



# Executive Summary

In 2019, the Council of the District of Columbia commissioned the Justice Policy Institute (JPI) to create a strategic plan to support the 2018 update of the Youth Rehabilitation Act (YRA). This strategic plan was intended to address the need for rehabilitative components for emerging adults, young people ages 18-24, which were notably missing from the 2018 revision to the YRA. **JPI submitted the YRA strategic plan to the District in 2021; however, no action has been taken to date to implement this strategic plan.**

Local criminal legal reforms such as the Incarceration Reduction Amendment Act (2016), Omnibus Public Safety and Justice Act (2018), and Second Look Amendment Act (2019) in the years surrounding the 2018 update to the YRA were intended to account for the needs of emerging adults as well as the need for public safety. These acts acknowledged developments in neurological science, which show that brain development, particularly with regard to executive function and decision-making, is ongoing through an emerging adult's mid-20s. This science and related research suggest that a comprehensive support system that addresses community and individual needs is the most effective long-term response to system involvement for emerging adults. Rehabilitative support, as shown in model programs from around the nation, results in lower recidivism rates, stronger social structures, and thriving communities over time.

However, in recent years, there has been a backlash blaming reform efforts for existing crime, when in fact, some of the **critical services and systems that were supposed to be implemented to support those reforms, such as the YRA strategic plan, were not implemented.** Public safety and justice reforms must be paired with the requisite services and systems to support system-involved emerging adults in being able to thrive and contribute positively to society. **Responsibility lies with the District to provide these types of strategic support, as recommended by the YRA strategic plan.**

**It is not too late to fix this.** This action plan is a guide for the District to use now to implement the YRA strategic plan. It is directly informed by the lived experience of DC's system-impacted emerging adults, a national developmental framework for emerging adult justice, research, and feedback from community partners and those working directly with the District's system-impacted emerging adults.

Across six areas, this action plan identifies a key priority and a first step towards meeting the priority. The need across these six areas is significant. While local and national models in each area point to the potential that can be achieved, **it also will require the District to advance policy and system-level change to address the shared goals of reducing crime while caring for all residents of the District.** This plan can serve as a guide to jurisdictions across the country working to improve the outcomes of young adults and invest in building safer communities.



## PRIORITIES

- 1. Create an Office of Emerging Adult Services.** Raise the profile of emerging adults and systematically address their needs as key components of violence prevention and community strength strategy.

**FIRST STEP:** Hire a director of emerging adult services.

- 2. Invest in Credible Messengers and Violence Interrupters.** Invest in people who build trust with similar life experiences and deep knowledge of place.

**FIRST STEP:** Prevent attrition and pay equitably.

- 3. Provide safe and stable housing.** Ease the burden of survival, allowing emerging adults space and time to develop critical life skills.

**FIRST STEP:** Develop a housing fund to support emerging adults.

- 4. Build education and workforce pathways.** Bridge the gap between current educational attainments and necessary education and job skills, thereby providing additional career options.

**FIRST STEP:** Provide access to education and award credit for learning.

- 5. Offer robust diversion and restorative justice options.** Prevent incarceration experiences, which further entrench trauma and harmful social situations. Connect emerging adults directly with the impacts of their actions, with the goal of restoring both the perpetrator and harmed parties.

**FIRST STEP:** Assess existing programs and begin to expand.

- 6. Invest in families, communities, and health.** Promote long-term wellbeing and reduce the odds of recidivism. Invest holistically in community partners to reinforce positive gains.

**FIRST STEP:** Provide family and health services for emerging adults.

We call on the District to recognize that system-impacted emerging adults can be an asset to the community and supported to achieve their greatest potential. This action plan offers a path forward for the District to pursue this investment in emerging adults to the benefit of families, communities, and the District.