

State of New Jersey

Juvenile Justice Commission

RECIDIVISM AND OUTCOMES REPORT: A THREE-YEAR FOLLOW-UP OF YOUTH RELEASED IN 2019

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INTRODUCTION

Background

This report is the result of a legislative mandate instituted by P.L. 2009, c. 329 (N.J.S.A. 30:4-91.15), as amended by P.L. 2015, c. 144, which requires the New Jersey Juvenile Justice Commission (JJJ) as well as the Department of Corrections (DOC) and the State Parole Board (SPB) to compile reports that record and examine annual recidivism rates, and to measure the effectiveness of the State's reentry initiatives and programs. Previously, the DOC took the lead on publishing a joint report for all three agencies. Beginning with the 2017-2018 report, our agencies collectively agreed to issue separate reports. This report therefore focuses solely on youth released from JJC facilities in 2019 (it does not include results for adults released from DOC facilities).

About the Juvenile Justice Commission

The Juvenile Justice Commission (JJJ) was established in 1995 to serve as the single agency of State government with centralized authority for planning, policy development, and provision of services in the juvenile justice system. The JJC is committed to leading the ongoing reform of the youth justice system, implementing and promoting policies and practices that improve outcomes for young people involved with the justice system, their families, and their communities, and advancing race equity and eliminating racial disparities in the administration of justice.

The JJC's three primary responsibilities are providing care, custody, and rehabilitative services to youth committed to the agency by the courts, supervising and coordinating services for youth released from custody on parole, and supporting local efforts to provide prevention and early intervention services to at-risk and court-involved youth. Across a continuum of care, which includes secure care facilities, residential community homes, and community-based parole and transitional services, the JJC provides programming, supports, and opportunities designed to help youth grow and thrive and to become independent, productive, and law-abiding community members.

More specifically, as a partner with communities and County Youth Services Commissions, the JJC works to identify and address specific issues faced by at-risk and justice-involved youth. The JJC awards millions of dollars in state, federal, and private funding each year to communities, allowing them to implement programs and services that help youth grow into successful adults. The vast majority of court-involved youth receive the necessary interventions and supports in their communities and never enter a JJC facility.

For those youth who, as a matter of community safety, require out-of-home placement with the JJC, a comprehensive classification process, which involves in-depth evaluations and assessments, determines each resident's placement in the JJC's continuum of secure-care facilities and residential community homes as well as the rehabilitative services each young person receives. Medical needs, education level, mental health diagnoses, history of substance abuse, suicide risk level, gang affiliation, and personal strengths and interests are also examined and used to guide the specific services and opportunities provided to youth. Routine case action

planning and reclassification reviews assess progress and inform whether adjustments to placement and programming are warranted.

The JJC also provides parole supervision and reentry planning for youth, striving to help youth stay on track after they return home. Each youth leaves the JJC with a structured community transition plan that includes goals, services, and a monitoring and support schedule. JJC parole staff support youth as they follow their plans, and help youth reconnect with their community through education, work, and mentoring.

The JJC has additional significant responsibilities which include partnering with counties in implementing youth justice reforms designed to improve outcomes for young people and communities; establishing standards for county youth detention facilities and monitoring compliance; overseeing the implementation of education programs in county detention facilities; and in partnership with the Governor’s Juvenile Justice & Delinquency Prevention (JJDP) Committee, monitoring compliance with the core requirements of the federal JJDP Act.

Summary of Recidivism Findings

The present report considers youth released from a JJC secure facility or residential community home in 2019 and follows each youth for a full three years after release. The three primary measures of recidivism considered by the JJC address three distinct questions:

- 1) Do released youth have a subsequent delinquency court filing or adult arrest for a new offense?
- 2) Do released youth have a subsequent adjudication or conviction for a new offense?
- 3) Do released youth experience a subsequent commitment to the JJC or to the New Jersey Department of Corrections for a new offense?

Note that the average age at release for youth considered in this analysis was 18.6 years. As a result, and as suggested by the three questions noted above, the analysis considers both juvenile and adult records to assess recidivism. Recidivism within three years for each of the three measures for 2019 follow:

Release Year	Court Filing/Arrest	Adjudication/Conviction	Commitment
2019	77.0%	49.8%	23.4%

For youth released in 2019, 77.0% had a new court filing/arrest within three years, 49.8% had a new adjudication/conviction within three years, and 23.4% had a new commitment to state custody within three years. Importantly, and as described later in this report, the rate of recidivism has been steadily decreasing since 2008. Additionally, the JJC has seen a drastic reduction in the number of youth placed in its care and custody due in large part to the extraordinary work of reform efforts such as the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI). Accordingly, it is worth noting that not only have the recidivism *rates* decreased since 2008, the overall *number* of youth exiting JJC facilities has decreased even more substantially, which means

far fewer formerly adjudicated young people are recidivating as compared to years past. Relatedly, the number of youth arrested in New Jersey has decreased steadily and significantly over the past decade, suggesting that the JJC's efforts to transform youth justice through JDAI and by prioritizing community-based prevention programs is having a significant, positive impact on overall public safety.

