

A new “megacourthouse” is being built in downtown Toronto. What does it mean for youth?

- The new Toronto courthouse will open in 2022.
- With 17-storeys, it will be the largest criminal court in Ontario and will handle approximately 40,000 criminal cases a year.
- It will amalgamate all Ontario Court of Justice criminal and youth justice courts in Toronto, including all three youth courts at 2201 Finch Ave. W, 1911 Eglinton Ave. E., and 311 Jarvis St.
- All young people between the ages of 12-17 charged by police will be required to appear at the new courthouse.

YOUTH-CENTRED APPROACH	<p>Combining all of Toronto’s youth justice and adult criminal courts at the new courthouse is a step backwards for youth justice in Toronto, which has had a youth-centered court at 311 Jarvis St. for more than six decades.</p> <p>It will be difficult to maintain a youth-centred approach at a courthouse primarily designed to address adult criminal matters.</p>
ACCESSIBILITY	<p>All youth courts and services in Toronto will be moved into the new courthouse. This means that young people from across the city will have access to the same services in the same location. But it also means that they can only access those services in downtown Toronto.</p> <p>It could take a young person more than 2 hours to get to the new courthouse if they are travelling from Scarborough by TTC.</p>
STIGMA & INTIMIDATION	<p>Youth who appear in court see themselves, and are seen by others, as “criminals.” This label can have long term negative effects. Research shows that youth who are steered into the court system are less likely to succeed in school or find stable employment, and are more likely to reoffend.</p> <p>Combining all of Toronto’s youth and adult courts threatens to blur the distinction between youth justice and adult criminal streams and further stigmatize youth in conflict with the law.</p>
CROSS-OVER YOUTH	<p>Youth from the child welfare system are overrepresented in the justice system.</p> <p>If youth justice is severed from family court and moved to the new courthouse, judges will not be able to oversee all child welfare and youth justice matters concerning a young person.</p>
SAFETY & SECURITY	<p>Youth courts will be in a designated area of the building and youth will be held in separate holding areas. But young people will enter through the same doors, wait in the same security lines, and use the same common areas as accused adults.</p> <p>At the new courthouse, kids as young as 12 from across the city will be required to appear in the same building as accused adults. Youth from different neighborhoods worry about their potential victimization if they appear in the same courthouse as youth from rival neighbourhoods.</p>



“If I were designing a court, I would make programs to prevent kids from getting charged again. And things to help youth having family problems, or are being bullied, have financial problems or need a job.”

-Youth with lived experience, age 16

READ MORE

“Criminal and youth lawyers worried about new Toronto ‘mega’ court, The Lawyer’s Daily, May 23, 2018. <https://www.thelawyersdaily.ca/articles/6500>

“The new Toronto megacourthouse is not for youth,” Toronto Star, May 2, 2018. <https://www.thestar.com/opinion/contributors/2018/05/02/the-new-toronto-megacourthouse-is-not-for-youth.html>

“Mother, experts concerned new ‘super’ courthouse won’t support youth in trouble with the law,” CBC, April 17, 2018. <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/mother-experts-concerned-new-super-courthouse-won-t-support-youth-in-trouble-1.4617092>

“Access to justice is about more than just access to courts,” SLAW, March 16, 2018. <http://www.slaw.ca/2018/03/16/access-to-justice-is-more-than-just-access-to-courts-youth-justice-and-the-new-toronto-courthouse/>

“Lawyers oppose court closures at forum, Law Times, December 4, 2017. <http://www.lawtimesnews.com/author/aidan-macnab/lawyers-oppose-court-closures-at-forum-15038/>

About Peacebuilders

Peacebuilders is a Toronto-based non-profit organization that provides programs and services to young people and works towards effecting change in our justice and education systems. We use restorative practices to keep young people out of the criminal justice system, make schools safer places for learning and development, and build strong and healthy communities.

Since 2004, Peacebuilders has run a restorative justice court-diversion program, Restorative Youth Circles (RYC), for youth between the ages of 12 and 18 accused of criminal offences. RYC is based out of the Ontario Court of Justice youth and family court at 311 Jarvis Street. Please visit www.peacebuilders.ca for more information.

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