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NEWS RELEASE

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Ramsey County Attorney's (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth Initiative evaluation reveals successful outcomes for youth, families and community

*Collaborative and restorative community-based response demonstrates better
outcomes for justice-involved youth than traditional court*

[\(Re\)Imagining Justice for Youth Impact Report: Increased Access, Reduced Recidivism](#)

Saint Paul, MN – Today, the Ramsey County Attorney was joined by state, local, and community leaders to highlight the successful partnership to transform the youth legal system in Ramsey County from a traditional adversarial model to a collaborative and restorative community-based approach known as (Re)Imagining Justice for Youth (RJY). Launched in July of 2021, RJY sought to fundamentally shift the paradigm from administering legal consequences to better meeting the needs of victims, families and young people by developing a collaborative review process to determine how best to respond through systematically evaluating harm, needs, and youth development. Instead of legal consequences such as a conviction, the goal is behavior change, accountability to community and victims, and less recidivism and re-referral rates.

“In almost five years since our launch, we have produced far better safety and justice outcomes for our community compared to the 10 years prior to 2021 and we have the data to prove it,” said Ramsey County Attorney John Choi. “We did this by transitioning away from an adversarial and legal consequence model to a more collaborative and restorative response through a collaborative review team that determines the best pathway to success for justice-involved youth and generates for more meaningful engagement of youth to repair harm with victims, family members, and peers.”

Measures of Success

Over a 4-year period, the Collaborative Review Team (“CRT”) reviewed eligible youth offenses brought to the RCAO to determine if community-accountability was likely to be successful, if the case required justice involvement at all, or whether the traditional justice system was the appropriate approach.

Of the total cases presented by law enforcement to the youth justice system, about 30% were reviewed by the CRT and 15% were fully resolved through based community accountability programs with no court involvement.

In 2022-2023, those young people referred to community accountability after CRT saw significantly improved outcomes over those whose cases were processed in court.

- 12-month recidivism rates for youth whose first cases were resolved in community accountability (4%) was far lower than those resolved in traditional court in the same period (29%), and lower than youth whose first cases were resolved in community in 2017-2018 (7%) or 2012-2013 (10%).
- Additional, more rigorous statistical analysis found that among matched cases of youth referred to the RCAO for the first time for an assault offense, those whose cases were resolved in community accountability had 1/3 the risk of recidivism compared to matched cases processed in traditional court.
- By revamping and increasing access to community accountability, RJY has lowered recidivism rates and established a process that ensures fewer future victims, increased graduation rates, higher employment rates, and a healthier community.
- To learn more, check out our most recent evaluation report by the University of Minnesota. [\(Re\)Imagining Justice for Youth Impact Report: Increased Access, Reduced Recidivism](#)

“Using a pre-charge process with the CRT, youth referred for assaults are making significant strides, consistent with research about the effectiveness of restorative practices in situations of interpersonal violence,” continued County Attorney Choi. “We have also seen promising results around eliminating the substantial and persistent racial disparities in the system, having decreased racial gaps with respect to which youth were offered community-based accountability and which youth succeeded in it.”

Lead University of Minnesota researcher Kara Beckman concluded, “The evidence on RJY clearly shows that accountability in community outperforms processing in traditional court. The county attorney should continue and expand RJY processes.”

“The documented and transparent results from the County Attorney demonstrate meaningful progress. We appreciate the collaborative approach and inclusion of law enforcement perspectives. The practices implemented since 2021 — combined with the proactive work of the Ramsey County Sheriff’s Office — are clearly improving public safety outcomes for our youth.”
- Ramsey County Sheriff Bob Fletcher

“For too long, traditional systems have responded to youth behavior -- particularly Black and Brown youth—with exclusion, punishment, and isolation. Restorative circles interrupt that pattern,” said Dr. Tamara Mattison, Founder of Generation 2 Generation. “They shift the question from ‘What rule was broken?’ to ‘Who was harmed, what are their needs, and how do we repair the harm?’ That reframing is transformational.”

“(Re)Imagining Justice for Youth proves that individual attention and accountability have a long-term positive impact,” said Ramsey County Chief Public Defender John Reimer. “It helps

address individual and family needs, ultimately leading to reduced recidivism.”

“We are honored to have partnered with RCAO to help them apply the latest research about brain science and adolescence development in their RJY initiative. The results demonstrate the approach is working, adding to existing evidence that strong connections to community lead to reductions in youth violence and increases in youth well-being.”

- Dr. Iris Borowsky, Gisela and E. Paul Konopka Chair in Adolescent Health and Development, UMN Medical School

Note: Contact Dennis Gerhardstein for additional information.