Challenges and Responses

While recidivism rates have been decreasing over time and while the vast majority of youth released from state custody are not returned to state custody within three years (76.6%), the recidivism rates do underscore the challenge the JJC faces in working to address the complex, multi-faceted issues presented by the young people in our care. While far fewer youth are committed to the JJC as a result of JDAI, the young people in the JJC population are now significantly older; have committed more serious community harm and therefore face longer terms of commitment, including youth convicted and sentenced as adults; are more heavily gang involved; and are more often dealing with complex service needs, including complex trauma. The increasing challenges and complex risk and needs factors presented by youth committed to the JJC make the decreasing recidivism rates more noteworthy.

It is also important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic emerged during the three-year follow-up period for the current cohort. In March of 2020 all schools in the state were ordered to close indefinitely and many school districts had transitioned to remote or hybrid learning for the 2020/2021 school year. Employment was impacted due to stay-at-home orders. During this time, the lack of structure and organization that school and work provides created challenges for many. Youth recently released from a highly structured stay in state custody may have felt the impact even more intensely. However, it will likely take several years to better understand the extent to which the pandemic had an effect on the recidivism rates of JJC youth. And, the precise impact of the pandemic on recidivism may not fully be known, given the myriad other factors that influence an individual's involvement in crime and delinquency.

In response to the challenges presented by this changing youth justice landscape, the JJC is committed to continuing to innovate and grow as an agency. Over the past few years, the JJC has expanded services and opportunities provided to young people in its care. These efforts include, for example, expanding the number of college courses offered; implementing new career training opportunities, including programs in entrepreneurship, Heating, Ventilation, and Air Conditioning (HVAC), and broadband infrastructure; implementing intensive healing circles in partnership with the Inside Circle Foundation; expanding employment opportunities, including a program to hire former JJC residents as youth worker trainees; launching new housing programs for released youth; for youth residing in JJC residential community homes, prioritizing obtaining employment experience and driver's licenses while in custody; and engaging with a consortium of community-based providers to bring a wide array of prosocial activities to youth to expand their interests and connect them with positive mentors.

Importantly, while this report focuses on outcomes for youth released from the JJC's direct care, the JJC serves many different groups of youth annually, including youth served through its Office

of Local Programs and Services. The Office of Local Programs and Services administers funding to develop and implement a coordinated, community-based continuum of programs and services to address the needs of youth in the community and to prevent system-involvement. This continuum of services includes delinquency prevention programs, court diversion programs, detention alternatives, dispositional options, and re-entry programs. On an annual basis, more than 10,000 youth are served in the community with the support of JJC funding. To further bolster this local continuum of care, the JJC, in partnership with County Youth Services Commissions and community-based organizations, recently launched the Restorative and Transformative Justice (RTJ) for Youth and Communities Pilot Program, which has as its centerpiece the establishment of “RTJ Hubs” in four cities. The addition of the RTJ Hubs, which are designed to divert youth from the formal justice system and serve youth released from JJC facilities as they transition home, represent another meaningful program that can support youth in the community and prevent recidivism.

Additional context for the recidivism rates and the corresponding challenges faced by JJC youth are detailed throughout this report. The JJC has put in place additional data collection mechanisms that will allow our agency to assess the impact of recently implemented interventions in the future, beginning with the cohort of youth released in 2020. The work undoubtedly continues, but the JJC will continue to rise to the challenge as we strive on an ongoing basis to improve outcomes for youth, families, and communities.

This report examines recidivism for youth released from the JJC in 2019 (N=235).¹ While there are various ways to define recidivism, the three primary measures of recidivism evaluated by the JJC, which are consistent with the work of the National Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators, (CJJA) address three distinct questions:

- 1) Do released youth have a subsequent **delinquency court filing or adult arrest** for a new offense?
- 2) Do released youth have a subsequent **adjudication or conviction** for a new offense?
- 3) Do released youth experience a subsequent **commitment** to the JJC or to the New Jersey Department of Corrections for a new offense?

Because the average age at release for youth in the study was 18.6 years, the analysis considered both juvenile and adult records when measuring recidivism. The date recorded for the recidivism event was the date most closely representing when the released youth committed/allegedly committed the new offense. The analysis used this new offense date to determine whether a given recidivism event occurred within 3, 6, 12, 24, or 36 months of release.

The JJC's Information Technology Unit provided a datafile extracted from the JJC's Juvenile Information Management System (JIMS), listing all youth released from JJC custody in 2019. This datafile also contained additional data points, including demographic and offense information. For each released youth, the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) then provided recidivism-related data from its Family Automated Case Tracking System data. JJC staff also consulted the State Police Criminal Case History database to acquire additional recidivism-related data for each released youth.

¹ Throughout the report, "N" refers to the raw number/total count of cases.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RELEASED YOUTH

Youth Demographics

Table 1 describes the demographics of youth released from JJC custody in 2019 (N=235). Table 1 shows that the majority of youth released in 2019 were male (98.3%) and youth of color (90.2%). The average age of youth released was 18.6, with the majority of youth falling in the age range of 18-20 years (58.7%). Overall, 46.8% of youth released resided in one of New Jersey's most densely populated, or "Urban 15" municipalities.² Finally, youth released in 2019 were most commonly from Camden County (21.7%).

