



Data Snapshot of Youth Incarceration in New Jersey

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In New Jersey, youth are incarcerated in three secure care facilities operated by the state's Juvenile Justice Commission (JJC). The JJC also operates 11 residential community homes where youth are housed in a less restrictive environment.¹

The youth incarceration rate in New Jersey has declined significantly in recent years. Between 2011 and 2017, the number of youth committed to secure care facilities dropped 50 percent. As of February 2017, 274 youth were incarcerated in state secure facilities (JJC, 2017).

While youth incarceration has declined in New Jersey, the state has the third-highest Black-White commitment disparity rate in the country.² In 2013, Black youth in New Jersey were 26 times as likely to be incarcerated as White youth.

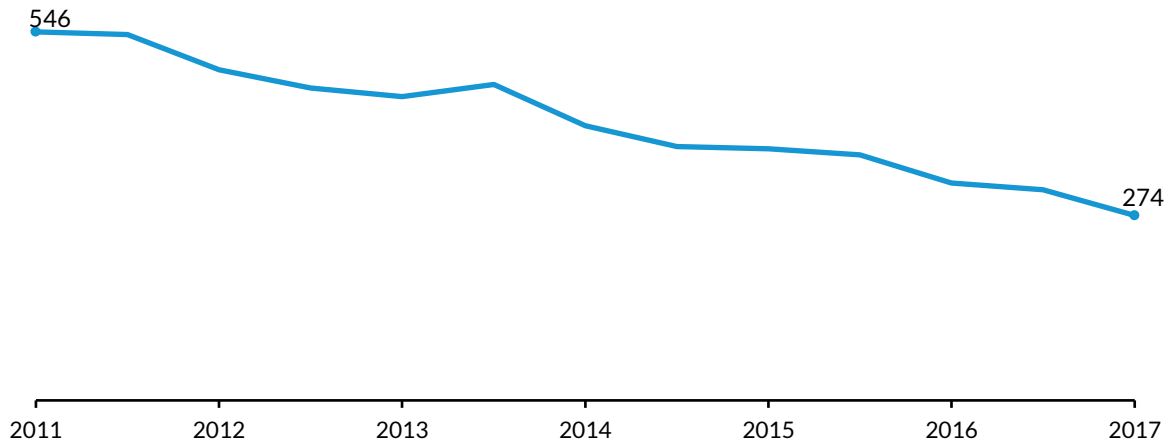
New Jersey is notable for its efforts to reduce pretrial detention of youth through the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (Mendel 2014).

Youth Incarceration Down 50 Percent since 2011

The number of youth committed to state facilities has steadily declined over the past several years, dropping 50 percent between 2011 and 2017 (figure 1). As of February 2017, 274 youth were committed to secure care facilities in New Jersey (JJC 2017).

FIGURE 1

Number of Youth in Secure Care Facilities, 2011-17



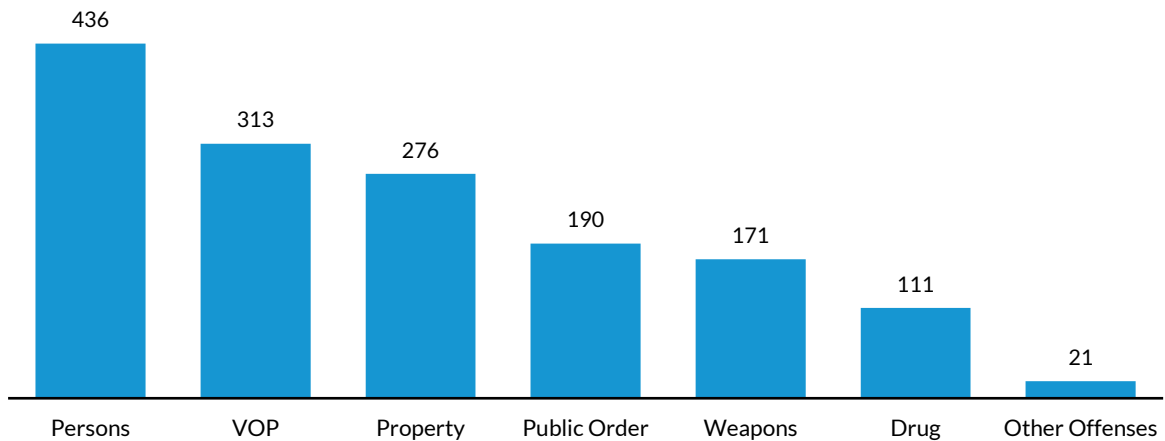
Source: New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.

