

Noteworthy State Investments in Restorative Justice Diversion for Youth

As The Sentencing Project documented in its 2026 report, *Victim-Centered Restorative Justice Diversion: A Better Way to Provide Meaningful Accountability for Youth*, the use of restorative justice (RJ) diversion remains a rarity throughout most of the country. However, seven states have enacted policies and made significant investments to support extensive use of RJ diversion.

Colorado – In 2013, Colorado created a restorative diversion pilot program in four of the state’s 22 judicial districts.¹ From 2014 through 2020, Colorado funded programs in three of the original pilot districts and five others. More than 1,200 youth participated in these programs, of whom 99% reached an agreement in a restorative justice conference, and 91% completed their agreements. Participant satisfaction was nearly unanimous (at least 97%) among participating youth, victims, and family members. Less than 9% of youth who completed their agreements re-entered the justice system on a new charge within one year.² Counties participating in the restorative justice diversion pilot project reduced the number of youth prosecuted in court more than comparable counties that didn’t participate.³ At least 15 districts now offer restorative justice diversion programs for youth who might otherwise be prosecuted in juvenile courts.⁴ In some Colorado court districts, restorative justice is now the default option for many or most delinquency cases.⁵ For instance, in the Boulder area more than half of youth referred to court are now diverted to restorative justice programs, and more than 90% of participants complete the program.⁶

Connecticut – Since 2020, the Connecticut Youth Services Association has been leading an effort to incorporate the use of restorative justice into the diversion programs overseen by the state’s network of 90 juvenile review boards.⁷ These boards, which work in 135 localities throughout Connecticut, oversee 2,000 diversion cases per year.⁸ Over one thousand participants took part in restorative justice trainings from 2020 to 2022, and dozens of case managers received intensive two-day trainings with detailed instruction on how to imple-

ment RJ conferencing in their local programs. In 2025, the state issued new protocols that will make restorative justice a core element in diversion programs statewide.⁹

Maine – The Division of Juvenile Services within Maine’s Department of Corrections provides funding to support diversionary restorative justice programs across the state.¹⁰ In 2025, the state provided \$1.1 million to six organizations for restorative youth diversion.¹¹

Minnesota – In 2023, Minnesota created a new Office of Restorative Practices to support restorative justice efforts statewide, and it established a new funding stream to support local programs that incorporate principles associated with restorative justice practices in the juvenile and criminal justice systems, as well as schools and communities.¹² Even before the legislation was enacted, several jurisdictions in Minnesota, including Hennepin County (Minneapolis) and Ramsey County (St. Paul), the state’s two most populous jurisdictions, were already offering restorative justice diversion to youth accused of delinquent conduct, as were a number of other smaller counties.¹³ As of October 2025, 22 Minnesota counties offered restorative justice diversion programs; these programs reached more than 900 youth (300 per year) from mid-2021 through mid-2024.¹⁴

Nebraska – In 2015, the Office of Dispute Resolution within Nebraska’s Administrative Office of the Courts launched a Juvenile Victim Youth Conferencing (VYC) program in three local court districts. The programs offered restorative justice conferencing for youth at various stages of the justice process – as a diversion from court, as an alternative to adjudication for youth whose

cases had already been filed, and for youth who had already been adjudicated.¹⁵ After initial results proved promising, the VYC program was expanded statewide in 2018. During the next three and a half years, a 2021 evaluation found, the program served nearly 900 youth, including 270 referred as diversion cases.¹⁶ Restorative conferences were held for nearly 80% of all youth referred, and just 12% were adjudicated for a new offense within one year of completing the program.¹⁷ A subsequent study also showed a one-year recidivism rate of 12%.¹⁸ In 2021, Nebraska allocated \$1 million for a three-year grant to continue expanding its restorative justice conferencing programs.¹⁹

North Dakota – Since 1999, North Dakota has been operating a statewide restorative justice diversion program that serves several hundred youth per year.²⁰ The program is overseen by the Consensus Council, a non-profit organization based in Bismarck. In the 2025 fiscal year, 250 youth were referred to the Consensus Council for restorative justice conferencing.²¹ Consensus Council staff reached out to the 201 unique victims involved in these cases, which resulted in 82 completed restorative agreements following a face-to-face victim-offender conference.²²

Another 28 youth signed restitution agreements with victims who participated in the program but declined to participate in a face-to-face meeting. In addition, 218 youth attended a 4-hour victim empathy seminar where they received training on values, empathy, and accountability and coaching on how to prepare a meaningful apology letter. These restorative justice diversion efforts are funded by the state's supreme court, although funding remains modest (just over \$250,000 per year for the entire program). The program is staffed primarily by a network of part-time restorative justice facilitators employed by the Consensus Council.

