

# Detention, Incarceration, and What Works to Improve Public Safety and Youth Outcomes

June 18, 2026

Josh Weber, Director, Youth and Juvenile  
Justice, The Council of State Governments  
Justice Center



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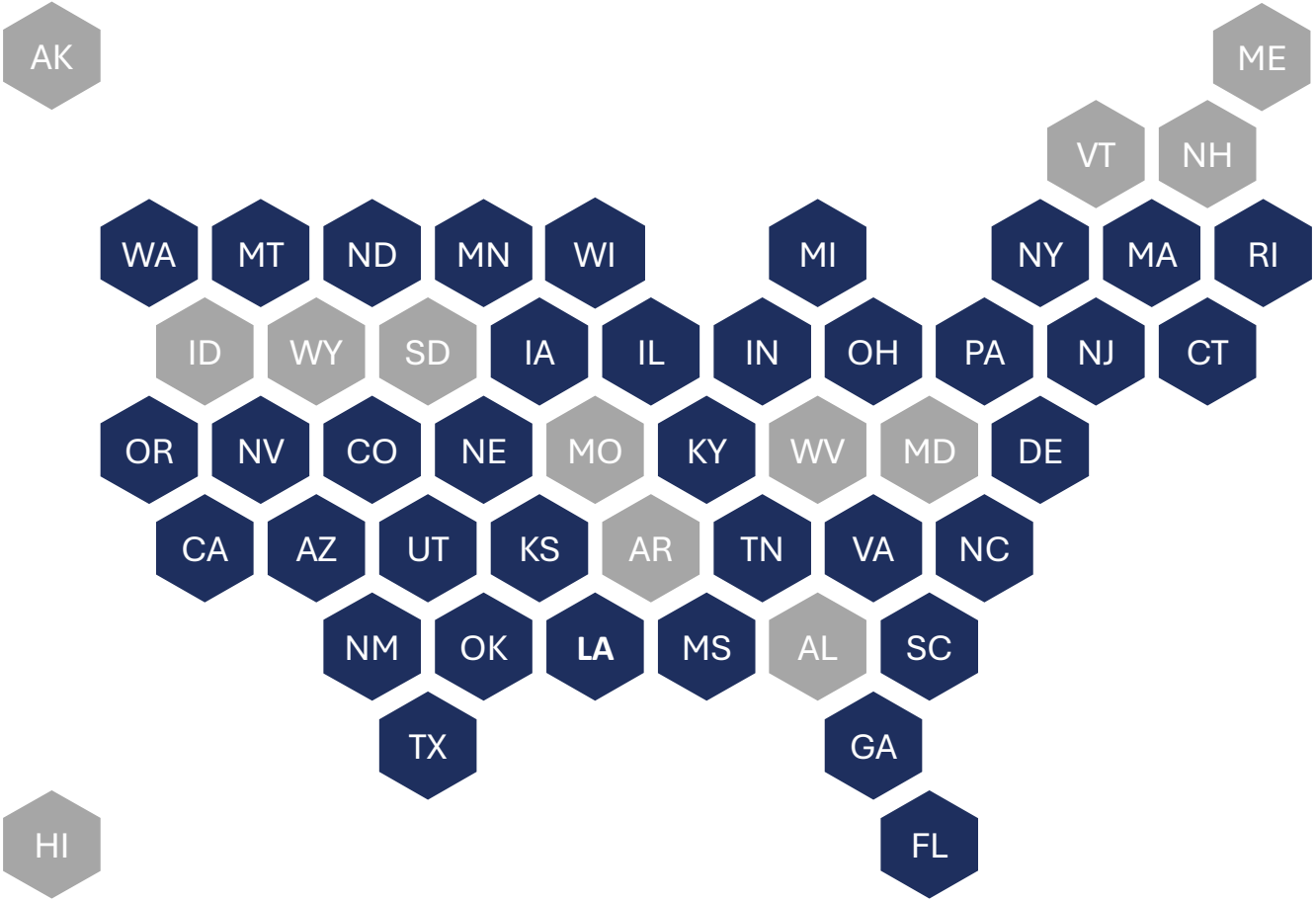
## Solutions for complex justice challenges

We help leaders in every state make communities safer and healthier.

- Trusted Data
- Practical Solutions
- Cross-systems collaboration



# We've helped improve outcomes for millions of youth and families in contact with the juvenile justice system nationwide.



# Current State of the Field

# Public concern, media coverage, and political divisiveness on youth crime and violence is currently at levels not seen since the mid-1990s.

**2** BALTIMORE  
WMAR

**HOMEPAGE SHOWCASE**

## 'You can't keep letting them get away with it': Addressing juvenile crime



MOCO 360

Opinion

### Opinion: To fix our juvenile justice system, we need accountability for offenders

Montgomery County has an obligation to fill the gaps to prevent recurring incidents

by **Dawn Luedtke**

November 18, 2023 11:00 am



By: Elizabeth

At our Oct. 30 County Council Public Safety Committee

## READER

**NEWS & POLITICS**

### Politics of fear: Are youth really to blame for the car-jacking spike?

Cops say masked teens with a thirst for violence and

are terrified  
reveals  
al evidence

Dukmas  
2021



### Lawmakers looking to hold parents accountable for their children's crimes



## THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

### Juvenile Crime Surges, Reversing Long Decline. 'It's Just Kids Killing Kids.'

Violence among children has soared across the country since 2020. One consequence: a mounting toll of young victims.

By [Dan Frosch](#) and [Zusha Elinson](#) | Photographs by José A. Alvarado Jr. for The Wall Street Journal  
Jan. 23, 2023 10:06 am ET