TABLE 1. YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS

	N	%
Gender		
Male	231	98.3%
Female	4	1.7%
Race		
Black	167	71.1%
Hispanic	45	19.1%
White	23	9.8%
Age at Release		
14 and under	3	1.3%
15-17	74	31.5%
18-20	138	58.7%
21 and over	20	8.5%
Mean	18.6	
Range	13.8-25.6	
Resides in Urban 15		
Yes	110	46.8%
No	125	53.2%
Top 5 Committing Counties		
Camden	51	21.7%
Essex	26	11.1%
Middlesex	25	10.6%
Passaic	25	10.6%
Mercer	24	10.2%

² The Urban 15 Cities are as follows: Bayonne, Camden, Clifton, East Orange, Elizabeth, Hoboken, Jersey City, Newark, New Brunswick, Passaic, Paterson, Trenton, Union City, Vineland, and West New York.

Offense and Commitment History of Youth

As described in Table 2, most youth released in 2019 had been committed to the custody of the JJC by the Family Part of the Superior Court (65.1%). An additional 3.0% were “waived” youth, who were tried, convicted, and sentenced by the Criminal Part of the Superior Court. Finally, 31.9% were ordered to attend and complete a JJC residential community home as a condition of probation.

TABLE 2. OFFENSE AND COMMITMENT HISTORY OF YOUTH

	N	%
Court Status		
Waived	7	3.0%
Committed	153	*65.1%
Probation	75	31.9%
Release Location		
Secure Facility	92	39.1%
Residential Community Home	143	*60.9%
Committing Offense Type		
Offense Against the Person ³	105	*44.7%
Weapons	34	14.5%
Drug	20	8.5%
Property	23	9.8%
Public Order ⁴	13	5.5%
Violation of Probation (VOP)	40	17.0%
Committing Offense Degree		
1 st Degree	50	21.3%
2 nd Degree	73	*31.1%
3 rd Degree	51	21.7%
4 th Degree	10	4.3%
DP/PDP	11	4.7%
Violation of Probation (VOP)	40	17.0%
# of Adjudications	Mean	Range
Total Adjudications in History	5.89	1-20
*Indicates the highest percentage in each category		

Table 2 also indicates that for youth released in 2019, 39.1% were released from a JJC secure facility, while 60.9% were released from a JJC residential community home. Offenses against the person (44.7%) were the most prevalent offense types for which youth had been originally placed with the JJC, followed by violations of probation (VOP, 17.0%). Regarding offense degree, most commonly youth had been placed with the JJC on a 2nd degree offense (31.1%), followed by 3rd

³ Offenses against the person include, for example, homicide, assault, terroristic threats, sexual offenses, robbery, carjacking, and kidnapping.

⁴ Public order offenses include, for example, disorderly conduct, riot, false public alarm, and obstruction of justice.

CHARACTERISTICS OF RELEASED YOUTH

degree offenses (21.7%) and 1st degree offenses (21.3%). Finally, at the time of JJC admission, youth had an average of 5.89 total adjudications in their court history.

Additional Descriptors

Table 3 provides some additional, descriptive information regarding youth released from JJC custody. Notably, upon entering the JJC, 10.2% (24) of the youth had a high school degree or equivalent, but upon departing the JJC, that figure had increased to 48.5% (114).⁵ Additionally one-third (34.5%) of youth released in 2019 had a reported history of gang involvement and 65.5% had no reported gang activity.

TABLE 3. ADDITIONAL DESCRIPTORS

	N	%
Education Level		
HS Degree/Equivalent	114	48.5%
Non-Graduate	121	51.5%
Gang Involvement		
Yes	81	34.5%
No	154	65.5%

⁵ The average age of youth released from JJC without a high school degree was 17.7, i.e., the younger age accounts for why they had not yet graduated from high school.

RECIDIVISM RATES

For each of the three measures of recidivism, the JJC evaluated recidivism within 3, 6, 12, 24, and 36 months, as well as the average length of time to the recidivism event, in days. On all three measures of recidivism, most recidivism occurred within the first year of release.

New Court Filings/Arrests

As indicated in Figure 1, the prevalence of recidivism, as measured by an offense leading to a new court filing/arrest, increased over time through the three-year period for youth released in 2019. Within one year of release, 57.4% of youth released during 2019 recidivated with a new court filing/arrest. At two years following release, recidivism rates had increased to 72.8%, and by three years after release, to 77.0%. The average number of days between release and the new offense for youth experiencing a new court filing/arrest was 261 days.

New Adjudications/Convictions

The prevalence of recidivism, as measured by an offense leading to a new adjudication/conviction, also increased over the three-year period, as illustrated in Figure 2. Within one year following release, 36.2% of youth released in 2019 recidivated with a new adjudication/conviction. By two years, new adjudication/conviction rates rose to 47.2%, and again to 49.8% by three years post-release. The average number of days between release and new offense for youth experiencing a new adjudication/conviction was 267 days.

New Commitments

As summarized in Figure 3, recidivism rates as measured by an offense leading to a new commitment also rose slightly during the three-year follow-up period. Within one year after release, 16.2% of youth released in 2019 recidivated with a new offense leading to a new commitment. By two years post-release, the rate had increased to 22.6%, and by three years post release, it had increased slightly to 23.4%. The average number of days between arrest and an event that led to a new commitment was 251 days.