Most Youth in New Jersey Are Incarcerated for Nonviolent Offenses

In New Jersey, most youth are incarcerated for persons offenses, followed by violations of probation (figure 2). Note, however, that publicly available data on these offense categories lack detail; the broad groupings published by the JJC mask important information about the wide range of crimes categorized under persons or property offenses.

FIGURE 2

Number of Offenses among Incarcerated Youth



Source: New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.

Note: VOP = violations of parole.

New Jersey Disproportionately Incarcerates Black Youth

The majority of justice-involved youth in New Jersey are Black (figure 3). Black youth make up 73 percent of those committed to secure juvenile facilities (JJC 2017) but only 14 percent of the youth population in the state.³

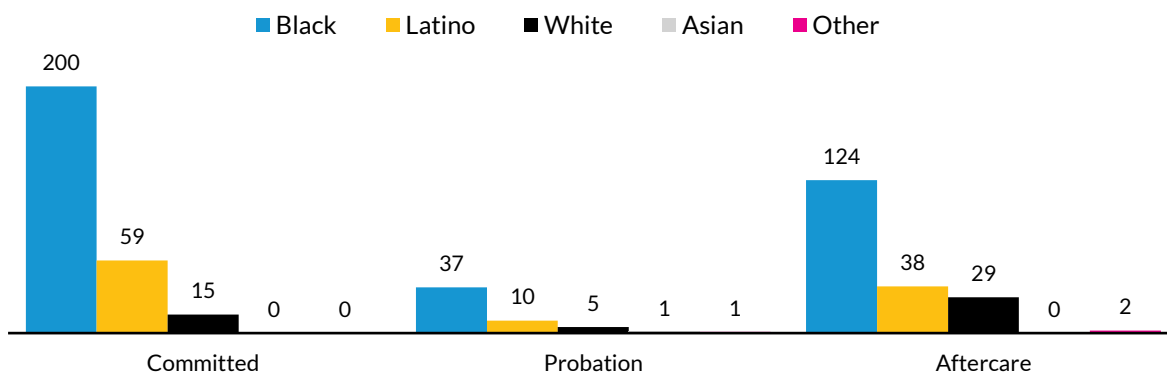
Across multiple metrics, racial and ethnic disparities in the state’s juvenile justice system are well above the national average. New Jersey has the third-highest Black-White commitment disparity in the country.

In 2013,⁴ compared with White youth, Black youth in New Jersey were

- 29.2 times as likely to be detained,⁵
- 24.2 times as likely to be committed,⁶ and
- 26.2 times as likely to be incarcerated out of home.⁷