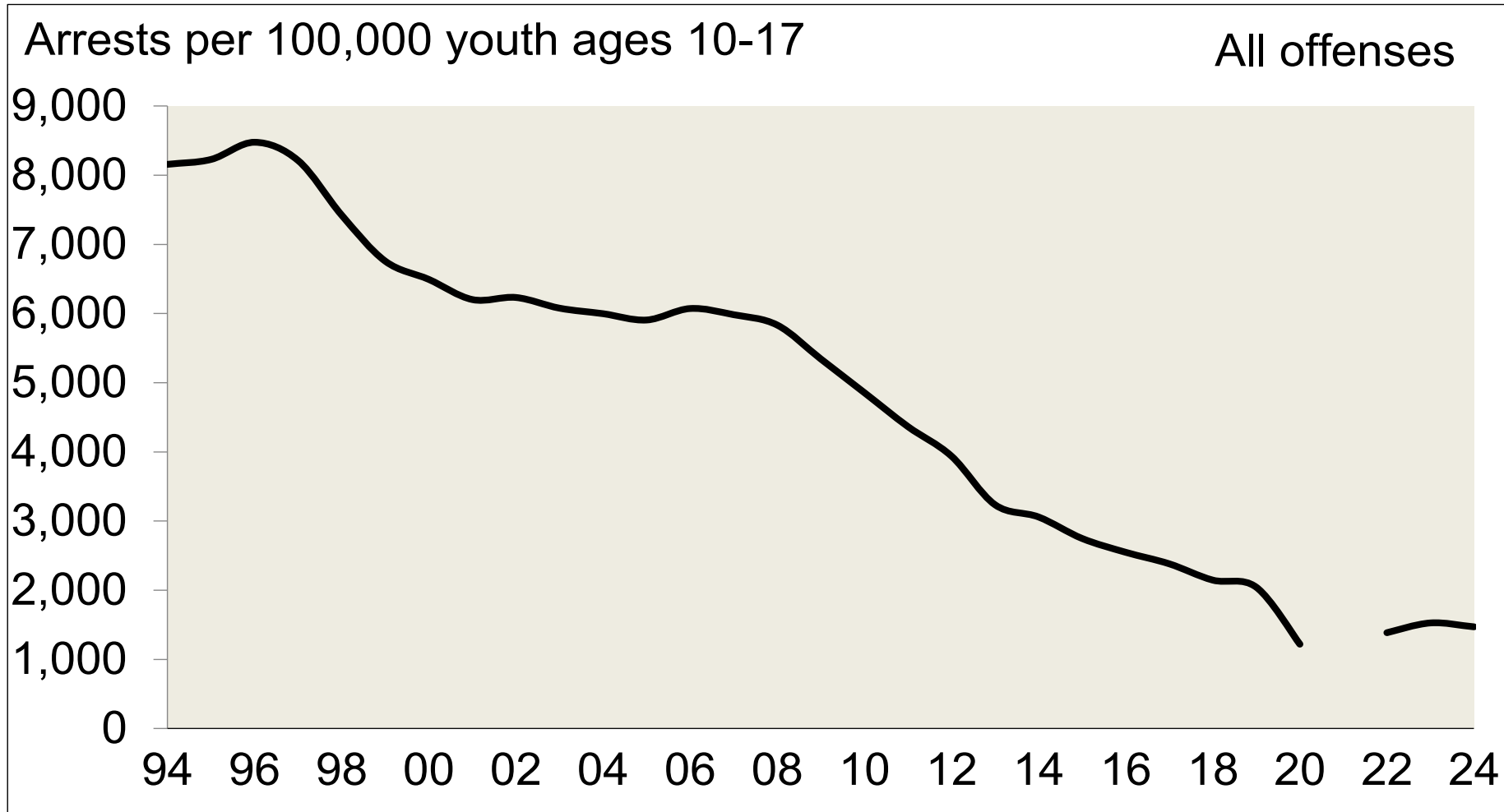
**2** BALTIMORE  
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**IN FOCUS**