Figure 1. New Court Filings/Arrests

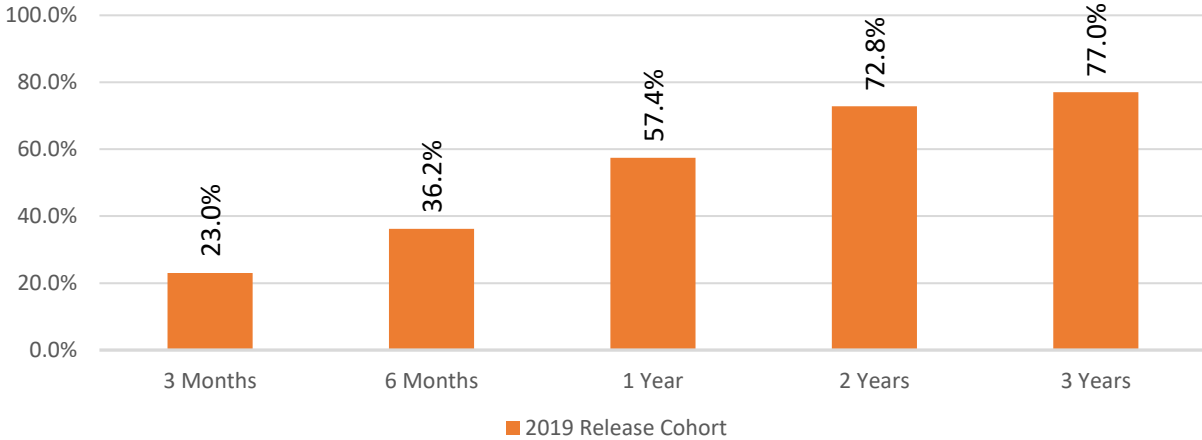


Figure 2. New Adjudications/Convictions

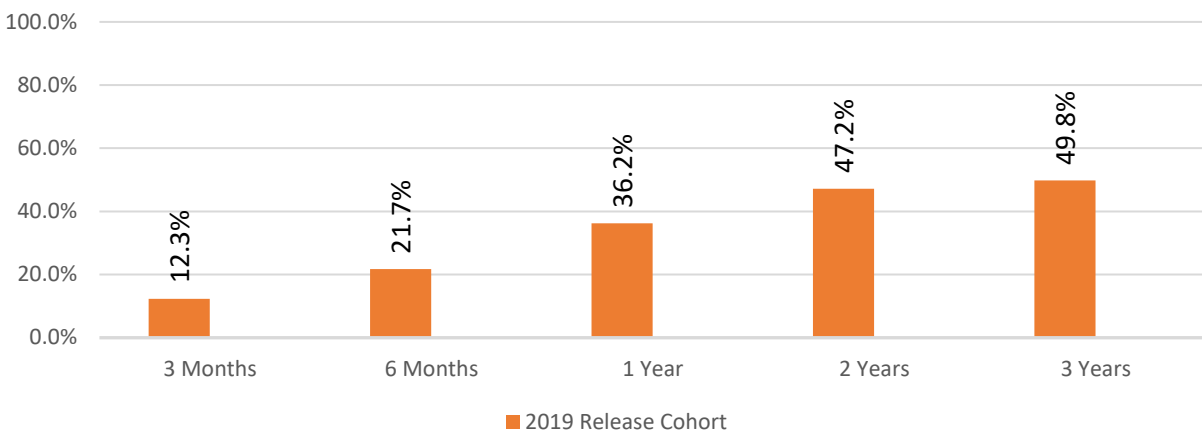
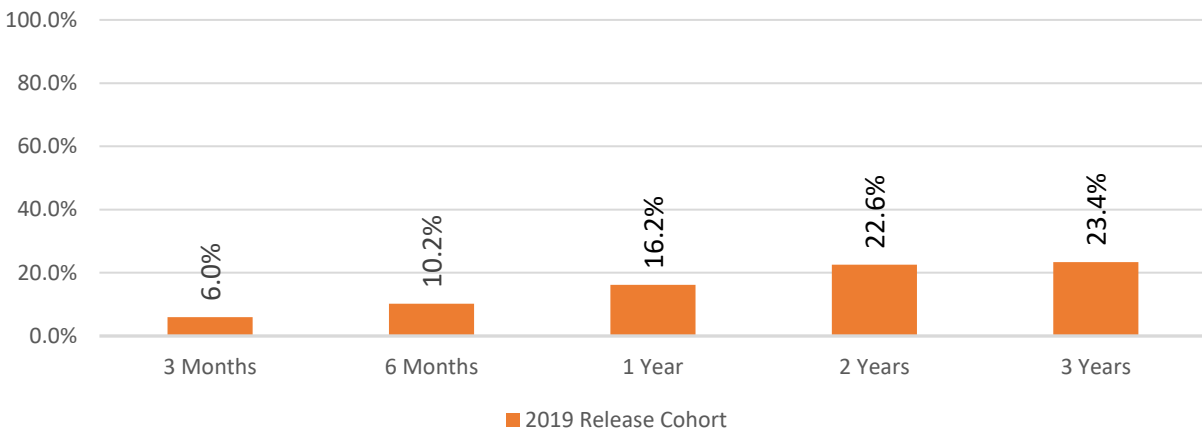


Figure 3. New Commitments



Trends in Recidivism: Three Years Post-Release

Table 4 shows multi-year trends for the three measures of recidivism at three years post-release. It is important to note that over time, as the result of substantial progress toward youth justice reform in New Jersey, the number of youth placed with the JJC has decreased substantially. Youth charged with lesser offenses and who have more limited court histories are now being successfully served in the community. While far fewer youth are placed with the JJC, the young people who are committed to the JJC today tend to be older, have committed more serious community harm and face longer sentences (including youth sentenced as adults), are gang involved, are more often dealing with complex service needs, and have been convicted of multiple offenses over time. Indeed, as noted earlier, youth released from the JJC in 2019 averaged 5.89 prior adjudications in their court history. These factors tend to be those that put youth at a greater risk for reoffending.