FIGURE 3

Number of Justice-Involved Youth by Race

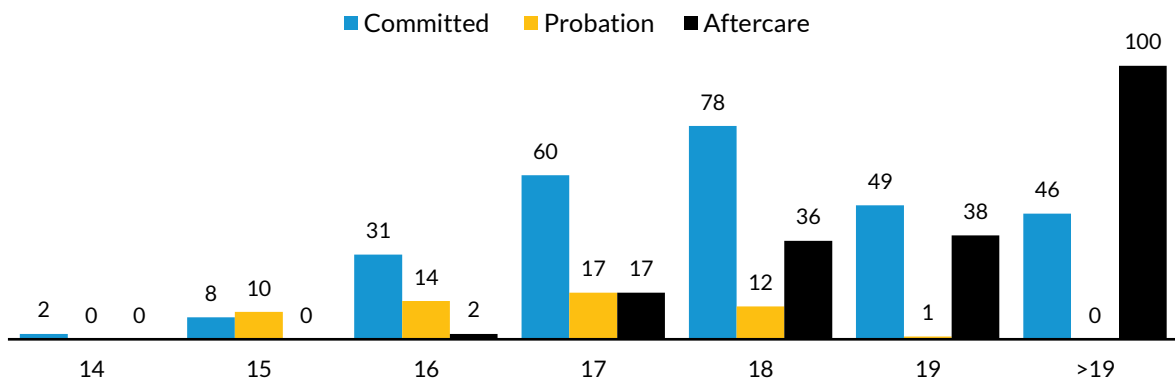


Source: New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.

Most committed youth are between 17 and 19 years old (figure 4); youth on probation tend to be slightly younger, and youth in aftercare tend to be older (JJC 2017). The vast majority of justice-involved youth in New Jersey are male (figure 5), and approximately 42 percent of committed youth and 41 percent of youth on probation receive special education services (figure 6; JJC 2017).

FIGURE 4

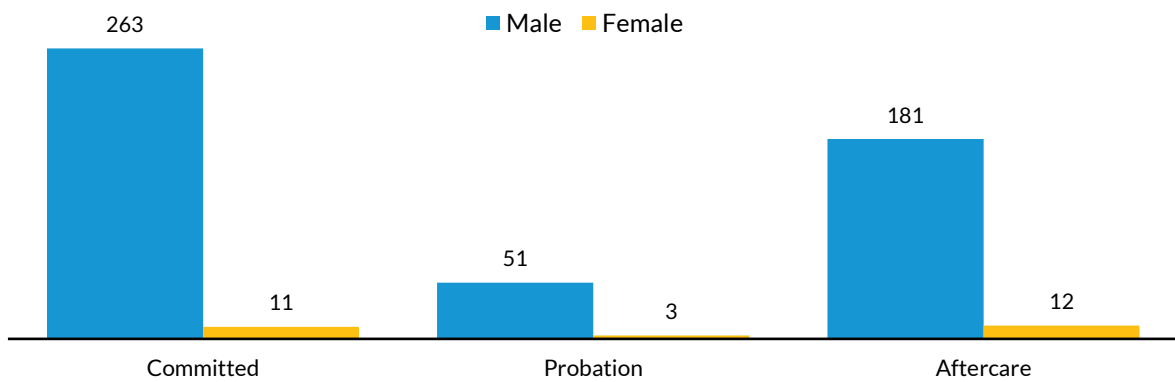
Number of Justice-Involved Youth by Age



Source: New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.

FIGURE 5

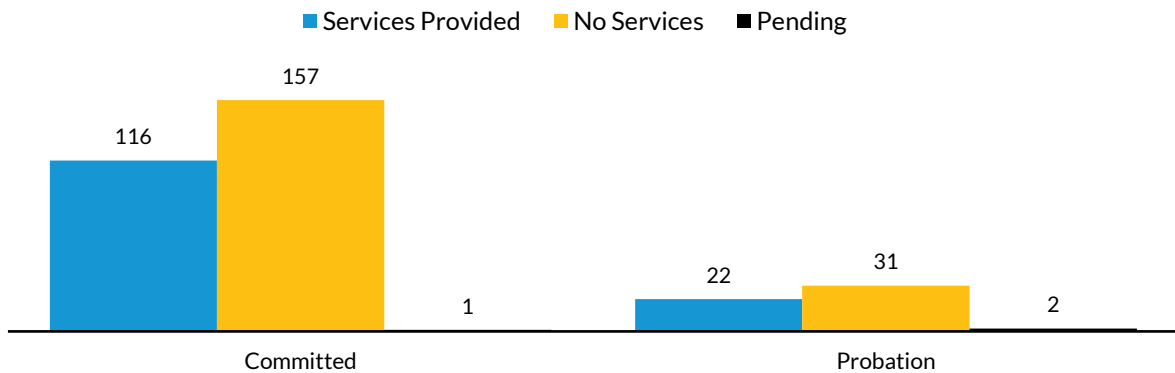
Number of Justice-Involved Youth by Gender



Source: New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.