### Governor wants juvenile justice bills to focus on accountability

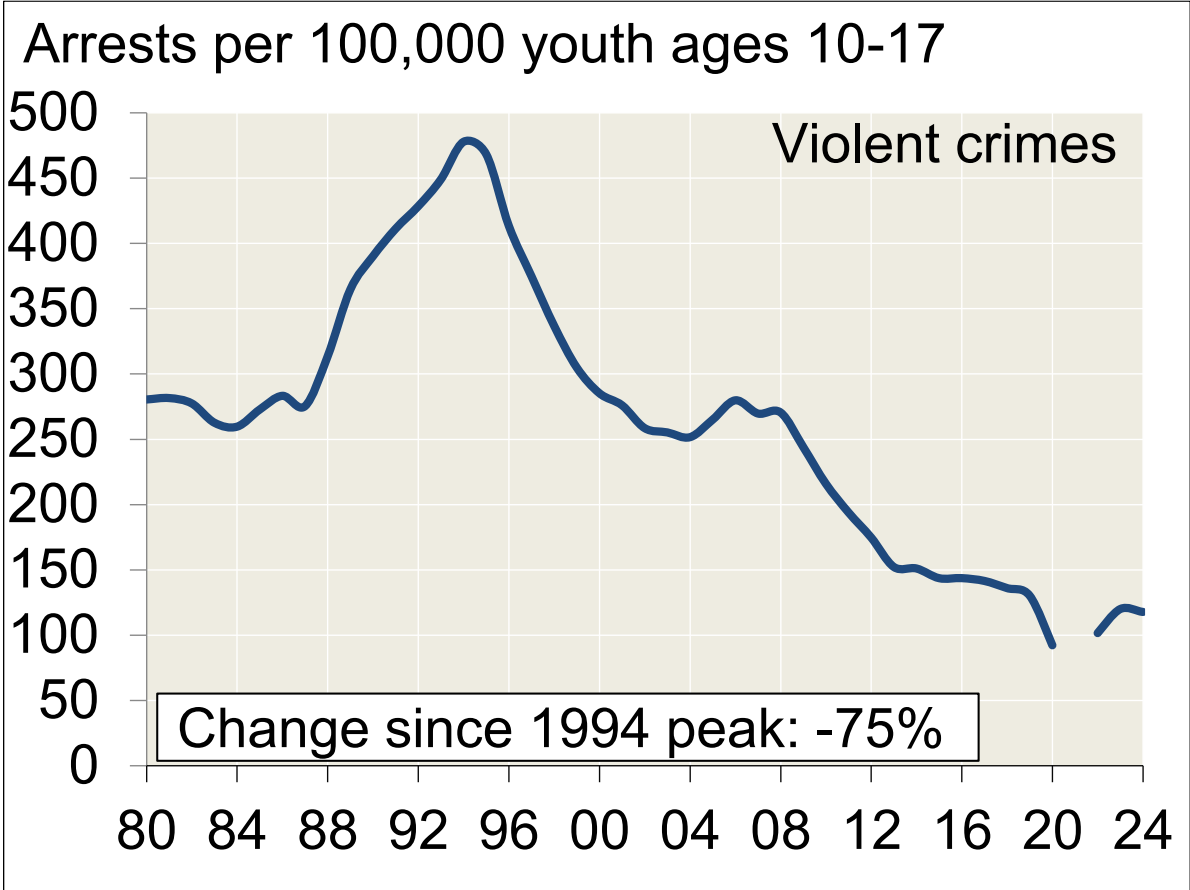
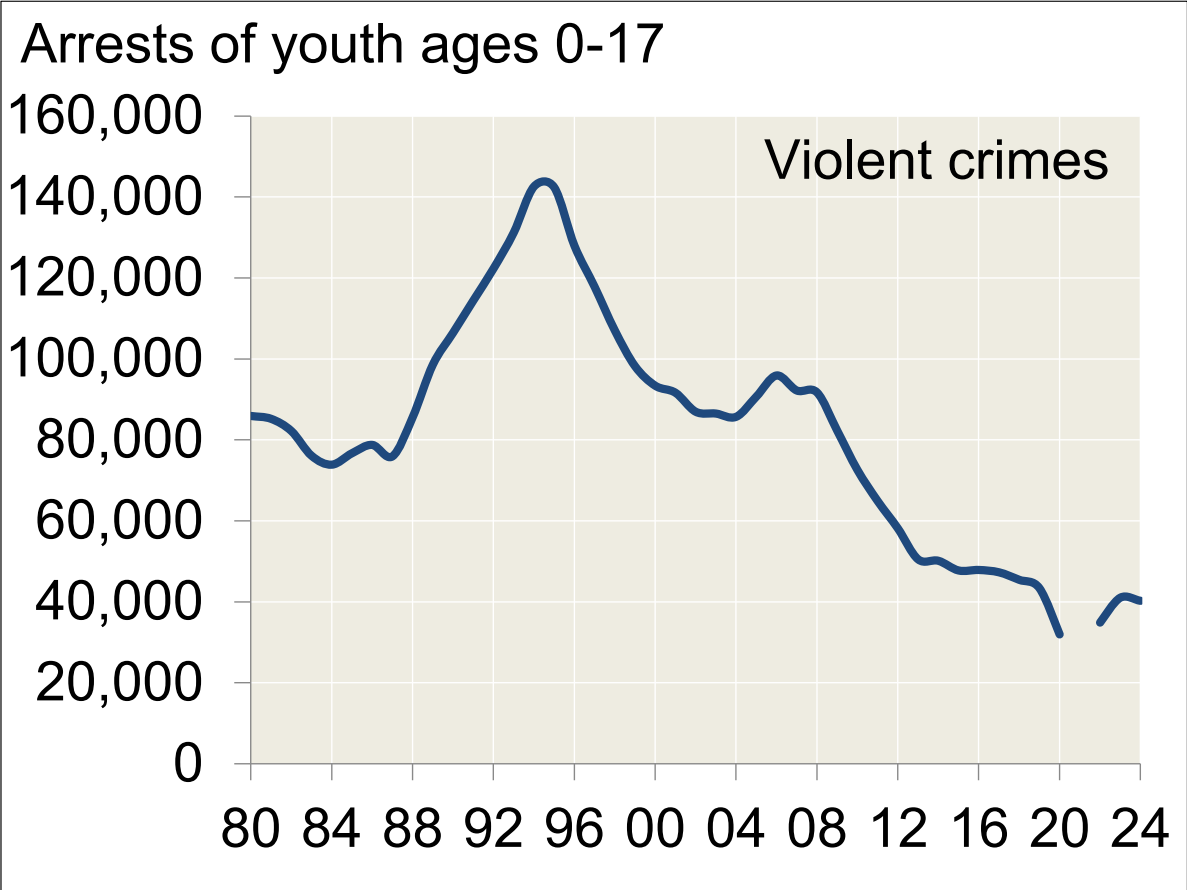


# The overall arrest rate for youth in 2024 was 83% below the 1996 peak.



Data source: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book (1980–2020); Crime in the United States Tables 38–40 (2022–2024).

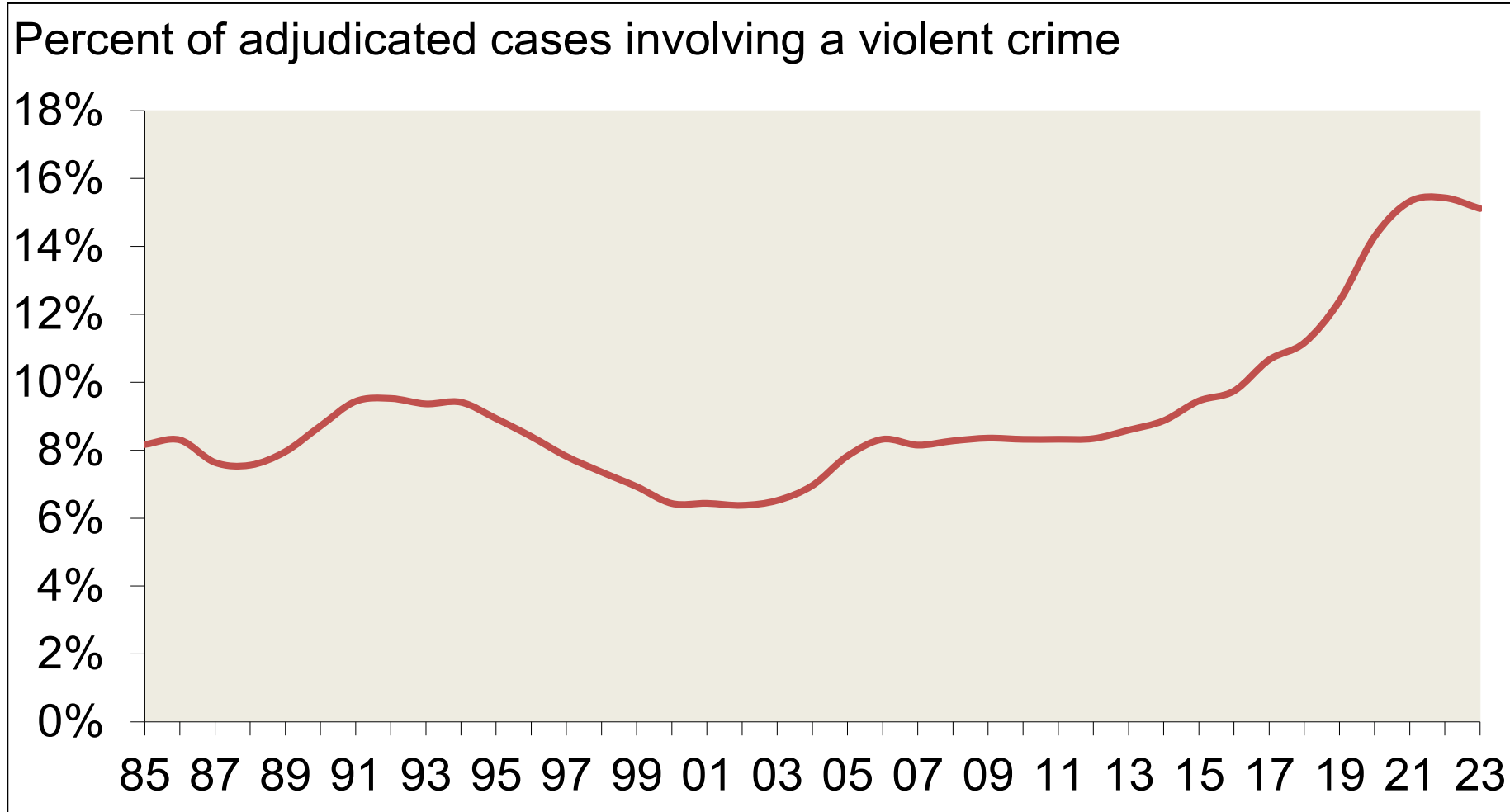
# The youth arrest rate for violence offenses is down 75% since 1994.