Importantly, however, despite JJC youth presenting with more significant risk factors over time, Table 4 indicates that recidivism rates have in fact been generally decreasing over time. For example, for youth released in 2019, 77.0% experienced a new court filing/arrest, down from 85.0% in 2008. Similarly, 49.8% of released youth experienced a new adjudication/conviction within three years, down from 73.3% in 2008. Finally, 23.4% of released youth experienced a new commitment within three years, down from 38.7% in 2008.

TABLE 4. TRENDS IN JUVENILE RECIDIVISM, 2008 TO 2019: THREE YEARS POST-RELEASE

Release Year	New Court Filing/Arrest	New Adjudication/Conviction	New Commitment
2008	85.0%	73.3%	38.7%
2009	84.8%	73.4%	34.7%
2010	86.1%	71.6%	36.9%
2011	84.0%	71.9%	32.4%
2012	78.9%	67.7%	33.1%
2013	78.9%	67.6%	30.2%
2014	76.9%	58.9%	23.9%
2015	78.0%	61.3%	28.0%
2016	72.2%	58.3%	29.2%
2017	87.3%	64.8%	30.7%
2018	74.0%	49.4%	24.2%
2019	77.0%	49.8%	23.4%

Differences in Recidivism Across Youth Characteristics: Three Years Post-Release

The analyses that follow describe differences in recidivism across various youth characteristics/circumstances and across different programmatic interventions. The analyses focus on recidivism within three years of release and seek to detect whether any meaningful or

statistically significant⁶ relationships exist between particular characteristics, circumstances, or interventions and recidivism.

Youth Demographics

Gender. As described in Table 5, for youth released in 2019, males were more likely to recidivate than females. Within three years of release, the recidivism rate for males was higher for new court filings/arrests within three years of release (77.1% vs. 75.0%),⁷ for new adjudications/convictions (50.6% vs. 0.0%),⁸ and for new commitments (23.8% vs. 0.0%).⁹

TABLE 5. RECIDIVISM ACROSS YOUTH DEMOGRAPHICS

	New Court Filings/ Arrests	New Adjudications/ Convictions	New Commitments
Gender			
Male	77.1%	50.6%	23.8%
Female	75.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Race			
Black	83.8%	53.3%	25.1%
Hispanic	68.9%	48.9%	20.0%
White	43.5%	26.1%	17.4%
Youth of Color*	80.7%	52.4%	24.1%
Resides in Urban 15			
Yes	78.2%	49.1%	20.9%
No	76.0%	50.4%	25.6%

* The combination of races/ethnicities excluding White.

Race/ethnicity. Regarding race/ethnicity, as described in Table 5, for new court filings/arrests, Black youth were most likely to have a new court filing/arrest (83.8%), followed by Hispanic youth (68.9%), and White youth (43.5%).¹⁰ Black youth were also most likely to have a new adjudication/conviction (53.3%), followed by Hispanic youth (48.9%), and White youth (26.1%).¹¹ Finally, Black youth were most likely to experience a new commitment (25.1%), followed by Hispanic youth (20.0%), and White youth (17.4%).¹²

A dichotomous race/ethnicity variable was created in order to consider recidivism results for Youth of Color collectively as compared to White youth. As described in Table 5 and Figure 4, Youth of Color were more likely to experience a new court filing/arrest than White youth (80.7%

⁶ In simple terms, statistical significance means it is very unlikely that observed differences between groups can be explained by chance alone. Throughout the report, a result is determined to be statistically significant when the p value, or probability value, is .05 or less.

⁷ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.009$, $df=1$, $p=.923$.

⁸ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=4.035$, $df=1$, $p=.045$.

⁹ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=1.246$, $df=1$, $p=.265$.