Vermont has long given restorative justice a central place in its justice system, and it funds a network of 17 community justice centers statewide which offer restorative justice alternatives to youth or adults accused of crimes.²³ Though some centers have offered restorative justice diversion programming for years, until 2025 the primary focus was on cases already charged in court, and the state did not track participation in pre-charge (diversion) versus other restorative justice programs.²⁴ Beginning in 2026, however, Vermont will provide funds specifically for pre-charge restorative justice diversion programming – with \$1.2 million allocated in year one to support diversion programs for youth and adults programs in 14 of the state's 16 counties.²⁵

Endnotes

¹ Sliva, S. M. & McClain, T. M. (2021). [Mapping the Path to Restorative Justice Diversion: Lessons from HB13-1254, Colorado's Legislated Pilot of Pre-File Restorative Justice Diversion for Juveniles](#). Colorado Restorative Justice Coordinating Council.

² Colorado Restorative Justice Council (n.d.). [Executive Summary: Colorado Restorative Justice in Juvenile Diversion](#)

³ Sliva, S. M., & Plassmeyer, M. (2021). [Effects of restorative justice pre-file diversion legislation on juvenile filing rates: An interrupted time-series analysis](#). *Criminology & public policy*, 20(1), 19-40.

⁴ These 15 programs were found online in September 2025 using links found on the National District Attorney's Association's "[Mapping Prosecutor-Led Diversion](#)" webpage; an online listing of "[Colorado Diversion Programs and Contacts](#)" posted by the Colorado Judicial Branch, the National Association of Community and Restorative Justice's [Restorative Justice Map & Directory](#) or the Prison Fellowship or the Prison Fellowship's [Restorative Justice Programs in Your State](#) webpage.

⁵ Sliva, S. M. & McClain, T. M. (2021). [Mapping the Path to Restorative Justice Diversion: Lessons from HB13-1254, Colorado's Legislated Pilot of Pre-File Restorative Justice Diversion for Juveniles](#). Colorado Restorative Justice Coordinating Council.

⁶ Golden, A. (March 3, 2023). [More than half of juvenile cases diverted by DA's office](#). Longmont Leader.

⁷ Bromley, E. (2022). [YSB & JRB presentation to the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee](#). Connecticut Youth Services Association.

⁸ Bromley, E. (2022). [YSB & JRB presentation to the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee](#). Connecticut Youth Services Association.

⁹ Connecticut Youth Services Association (2025). [Trauma-informed restorative diversion: Standard protocols and procedures for youth diversion teams](#).

¹⁰ Permanent Commission on the Status of Racial, Indigenous, and Tribal Populations (2025). [Restorative Justice: An Examination: A Report to the Maine Legislature](#).

¹¹ Thibeault, C. (2025). [Juvenile Division 2025 Annual Report](#). Maine Department of Corrections, Division of Juvenile Services.

¹² Minnesota Department of Public Safety Office of Justice Programs (2024). [2025 Restorative Practices Initiatives Grant Program: Grant Request for Proposals](#).

¹³ Liberation Lab. (2025). [The State of Restorative Practice in Minnesota in 2025](#). Department of Pediatrics and School of Social Work, University of Minnesota; Liberation Lab (2025). [Minnesota Restorative Services Directory](#); Beckman, K. (2023). [Strengthening community, restoring youth and improving safety: Thirteen years of Restorative Justice in Carlton County](#). University of Minnesota Center for Healthy Youth Development.

¹⁴ Liberation Lab. (2025). [The State of Restorative Practice in Minnesota in 2025](#). Department of Pediatrics and School of Social Work, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, MN.

¹⁵ Jimenez, C. A. (2021). [Victim Youth Conferencing Evaluation](#). State of Nebraska Judicial Branch, Office of Dispute Resolution.

¹⁶ Jimenez, C. A. (2021). [Victim Youth Conferencing Evaluation](#). State of Nebraska Judicial Branch, Office of Dispute Resolution.

¹⁷ Jimenez, C. A. (2021). [Victim youth conferencing evaluation](#). State of Nebraska Judicial Branch, Office of Dispute Resolution. Hobbs, A., Garman, J., & Brewer, S. (2025). Restorative diversion: victim youth conferencing effects on recidivism. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2025.250806>.

¹⁸ Hobbs, A., Garman, J., & Brewer, S. (2025). Restorative diversion: Victim youth conferencing effects on recidivism. *Criminal Justice Studies*, 1-13. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1478601X.2025.250806>.

¹⁹ Blankley, K.M. & Britten, N. (July/August 2022). [Expansion of restorative justice initiatives for youth in Nebraska](#). *The Nebraska Lawyer*.

²⁰ Friesz, J. (July 22, 2020). [Testimony related to restorative justice](#). Judiciary Committee, North Dakota State Legislature.

²¹ Information provided by Elizabeth Hilt, Associate Director of the Consensus Council, by email (September 18, 2025) and videocall (September 19, 2025).

²² Information provided by Elizabeth Hilt, Associate Director of the Consensus Council, by videocall (September 19, 2025).

²³ [Who We Are](#) (n.d.), Vermont Community Justice Network.

²⁴ Emails to the author from Willa Farrell, Community Justice Unit Director, Vermont Association of Court Diversion and Pretrial Services, September 10, 2025 and September 15, 2025.

²⁵ Emails to the author from Willa Farrell, Community Justice Unit Director, Vermont Association of Court Diversion and Pretrial Services, September 10, 2025 and September 15, 2025.