



# **GIRLS AND THE VCO EXCEPTION**

## **Eliminating the VCO Exception in Favor of Secure Alternatives Benefits Girls**

### **FACT SHEET**

- Across the country, girls in the juvenile justice system serve twice the amount of detention time for status offenses compared to boys and are disproportionately effected by the VCO exception.
- In 2015, girls comprised 43% of petitioned status offender cases nationwide even though they made up only 14% of youth in residential placement.
- In 2015 girls made up almost 60% of all petitioned runaway status-offender cases in the United States. Girls often run because of abusive home environments, making detention a particularly cruel response.
- Increasing evidence shows courts use the VCO exception for girls out of paternalism, as girls are often viewed as needing protection from harm.
- Most states have eliminated the VCO exception or use it infrequently. However, Washington is continually ranked as one of the biggest offenders in detaining kids under the VCO exception.
- Research and best practices have shown that placing girls in detention for status offenses likely exacerbates the problems that caused intervention. Detention is particularly damaging for girls with trauma histories.
- Dozens of national child-welfare, mental health and civil rights organizations have come out in favor of repealing the VCO exception and noted that it particularly harms girls.