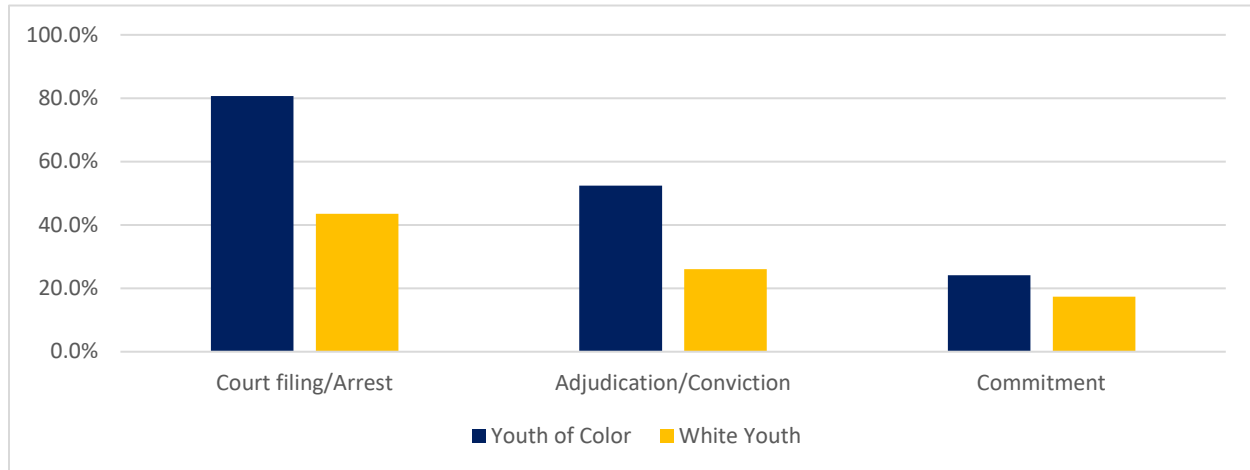
¹⁰ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=20.681$, $df=2$, $p=.000$.

¹¹ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=6.003$, $df=2$, $p=.050$.

¹² These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=1.039$, $df=2$, $p=.595$.

vs. 43.5%),¹³ a new adjudication/conviction (52.4% vs. 26.1%),¹⁴ and a new commitment (24.1% vs. 17.4%).¹⁵

FIGURE 4. THREE-YEAR RECIDIVISM RATES FOR YOUTH OF COLOR VS. WHITE YOUTH



Municipality of Residence. As indicated in Table 5, youth residing in the major urban 15 areas were somewhat more likely to experience a new court filing/arrest (78.2% vs. 76.0%)¹⁶ than youth residing in other areas. Youth residing in the major urban 15 areas were slightly less likely to experience a new adjudication/conviction (49.1% vs. 50.4%),¹⁷ or a new commitment (20.9% vs. 25.6%).¹⁸

Youth Offense/Commitment History and Gang Involvement

Committing Offense Type. As described in Table 6, for new court filings/arrests, youth placed with the JJC for public order offenses were most likely to recidivate (100.0%), followed by drug offenses (95.0%), weapons offenses (88.2%), property offenses (87.0%), VOPs (77.5%), and offenses against the person (64.8%).¹⁹ For new adjudications/convictions, youth placed with the JJC for public order offenses were most likely to recidivate (92.3%), followed by drug offenses (70.0%), property offenses (69.6%), weapons offenses (50.0%), VOPs (47.5%), and offenses against the person (37.1%).²⁰ Finally, in terms of new commitments within three years, youth with public order offenses were most likely to recidivate (46.2%), followed by drug offenses

¹³ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=16.208$, $df=1$, $p=.000$.

¹⁴ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=5.728$, $df=1$, $p=.017$.

¹⁵ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.514$, $df=1$, $p=.473$.

¹⁶ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.157$, $df=1$, $p=.692$.

¹⁷ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.040$, $df=1$, $p=.841$.

¹⁸ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.718$, $df=1$, $p=.397$.

¹⁹ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=20.151$, $df=5$, $p=.001$.

²⁰ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=23.068$, $df=5$, $p=.000$.

(45.0%), weapons offenses (29.4%), offenses against the person (18.1%), VOPs (17.5%), and property offenses (17.4%).²¹

TABLE 6. RECIDIVISM ACROSS OFFENSE/COMMITMENT HISTORY & GANG INVOLVEMENT

	New Court Filings/ Arrests	New Adjudications/ Convictions	New Commitments
Committing Offense Type			
Public Order	100.0%	92.3%	46.2%
Drug	95.0%	70.0%	45.0%
Weapons	88.2%	50.0%	29.4%
Property	87.0%	69.6%	17.4%
Violation of Probation (VOP)	77.5%	47.5%	17.5%
Offense against the Person	64.8%	37.1%	18.1%
Committing Offense Degree			
1 st degree	60.0%	26.0%	18.0%
2 nd degree	82.2%	54.8%	24.7%
3 rd degree	80.4%	60.8%	31.4%
4 th degree	80.0%	60.0%	20.0%
DP/PDP	100.0%	72.7%	27.3%
Violation of Probation (VOP)	77.5%	47.5%	17.5%
Gang Involvement			
No Gang Involvement	74.0%	49.4%	22.1%
Yes Gang Involvement	82.7%	50.6%	25.9%
Total Adjudications	Mean	Mean	Mean
Recidivists	6.40	6.98	7.02
Non-Recidivists	4.20	4.81	5.55

Committing Offense Degree. Table 6 indicates that for new court filings/arrests, youth placed with the JJC for DP/PDP offenses were most likely to recidivate (100.0%), followed by 2nd degree offenses (82.2%), 3rd degree offenses (80.4%), 4th degree offenses (80.0%), VOPs (77.5%), and 1st degree offenses (60.0%).²² Youth placed with the JJC on DP/PDP degree offenses were most likely to receive a new adjudication/conviction (72.7%), followed by 3rd degree offenses (60.8%), 4th degree offenses (60.0%), 2nd degree offenses (54.8%), VOPs (47.5%), and 1st degree offenses (26.0%).²³ For new commitments, 3rd degree offenses had the highest rate of recidivism at 31.4%, followed by DP/PDP (27.3%), 4th degree offenses (20.0%), 2nd degree offenses (24.7%), 1st degree offenses (18.0%), and VOPs offenses (17.5%).²⁴

Gang Involvement. As noted in Table 6, youth with gang involvement were more likely to experience a new court filing/arrest within three years as compared to youth with no gang

²¹ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=12.533$, $df=5$, $p=.028$.