**\*After a brief increase post pandemic, youth violence rates fell again in 2024 to below pre pandemic levels**

Data source: OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book (1980–2020); Crime in the United States Tables 38–40 (2022–2024).

**Because fewer youth who commit minor offenses are being arrested and adjudicated, the proportion of cases before the court involving a violent crime has almost doubled in the past 20 years.**



Data source: Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics.

# Adolescents are experiencing unprecedented mental health challenges, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.



**29%**

Reported that their **mental health was not good** “most of the time or always.”



**20%**

Seriously considered attempting suicide.



**40%**

Felt sad or hopeless in 2023, compared to 26% in 2009. This includes 53% of girls and over 65% of LGBTQ youth.



**109%**

Increase in adolescent drug overdose deaths during the pandemic.

Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System 2023, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm>.

# Public agencies and providers are facing significant staffing challenges that undermine their ability to address youth's needs.

**> 85%**

Cite moderate or severe challenges in hiring and retaining staff.

**> 80%**

Report moderate or severe staffing challenges among service providers, significantly impacting service availability.

**< 10%**

Felt their state had a plan to address these staffing challenges.

# Use of Out-of-Home Placement: Research and Best Practices

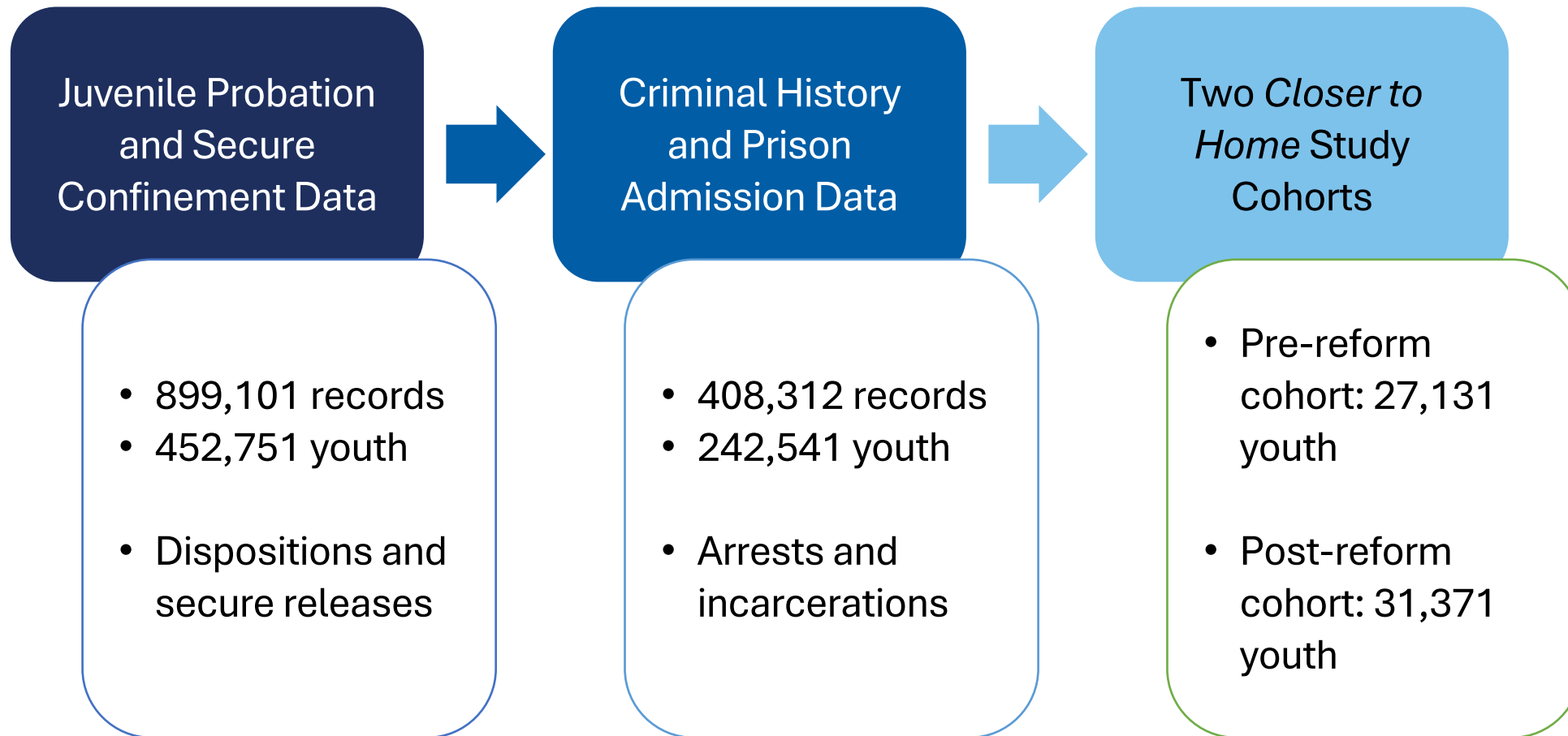
# Out-of-home placement is an ineffective community safety, youth development, health, economic, or resource allocation strategy.

