

Letters: Sending children to Angola increases chances of recidivism

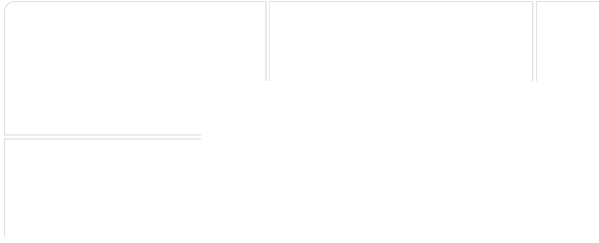


Approaching the entrance to Angola, visitors are sent to various parking lots. Traffic coming in uses contraflow.

BY JAN RISHER | FEATURES EDITOR

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR
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As physicians who care for children, we join in the recent op-ed by Demario Davis and Malcolm Jenkins to strongly oppose the relocation of our youth from juvenile detention facilities to Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola. Security issues that led to this decision aren't the fault of the children; they should be given the opportunity to rehabilitate, not be sent to a maximum-security facility designed for adult incarceration.



Detention centers are known to have profoundly negative impacts on physical, emotional and psychological health, without evidence of being effective in decreasing crime or rehabilitation. The solution to insufficient resources allocated to juvenile justice facilities in Louisiana isn't relocating detained children and adolescents to an adult facility. To redirect our youth from detainment to becoming valuable and contributing members of our community, we must invest in established, evidence-based interventions and build on existing initiatives in our communities.

Children and adolescents experience and internalize events differently than adults. Childhood trauma exposure can hinder development and increase learning disabilities, behavioral problems and mental health diagnoses, all of which subsequently increase the risk of incarceration. To detain children and adolescents in a facility that is not designed for their developmental, educational and psychiatric needs further increases their likelihood of recidivism.

Developmentally appropriate and culturally sensitive alternative initiatives have been shown to be more effective to afford youth the opportunities to develop into healthy, productive adults while maintaining public safety. Investing in these programs requires state funding to reform our current process; design changes to policies, practices and programs; and monitor impact.

These are our children, our community, and our future. It is up to all of us to advocate for them and do everything we can to ensure their safety.

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