²² These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=12.952$, $df=5$, $p=.024$.

²³ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=17.333$, $df=5$, $p=.004$.

²⁴ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=3.619$, $df=5$, $p=.605$.

affiliation (82.7% vs. 74.0%).²⁵ There were slightly higher rates of new adjudications/convictions among youth with gang involvement compared to youth with no gang involvement (50.6% vs. 49.4%).²⁶ And finally, youth with gang involvement were slightly more likely to have a new commitment compared to youth with no gang involvement (25.9% vs. 22.1%).²⁷

Number of Adjudications. Table 6 also indicates that youth who recidivate had longer court histories at the time of placement with the JJC than youth who did not recidivate. Specifically, the average number of adjudications at the time of placement with the JJC for youth who experienced a new court filing/arrest within three years of release was higher than for those who did not (6.4 vs. 4.2).²⁸ The same was true for youth who experienced new adjudications/convictions (6.9 vs. 4.8)²⁹ and new commitments (7.0 vs. 5.6).³⁰

Additional Factors

Several additional characteristics of released youth were examined, with a primary focus on their relationship with new court filings/arrests within three years. For these additional variables, data are collected either exclusively or largely for committed youth and waived youth, who comprised 68.1% of the youth released in 2019. As a result, the findings are relevant largely for the JJC's committed population, except where otherwise noted.

TABLE 7. DIFFERENCES IN NEW COURT FILINGS/ARRESTS ACROSS ADDITIONAL FACTORS

Education Level	%
HS Degree/Equivalent	70.2%
Non-Graduate	83.5%
Education/Vocation Needs Score	Mean
Recidivists	3.99
Non-Recidivists	3.29

Education Level. For youth without a high school diploma or GED, the JJC provides a full, year-round academic program aligned to Core Curriculum Content Standards of the Department of Education. Of the youth in the released cohort, 10.2% (N=24) had entered the JJC with a high school diploma. Upon release in 2019, almost half the 2019 youth cohort released from the JJC had a high school diploma (48.5%, N=114). Youth that exited the JJC with a high school diploma were less likely to have a new court filing/arrest within three years (70.2% vs. 83.5%).³¹

Comprehensive Informational Assessment (CIA) Needs Area Scores. The CIA is used to determine levels of need on eight separate life domains. The domains include family/household; educational/vocational; substance abuse; peers/role models; attitudes/behaviors; use of

²⁵ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=2.265$, $df=1$, $p=.132$.

²⁶ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.034$, $df=1$, $p=.854$.

²⁷ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.438$, $df=1$, $p=.508$.

²⁸ These differences were statistically significant. $F=15.416$, $df=1$, $p=.000$.

²⁹ These differences were statistically significant. $F=21.838$, $df=1$, $p=.000$.

³⁰ These differences were statistically significant. $F=6.748$, $df=1$, $p=.010$.

³¹ These differences were statistically significant. $X^2=5.863$, $df=1$, $p=.015$.

time/leisure activity; medical/physical health; and psychological/mental health. The analysis considered the relationship between all of these needs areas and recidivism, as measured by new court filings/arrests within three years.

Youth released in 2019 saw fewer CIA needs areas significantly related to recidivism than in previous years. Table 7 reports the one needs area score – education/vocation – where a statistically significant relationship with new court filings/arrests exists (recidivists 3.99 vs. 3.29).³² New court filings/arrests were not significantly linked to the following CIA needs areas: substance abuse, peers/role models, attitudes/behaviors, psychological/mental health, time/leisure, family/household and medical/physical.

Initial Classification & Custody Document (ICCD) Scores. The ICCD guides placement decisions for committed and waived youth and serves as a broad measure of prior delinquency and placement history. The analysis considered the relationship between ICCD scores and recidivism, as measured by new court filings/arrests within three years. The average ICCD score for recidivists was 13.30, higher than that of non-recidivists (10.65).³³

Type of Facility. This analysis compared recidivism across residential and secure care settings in a more in-depth way, again focusing on re-arrest/court filings, but considering additional time frames, including time to recidivism. The 2019 cohort saw 60.9% (n=143) of JJC youth depart from a community program, while 39.1% (n=92) departed from a secure care facility. Secure care youth had slightly higher recidivism rates compared to youth departing residential programs (77.2% vs. 76.9%).³⁴ When looking at average time to reoffend, those departing residential programs took longer to recidivate (263 days) than youth departing secure care facilities (258 days).³⁵

Differences in Recidivism Across Rehabilitation & Reentry Programming

Youth involved with the JJC receive the same basic curricula in three common programs. New Freedom is a cognitive-behavioral substance abuse curriculum that works with residents' thinking patterns to affect and redirect future behavior through the stages of change. The Phoenix curriculum is built on a motivational enhancement and cognitive-behavioral model and is specifically targeted toward disentangling youth from gangs. Aggression Replacement Training (ART) focuses on the underlying philosophy that every act of adolescent aggression, whether in school, at home, or in the community, has both external and internal causes. ART is an evidenced-based cognitive behavioral intervention that consists of three components: anger control, behavioral skills, and moral reasoning.

