

LoHud: NY looks to treat 16 and 17 year olds as juveniles in criminal-justice system

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New York over the next three years will no longer treat 16 and 17 year olds convicted of crimes as adults, and instead move them into juvenile detention facilities in most cases.

Gov. Andrew Cuomo said today he would seek to implement the recommendations of the Commission on Youth, Public Safety & Justice, which he appointed last year.

“You put a 16 and 17-year-old into a state prison, there is no way they’re not going to come out worse than they went in,” Cuomo said via telephone to a Martin Luther King Day event hosted by the Rev. Al Sharpton in Harlem.

Later, Cuomo heard the recommendations from the commission at the Capitol. The commission said the state should implement the changes over three years.

By January 2017, the state would treat 17 year olds as juveniles, and then 18 year olds in the same manner by 2018.

The most serious crimes, such as murder and other violent convictions, would still be treated in criminal court, and the youth could still be convicted with the crimes. But their cases would be handled differently, and they wouldn’t go to regular jail. A judge would have the option to move the cases to family court.

The state would look to set up juvenile detention centers, rather than send the youth to prison. Less serious crimes, such as misdemeanors, would be transferred to family court.

“We’re going to keep 16 and 17-year-olds out of prison; We’re going to create juvenile facilities and get them the training in a safe environment so we can actually help them turn around their lives,” Cuomo said.

The state said it has about 800 youth aged 16 and 17 in state and county prisons, mainly minorities. Also, youthful offender status would be available for those up to age 20, and in non-violent cases, youth could get their records sealed if they stay out of trouble for at least five years.

Cuomo said the recommendations would be developed into a legislative package and sent to the state Legislature for approval.