## Compared to their similar peers, youth who are placed out of home are:

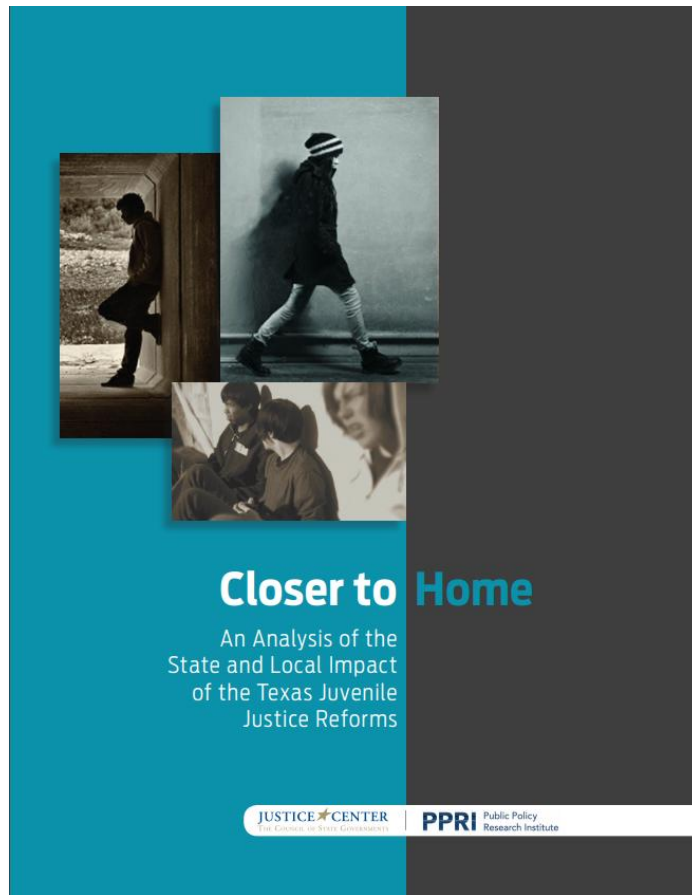
- More likely to reoffend when they return to the community
- More likely to commit a serious, violent offense when they reoffend
- Have a significantly greater likelihood of adult criminal justice involvement, including self-reported criminality and incarceration
- Less likely to complete high school
- Experience lower wages, longer periods of non-employment, and higher levels of public assistance into adulthood, with particularly pronounced effects for Black youth
- Experience negative and lasting psychological and social effects including health problems, functional limitations, depressive symptoms, suicidal ideation, and substance abuse.

\*The cost of placement is typically over 7–15 times the cost of intensive, evidence-based, community-based programs demonstrated to reduce recidivism with high-risk youth.

# We partnered with Texas to conduct the largest-ever study of secure incarceration vs. community supervision comparing similar youth.



# Texas Recidivism Study: Youth who were incarcerated were more likely to reoffend than similar youth who remained in the community.



