



Juvenile Justice Matters

Juvenile Justice Commission

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Juvenile Detention - 2003

This issue examines recent juvenile detention trends, and highlights current efforts to implement a significant detention reform initiative in New Jersey to address some longstanding concerns.

Recent Detention Trends

In New Jersey, the two purposes for placing youth in secure detention (as per N.J.S.A. 2A:4A-34) are: 1) to minimize the risk of serious reoffending while youth are awaiting adjudication, and 2) to ensure alleged delinquents appear in court. How many youth (and which types of youth) actually end up in secure detention facilities, and how long they stay varies greatly from local jurisdiction to local jurisdiction. Differences are typically tied to an array of practices, processes and other realities, in addition to the nature and extent of juvenile offending, that are characteristic of each jurisdiction.

In New Jersey, juvenile detention facilities are currently operated in 17 counties. All are county run except Atlantic's facility which is operated by the JJC. The remaining counties (i.e., Cape May, Hunterdon, Salem and Somerset) send juveniles perceived as needing secure detention to neighboring county detention facilities. Note that in Union County the JJC capped admissible youth

population at 34 (the facility's "approved capacity"), in May of 2003. This resulted in a substantial number of admitted youth being transferred from Union County to Bergen, Middlesex, Morris, Sussex, and Warren counties. The statistics below for 2003, however, depict the relevant figures for Union County and these five counties *had there been no transfers from Union County*, as a way to continue to reflect, in a consistent manner, trends in county admission and other practices and processes.

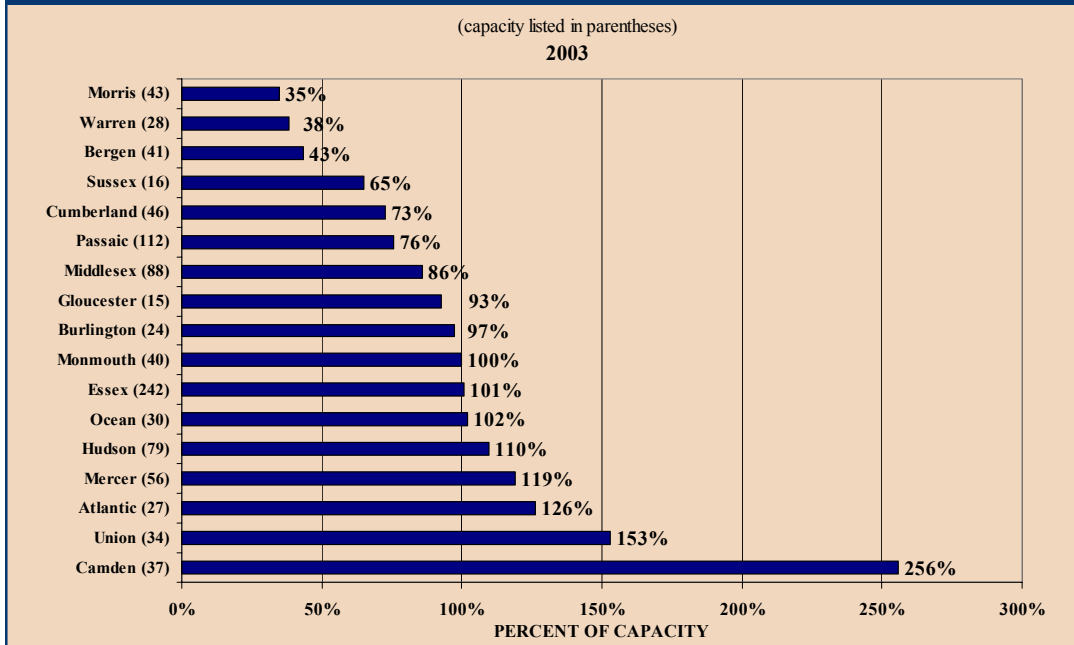
The following provides annual data on trends in secure detention over the last five years (i.e., 1999 through 2003). It examines the statewide system of juvenile detention, along with

highlighting county variations for 2003.* To anticipate the following, there has been a recent statewide decline in detention admissions and, less so, in average daily population (in part reflecting a rise in length of stay). The result has been a small improvement in overcrowding, although progress has been uneven across counties.

Admissions. There were 11,826 admissions to juvenile detention facilities in 2003. Males accounted for 84.0% of the admissions, females 16.0%. Minority youth comprised 81.4% of the admissions, a small increase compared with 1999. The number of admissions in 2003 was a small decrease of 7.4% compared with the prior year, with 11 of the 17 facilities experiencing a decline. In addition, admissions dropped 12.7% between 1999 and 2003. Over the same five year period, the juvenile detention *rate* (i.e., admissions per 100 delinquency complaints in family court) rose slightly from 25.0 to 25.7. At the county level, the greatest declines in admissions between 2002 and 2003 occurred in Sussex (-29.8%), Bergen (-22.3%), Atlantic (-19.3%), Monmouth (-17.7%), and Essex (-15.4%). Growth in admissions was greatest for Mercer (+9.3%), and Cumberland (+5.5%).