FIGURE 6

Number of Justice-Involved Youth by Provision of Special Education Services



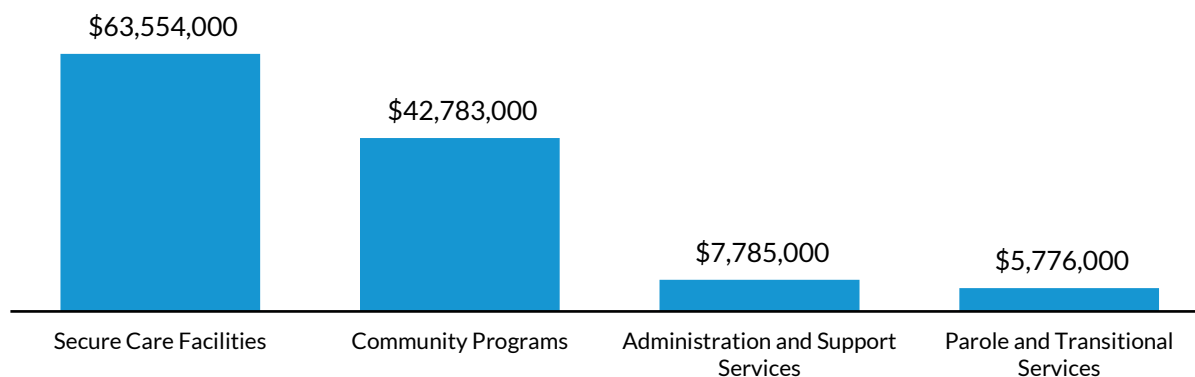
Source: New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission.

Despite Population Declines, New Jersey Still Spends Heavily on Incarceration

Most of New Jersey's 2016–17 juvenile justice appropriations (53 percent) are slated for operation of the state's three secure care facilities (figure 7). Community programs, including the operation of residential community homes and grants-in-aid to programs such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative, make up 36 percent of the state's juvenile justice appropriations (Treasury 2016).

FIGURE 7

Juvenile Justice Appropriations, 2016–17



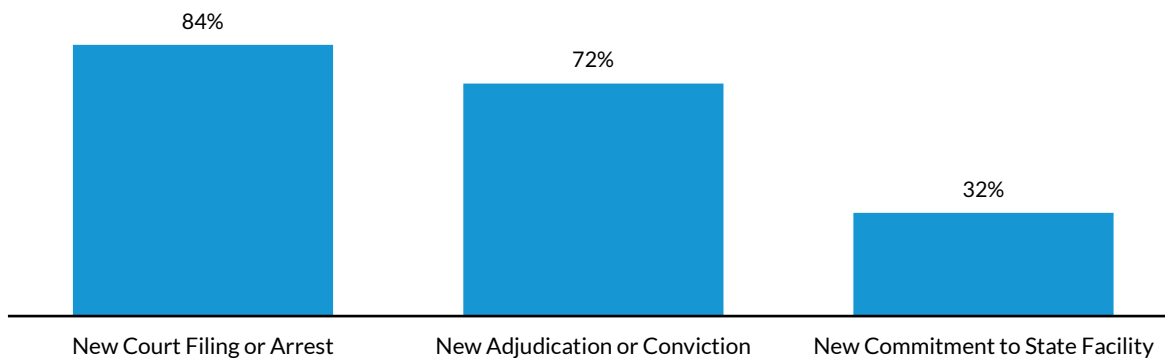
Source: New Jersey Department of the Treasury, Office of Management and Budget.

Return on Investment for Youth Incarceration Is Poor

Recidivism rates are high in New Jersey. More than 80 percent of youth released from secure correctional facilities are arrested or obtain a new court filing within three years (DOC n.d.).

FIGURE 8

Youth Recidivism Rates in New Jersey Three Years after Release, 2011–14



Source: Department of Corrections, State Parole Board and Juvenile Justice Commission, "Release Outcome 2011: A Three-Year Follow-Up" (Trenton: State of New Jersey, Department of Corrections, n.d.).