## One-Year Probability of Rearrest

Released from State-Run Secure Facilities

**41%**

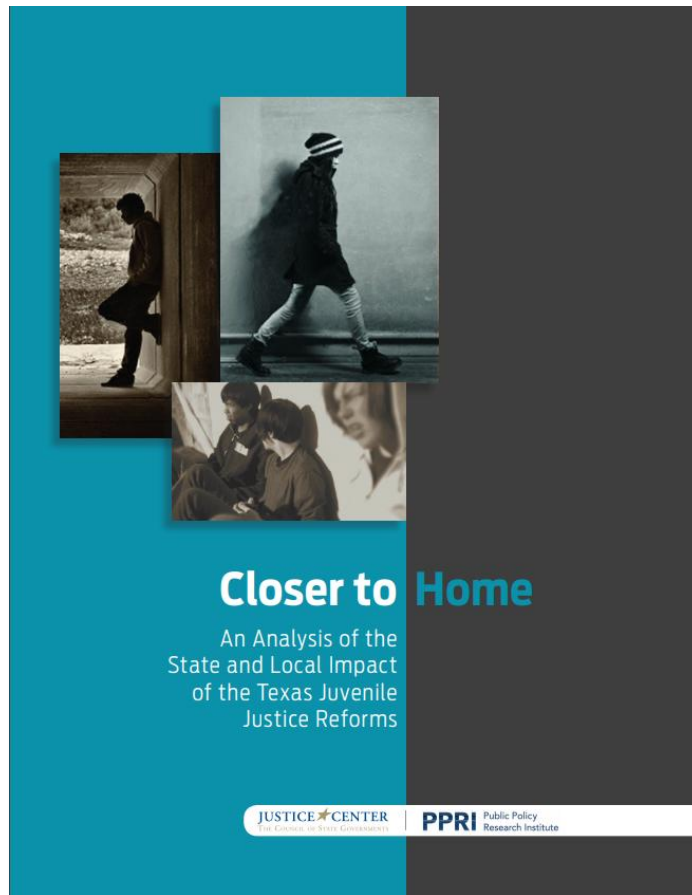
Supervised in the Community

**34%**



**21% more likely to be rearrested**

# Texas Recidivism Study: Youth who were incarcerated who did reoffend were more likely to commit a felony offense.



## First Recidivism Offense a Felony

Released from State-Run Secure Facilities

**49%**

Supervised in the Community

**17%**

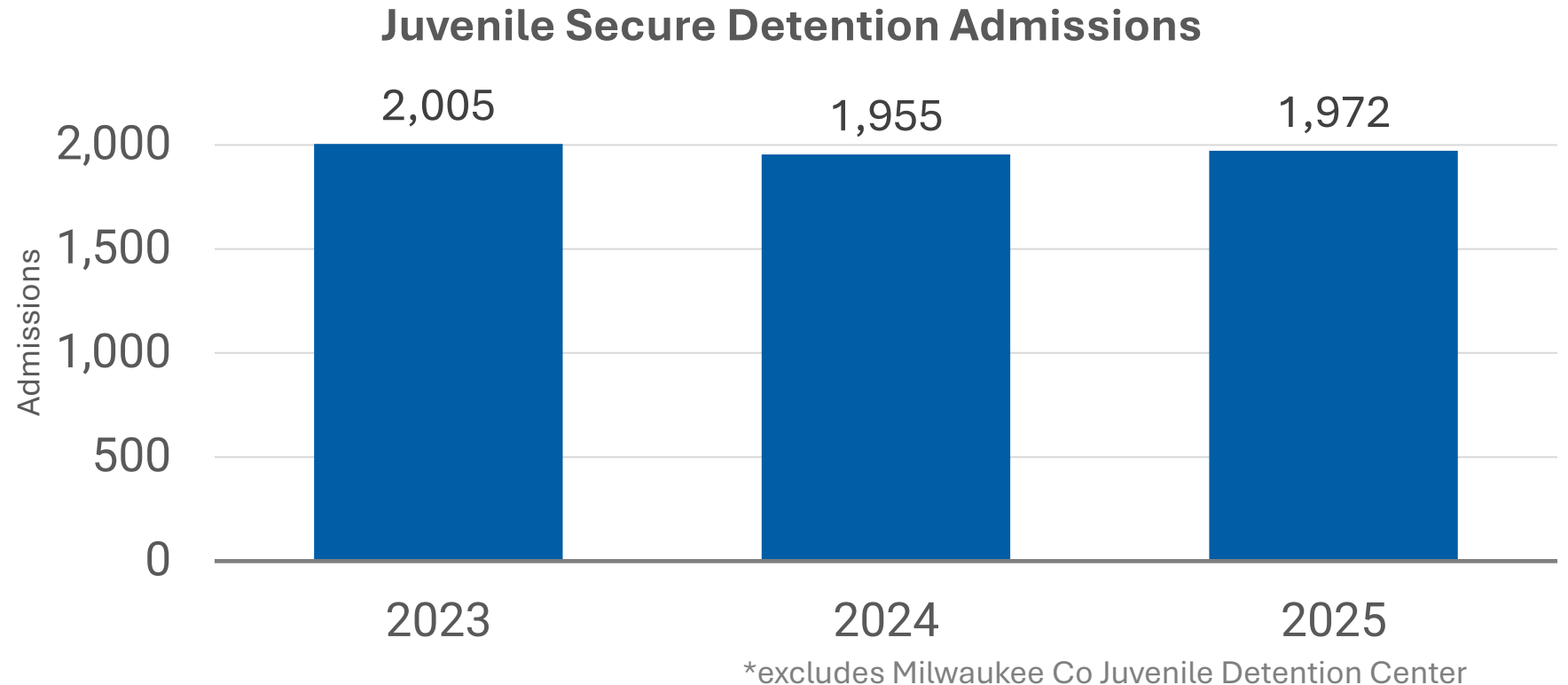
**3x more likely to commit a felony when recidivating**

# Use of Detention and Incarceration in Wisconsin

# Like other states, detention admissions in WI declined substantially over the last two decades but have remained steady the last few years.

\*In 2023, WI had the 11<sup>th</sup> lowest statewide detention rate in the country.

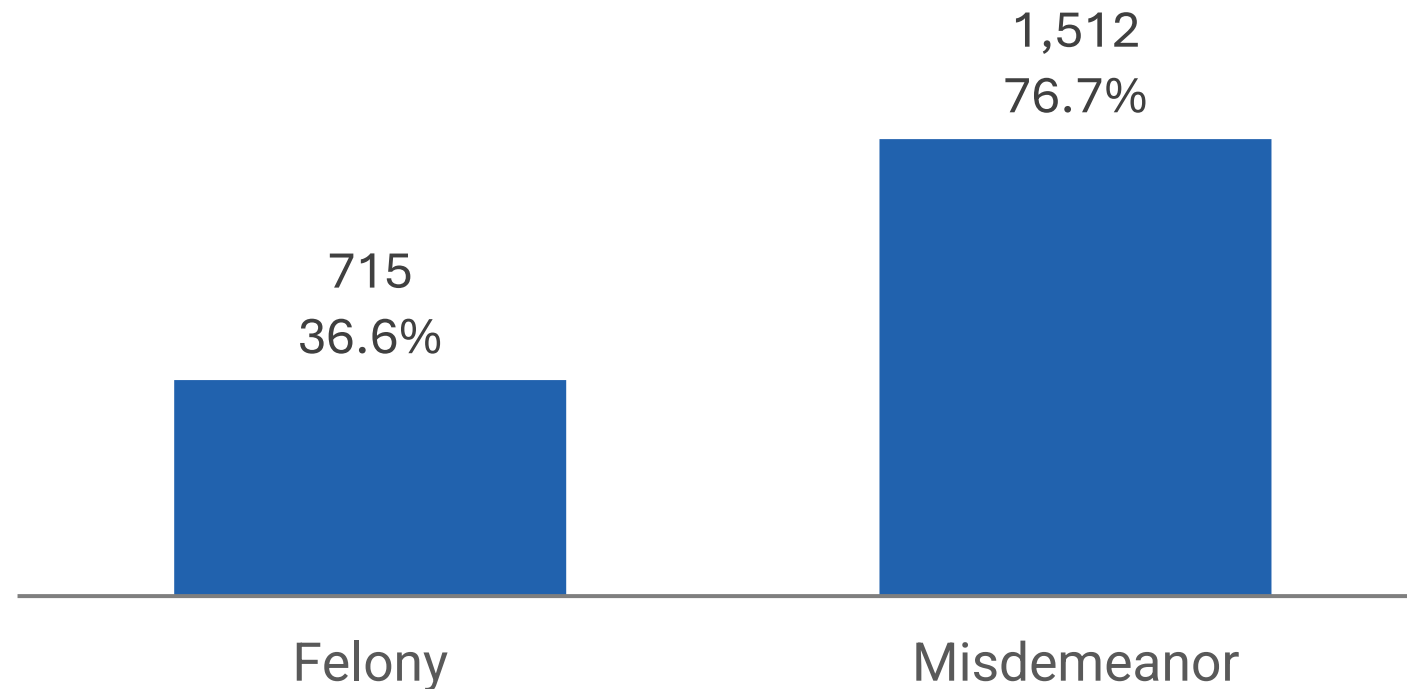
\*\*In 2023, the detention rate per 100,000 for White youth was 7; for Native American youth it was 55, and for Black youth it was 213.



All detention data provided by DCF. Comparative and rate data from OJJDP Census of Residential Placement.

# Over three-quarters of youth who are detained in WI have committed a misdemeanor offense.

Offense Classification of Admissions to WI Juvenile Detention Facilities, 2025\*



\*Admissions may be associated with multiple offenses, so percentages may total over 100%.

