's budget proposal continues a dangerous trend of not devoting resources to develop and staff these programs, which are integral to our communities. Rather than providing the requested 8.5 percent rate increase to those who work with at-risk youth and can intervene and help them chart a different course, the governor is proposing a mere 2.5 percent increase, meaning that it will be harder than ever to find qualified staff to help our children and to keep our communities safer.

Not investing in those who provide the community- and home-based programs necessary to make Raise the Lower Age work will only hurt the youth and families who need these programs the most and who could, ultimately, make our neighborhoods less safe. We need to finish the job and invest in those working with youth and families to keep them out of our criminal justice system.

*Lucas Jacobs is the vice president of detention and prevention services of Berkshire Farm Center & Services for Youth, a nonprofit organization that provides family programs and services in 55 of New York's 62 counties.*



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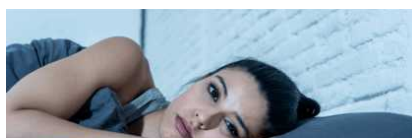
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April 16, 2023

**Lucas Jacobs**

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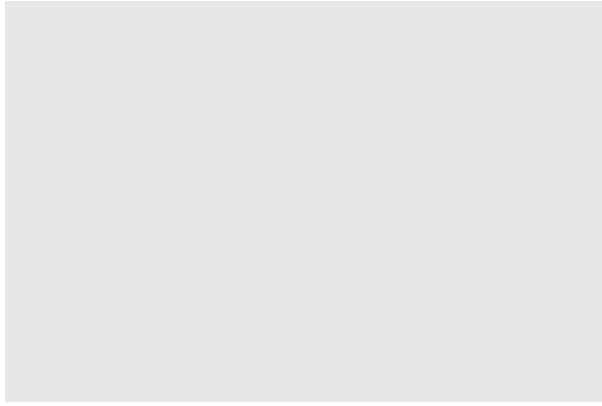
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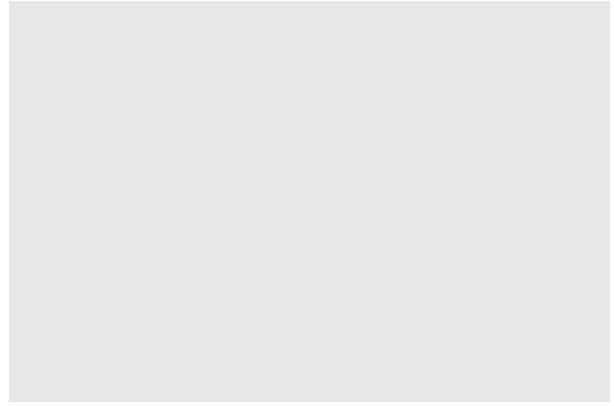
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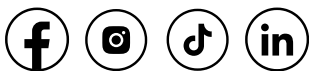


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