Information on Community-Based Alternatives Is Limited

The New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission operates several residential community homes as an alternative to placement in secure facilities. These less restrictive facilities feature organized programming, such as community service projects and educational and vocational opportunities, but still function as out-of-home placements for youth. Certain facilities specialize in treating youth with mental health needs and those charged with sex offenses.⁸ Programs targeted to assist youth with substance abuse-related needs are run at the New Jersey Training School and three residential community homes.⁹

Notable Reforms and Ongoing Efforts

New Jersey has been a national pioneer in replicating the local Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative statewide. The state has seen significant declines in detention populations, and many detention centers have closed or been consolidated. Use of a risk assessment and availability of detention alternatives in the state have reduced the number of youth placed in detention before trial or while awaiting placement (Mendel 2014).

In 2015, SB 2003 further reformed certain aspects of the state's juvenile justice system. The bill limited waiver to adult court to those ages 15 and older and restricted the use of solitary confinement for incarcerated youth.¹⁰

Notes

¹ "Juvenile Justice Commission," State of New Jersey, Office of the Attorney General, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://www.nj.gov/oag/jjc/index.html>.

² "Unbalanced Juvenile Justice," W. Haywood Burns Institute for Juvenile Justice Fairness and Equity, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://data.burnsinstitute.org>.

³ "New Jersey: Annual Decision Points," W. Haywood Burns Institute for Juvenile Justice Fairness and Equity, accessed March 13, 2017, <http://data.burnsinstitute.org/decision-points/31/new-jersey#comparison=3&placement=3&racess=1,2,3,4,5,6&offenses=5,2,8,1,9,11,10&odc=1&dmp=1&dmp-comparison=2&dmp-decisions=5&dmp-county=-1&dmp-races=1,2,3,4,7,5,6&dmp-year=2013>.

⁴ "Unbalanced Juvenile Justice," <http://data.burnsinstitute.org>.

⁵ Detention is defined as placement in a secure facility pending an adjudication hearing, transfer to adult court, disposition, or transfer to another jurisdiction.

⁶ Commitment is defined as court-ordered placement to a facility following adjudication.

⁷ Out of home includes detention, commitment, and youth sent to a facility as part of a diversion agreement in lieu of adjudication.

⁸ "Community Programs: Residential Community Homes," State of New Jersey, Office of the Attorney General, Juvenile Justice Commission, accessed March 13, 2017, http://www.nj.gov/oag/jjc/residential_community.html.

⁹ “Special Needs Services,” State of New Jersey, Office of the Attorney General, Juvenile Justice Commission, accessed March 13, 2017, http://www.nj.gov/oag/jjc/offices_specialized.htm.

¹⁰ Anne Tiegen, “Juvenile Justice 2015 Year-End Report,” National Conference of State Legislatures, January 1, 2016, <http://www.ncsl.org/research/civil-and-criminal-justice/juvenile-justice-2015-year-end-report.aspx>.

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DOC (Department of Corrections), State Parole Board and Juvenile Justice Commission. n.d. “Release Outcome 2011: A Three-Year Follow-Up.” Trenton: State of New Jersey, Department of Corrections.

JJC (Juvenile Justice Commission). July 29, 2011. “[Juvenile Demographics and Statistics](#).” Trenton: State of New Jersey, Office of the Attorney General.

JJC (Juvenile Justice Commission). February 24, 2017. “[Juvenile Demographics and Statistics](#).” Trenton: State of New Jersey, Office of the Attorney General.

Mendel, Richard A. 2014. *JDAI in New Jersey: A Statewide Replication Success Story—And Lessons for Taking JDAI Statewide*. Baltimore, MD: The Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Treasury (Department of the Treasury), Office of Management and Budget. 2016. “[Appropriations Handbook: State of New Jersey, Fiscal Year 2016–2017](#).” Trenton: State of New Jersey Department of the Treasury.

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