There are a few key intervention strategies that differ significantly based on each youth's needs and risk factors. This recidivism study examined differences between those who did and those

³² These differences were statistically significant. $F=6.378$, $df=1$, $p=.012$.

³³ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $F=3.425$, $df=1$, $p=.066$.

³⁴ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.002$, $df=1$, $p=.964$.

³⁵ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $F=.019$, $df=1$, $p=.890$.

who did not recidivate in terms of several key interventions provided by the JJC. This analysis focused primarily on new court filings/arrests within three years (unless otherwise noted).

Sex Offender Treatment. Sex offender specific treatment is provided in both the secure and residential environments for youth clinically assessed as requiring treatment. For youth released in 2019, 4.7% (n=11) of the entire cohort took part in sex offender treatment within the JJC. Of those, 63.6% (n=7) received treatment in a secure care setting while 36.4% (n=4) received treatment at a residential program. The rate of new court filings/arrests for those in secure care receiving sex offender treatment was 28.6% (n=2) and 25.0% (n=1) for those receiving sex offender treatment in a residential setting.³⁶

Substance Abuse Treatment. Of the 2019 release cohort, 34.5% (n=81) took part in an intense substance abuse treatment program for at least 30 days based on a clinical assessment of substance abuse needs. Within that subgroup, 82.7% (n=67) received treatment in a residential program, while 17.3% (n=14) received treatment in a secure care environment. The rate of new court filings/arrests for those receiving most of their intensive substance abuse treatment in residential setting was 86.6% (n=58), compared to 78.6% (n=11) for those in a secure care setting.³⁷

Transitional Reentry Programs. For youth released in 2019, transitional programs were available for both committed and probationer youth (males). Committed youth attend as a condition of their parole, and probationers attend when they have completed a community residential program and have been granted a release date. The goal of the transitional setting is to allow residents to gain responsibility gradually as they prepare to return to their community, in a facility that is closer to their home. The youth receive education in their home school district or at the transitional program, which follows the Core Curriculum Content Standards of the NJ Department of Education. Each youth receives a myriad of other services that are best suited to meet his release plan, including career exploration, health/wellness, life skills, family reunification, and/or planning for independent living. Residents are permitted to visit their homes, schools, religious services, and work sites in accordance with program policies. A resident's stay can range from two weeks to 45 days. Program completion is determined by each resident's behavior, their individual completion of transitional goals, and the recommendation of the transitional team.

Of the 2019 release cohort, 20.0% (n=47) took part in a transitional reentry program. This subset of youth showed no significant difference in the rates of new court filings/arrests as compared with youth who did not participate in a transitional program (78.6% vs. 76.6%, n=37 vs. n=144).³⁸

³⁶ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.016$, $df=1$, $p=.898$.

³⁷ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.587$, $df=1$, $p=.444$.

³⁸ These differences were NOT statistically significant. $X^2=.096$, $df=1$, $p=.756$.

CONCLUSION

This legislatively mandated report examines recidivism outcomes for a cohort of youth released from the care and custody of the JJC in 2019. Each youth was tracked for three full years following release from custody. As described in this report, recidivism rates have been generally decreasing over time. For example, for youth released in 2019, 77.0% experienced a new court filing/arrest, down from 85.0% in 2008. Similarly, 49.9% of released youth experienced a new adjudication/conviction within three years, down from 73.3% in 2008. Finally, 23.4% of released youth experienced a new commitment within three years, down from 38.7% in 2008.

It is important to note that the Covid-19 pandemic emerged during the three-year follow-up period for the current cohort. In March of 2020 all schools in the state were ordered to close indefinitely and many school districts had transitioned to remote or hybrid learning for the 2020/2021 school year. Employment was impacted due to stay-at-home orders. During this time, the lack of structure and organization that school and work provides created challenges for many. Youth recently released from a highly structured stay in state custody may have felt the impact even more intensely. However, it will likely take several years to better understand the extent to which the pandemic had an effect on the recidivism rates of JJC youth. And, the precise impact of the pandemic on recidivism may not fully be known, given the myriad other factors that influence an individual's involvement in crime and delinquency.

Additionally, while this report focuses on outcomes for youth released from the JJC's direct care, it is important to note the JJC serves many different groups of youth annually, including youth served through its Office of Local Programs and Services. The Office of Local Programs and Services administers funding to develop and implement a coordinated, community-based continuum of programs and services to address the needs of youth in the community and to prevent system-involvement. This continuum of services includes delinquency prevention programs, court diversion programs, detention alternatives, dispositional options, and re-entry programs. On an annual basis, more than 10,000 youth are served in the community with the support of JJC funding. Moreover, the number of youth arrested in New Jersey has decreased steadily and significantly over the past decade, suggesting that the JJC's efforts to transform youth justice through the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and by prioritizing community-based prevention programs is having a significant, positive impact on overall public safety.

The JJC is committed to leading the ongoing reform of the youth justice system and to implementing policies and practices that help youth to grow and thrive. The extent of identified personal, family, and community risk factors faced by youth placed with the JJC underscores the challenges to achieving sustained, successful reintegration back to the community. The JJC remains laser-focused on meeting this challenge and on strengthening its approach to working with youth, families, and communities.