# Most youth who are detained in WI have committed a nonviolent offense.

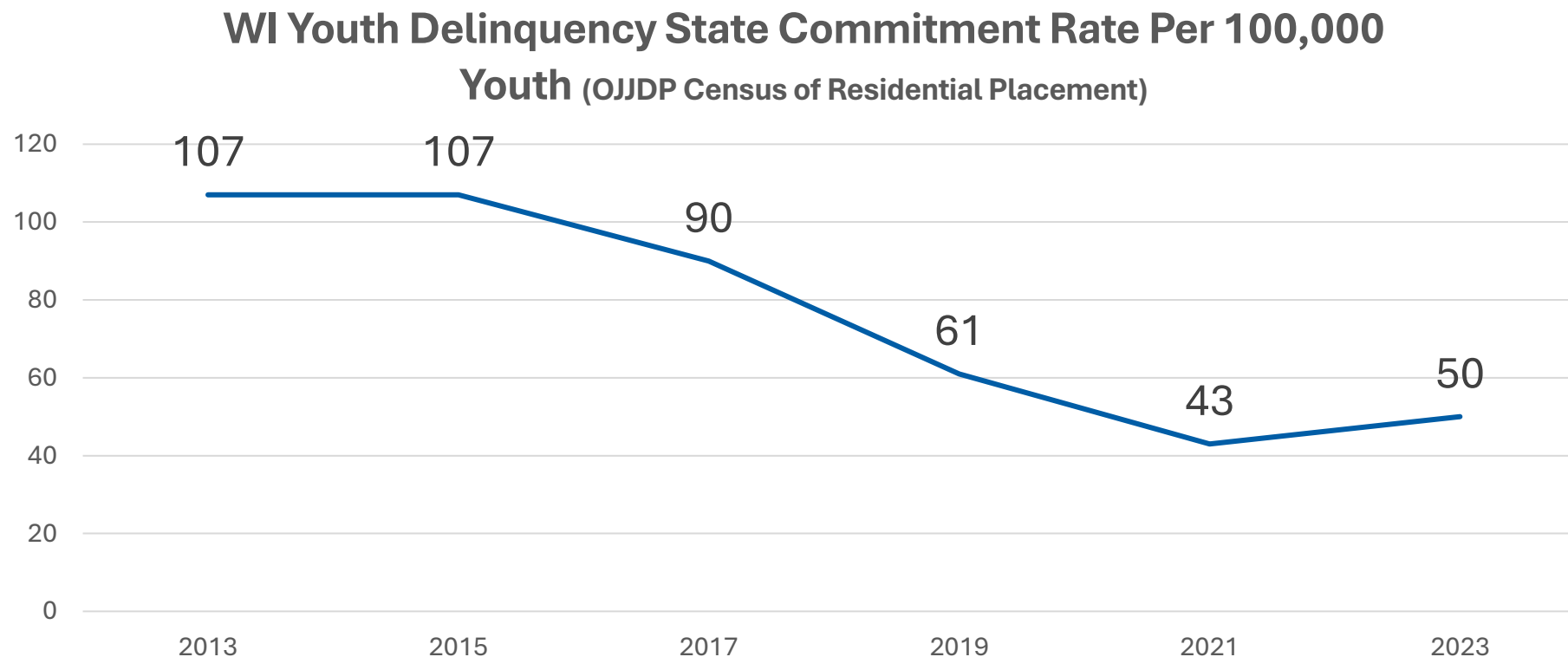
**Offense Categories of Admissions to WI Juvenile Detention Facilities\***

Offense Category	2023		2024		2025	
	Percent	Count	Percent	Count	Percent	Count
Society	39.5%	791	46.9%	916	47.0%	927
Other	47.9%	961	45.8%	896	46.0%	907
Property	32.9%	659	32.6%	637	32.1%	632
Violent	7.5%	151	6.3%	123	7.8%	154
Drug	4.4%	89	4.7%	91	4.7%	92

\*excluding Admissions to Milwaukee County Juvenile Detention Center  
Admissions may be associated with multiple offenses, so percentages may total over 100%.

The most common offenses within the Society category include disorderly conduct and possession of dangerous weapon by child-firearm. The most common offenses within the Other category include battery and resisting or obstructing an officer.

# Similarly, like other states, WI's commitment rate has declined over the last decade, but it has increased more recently.

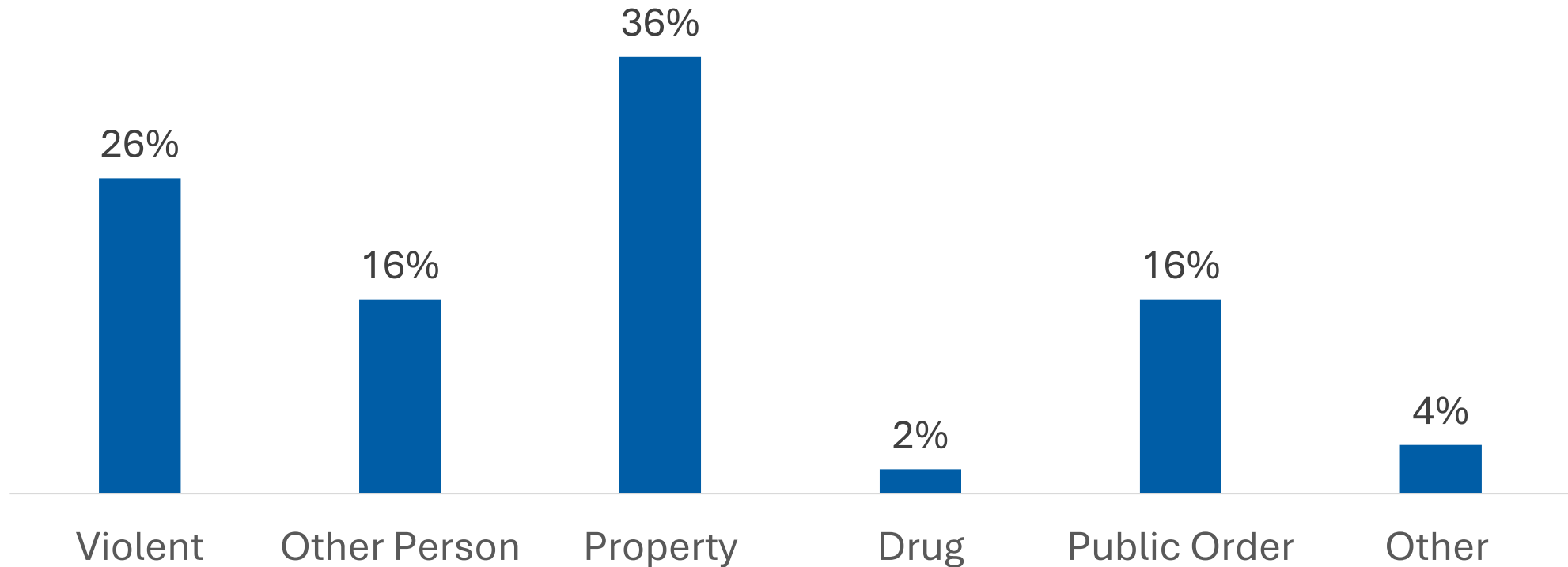


\*In 2023, WI had the 17<sup>th</sup> lowest commitment rate in the country.