Average Length of Stay. The average length of time youth remained in county detention facilities (i.e., length of stay) in 2003 was 28.0 days. This was a small increase of 5.3% compared with the prior year, with 10 of the 17 facilities experiencing greater

Average Juvenile Detention Populations as a Percent of Approved Capacity



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average length of stay. There was a similar increase of 5.7% over the five-year period of 1999 through 2003, and a more dramatic growth of 21.7% in average length of stay over ten years. At the county level, the greatest increases in length of stay between 2002 and 2003 were experienced in Essex (+15.7%), Sussex (+11.1%), Camden (+9.5%), and Hudson (+9.3%). The largest declines were in Cumberland (-20.1%), and Morris (-11.3%).

Average Daily Population. The number of juveniles admitted to a facility and the amount of time juveniles remain in a facility are the two factors that determine the number of youth in juvenile detention facilities on any given day (i.e., average daily population, ADP). In 2003, ADP statewide was 905.9. This was a 2.7% decline compared with the prior year, and a drop of 7.8% compared with 1999. All but five facilities experienced declines between 2002 and 2003. Declines were led by Monmouth and Sussex (-22.6% each), Burlington (-19.9%), Cumberland (-15.9%), and Bergen (-15.7%).

Increases were greatest in Mercer (+18.5%), Camden (+14.5%), and Gloucester (+8.6%).

Overcrowding in Secure Detention. Statewide, there was substantial growth in detention capacity over the last decade in an effort by several counties to address concerns about rising detention populations and overcrowding. Between 1994 and 2003, approved capacity in NJ rose 55%; over the last five years, there was a much smaller increase of 5%.

For 2003, detention facilities statewide operated slightly below approved capacity, at 97.3%, for the first time in over a decade. Counties varied greatly in both the “size” of their facility and the number of youth at the facility on any given day, each contributing to the presence or absence of overcrowding. In 2003, eight of the 17 facilities operated at or over approved capacity for the year. They included Camden (256% of capacity), Union (153%), Atlantic (126%), Mercer (119%), Hudson (110%), Ocean (102%), Essex (101%), and Monmouth (100%).**

JDAI Comes to New Jersey

New Jersey has been selected by the Annie E. Casey Foundation as a replication site for its Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). JDAI provides a framework for developing and implementing strategies to reduce the number of youth unnecessarily or inappropriately held in secure detention, while maintaining public safety by minimizing the number of youth who fail to appear in court or reoffend pending their court hearing. JDAI also works to redirect public funds toward successful reform strategies and to improve conditions of confinement in secure detention. This nationally recognized system reform effort has demonstrated across a number of jurisdictions that reliance on secure detention for juveniles can be safely reduced.

The reform effort is beginning in five counties (Atlantic, Camden, Essex, Hudson and Monmouth), with the hope of statewide replication of JDAI in the future. Each county has developed (or will develop) a JDAI Local Steering Committee consisting of key stakeholders. Committees are examining the state of their county detention systems, informed by specially collected data. The purpose is to identify specific areas in need of reform, and strategies for achieving positive change through the commitment and collaboration of all parties significant to the reform effort. Alongside the local committees, the Juvenile Justice Commission has developed a State JDAI Steering Committee to work in parallel with the local committees, and to facilitate the needed

reform dialogue. As an integral part of JDAI, New Jersey will receive a significant level of technical assistance, including important insights of colleagues across the country who have already experienced successes and overcome potential barriers to implementation of detention reform in their jurisdictions.

In the spirit of the JDAI model, as counties proceed with their collaborative reform efforts, attention will be focused on the following:

- ✓ examining detention admissions policy and practices, and the potential for implementing an objective admissions screening tool (currently a focus of the State JDAI Steering Committee);
- ✓ enhancing available alternatives to secure detention;
- ✓ reducing delays in court processing as a way to reduce length of stay in secure facilities;
- ✓ focusing on the prevalence of “special” cases, e.g., placements on violations of probation; youth awaiting dispositional placement;
- ✓ establishing a process for detention facility self-inspections to address conditions of confinement issues; and
- ✓ identifying strategies to reduce existing racial disparities in secure detention.

* Figures for admissions, length of stay and ADP do not include juveniles admitted to juvenile detention commitment programs operated by seven counties; figures on facility overcrowding, however, do include them.

**The actual operating level for the following counties due to the mid-year capping of admissions to the Union facility were as follows: Union, 116%; Bergen, 46%; Middlesex, 87%; Morris, 41%; Sussex, 81%, and Warren, 57%.



James E. McGreevey, Governor
 Peter C. Harvey, Attorney General
 Howard L. Beyer, Executive Director,
 Juvenile Justice Commission



Editor: Michael Aloisi 609-292-2381 • Art Director: Paul Kraml 609-777-4415

www.njjc.org

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