\*\*In 2023, the commitment rate for White youth was 24; for Native American youth it was 274, and for Black youth it was 288.

# Approximately three-quarters of youth in state custody in WI in 2023 committed a nonviolent offense and 48% a nonperson offense.

2023 State Commitments Most Serious Offense  
(OJJDP Census of Residential Placement)



\*In 2023, nationally, 66% of committed youth were committed for a nonviolent offense and 53% for a nonperson offense.

# Best Practices in the Use of Detention and Incarceration

# Best Practice 1: Establish a shared vision for the use of placement and strict criteria to guide these decisions.

## Out-of-home placement should generally be limited to the following 3 reasons:

1. Youth are at high risk for seriously harming another person.
2. Youth have such acute behavioral health needs that their behavior is unmanageable in the community, and they require a brief period of stabilization in a residential setting.
3. Youth are a demonstrated flight risk (detention).

## Youth should not be detained or incarcerated for:

1. Treatment reasons
2. Self-protection
3. Family reasons
4. For assessment/competency evaluation or other diagnostic purposes
5. Lack of community-based alternatives
6. Struggling to comply with probation conditions not directly related to public safety

## Best Practice 2: Use validated screening and assessment tools to guide placement decisions.

- ✓ Require that no youth can be brought to detention by law enforcement or any other party without first conducting a detention screening using a validated screening tool.
- ✓ Detention screenings should be brief, focused on public safety and flight risk, conducted 24/7, and have limited (<10%) overrides.
- ✓ Detention screening tools should rule youth in, rather than rule youth out, and should be accompanied by decision-making criteria, guidelines, and a continuum of alternatives.
- ✓ Conduct validated risk assessments and mental health/trauma screenings (and assessments as needed) for all youth prior to disposition.
- ✓ Provide a summary of key assessment findings and recommendations for supervision and services to all case parties prior to disposition.
- ✓ Require supervisor review/approval processes, and potentially multisystem staffing, before making placement recommendations, including for nonsecure facilities.

# Best Practice 3: Develop alternative pathways, services, and supports for youth with varying risks and needs in lieu of placement.

## Public Safety Concerns

- ✓ Evidence-based, community-based risk reduction services, especially intensive cognitive behavioral therapy and family therapy (MST, FFT, DBT, trauma-informed CBT, etc.)
  - Don't mistake mental health services for risk-reduction services.
  - Establish a dedicated cohort of providers, contractual requirements, rates commensurate with the population served, required training, and case management partnerships.
- ✓ Wraparound case management/mentoring/youth advocate programs
- ✓ Violence interrupters/credible messengers
- ✓ Safety planning with youth, families, prosocial networks, and service providers
- ✓ Electronic monitoring/reporting centers/pre-disposition supervision

## Best Practice 3: Develop alternative pathways, services, and supports for youth with varying risks and needs in lieu of placement (cont.).

### Behavioral Health/Self-Protection

- ✓ Dedicated partners and pathways, potentially through MOUs, for behavioral health assessments
- ✓ Mobile crisis and alternative responders
- ✓ Therapeutic respite
- ✓ Partner with the behavioral health system to access Certified Community Behavioral Health Clinics and Medicaid funded intensive in-home/CBT/family therapy
- ✓ Teleservices

## Best Practice 3: Develop alternative pathways, services, and supports for youth with varying risks and needs in lieu of placement (cont.).

### Family Reasons

- ✓ Domestic conflict alternative response models so family conflict does not become a driver of juvenile justice system involvement
- ✓ Family finding processes and kinship care placements
- ✓ Respite/shelter
- ✓ Family advocates/navigators with lived experience
- ✓ Family strengthening services, including partnerships with the child welfare system
- ✓ Crossover youth policies, case conferencing, boundary spanners, and specialized support services
- ✓ Therapeutic foster care homes/Multidimensional Treatment Foster Care

# Best Practice 3: Develop alternative pathways, services, and supports for youth with varying risks and needs in lieu of placement (cont.).

## Lack of Services

- ✓ Establish an ongoing leadership group of other youth/family service systems and providers to share information and coordinate on service funding/availability/access/MOUs
- ✓ Develop a multisystem case conferencing process for complex cases
- ✓ Conduct community service resource and fiscal mapping, including grassroots services such as mentoring and credible messenger programs, faith-based services, prosocial activities, etc.
- ✓ Teleservices
- ✓ Structured probation sessions such as EPICS, Family Functional Probation, Carey Guides, journaling, Motivational Interviewing, etc.
- ✓ Bring evidence-based programming in house and/or establish regional models such as for MST, FFT, Thinking for a Change, ART, etc.
- ✓ Keep trying! And hold all parties accountable for success.

## **Best Practice 4: Establish collaborative evaluation, communications, and accountability/continuous quality improvement strategies.**

- ✓ Collect and analyze data on the use of detention and incarceration.
  1. Alignment between screening and assessment tools and judicial/system decisions
  2. Offense, risk, and demographic profile of youth detained and incarcerated
  3. Service utilization including dedicated alternatives to placement
  4. Recidivism and technical violation rates as well as other youth outcomes
- ✓ Establish ongoing, collaborative processes to share and use data to guide policies/funding across branches of government and system stakeholders.
- ✓ Highlight success through both data and storytelling and be proactive in strategic communications.
- ✓ Establish a shared approach to risk management, learn from cases that go wrong, and hold one another accountable for continuous quality improvement.

# Thank You!

For more information, please contact Josh Weber at [jweber@csg.org](mailto:jweber@csg.org).

## Solutions for justice challenges.

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