ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Citizens for Juvenile Justice would like to thank the following agencies and individuals for their assistance:

• Department of Youth Services, in particular Rob Tansi, Crispin Birnbaum, and Commissioner Peter Forbes
• Department of Probation, in particular Laura Lempicki, Janice Neiman, and Commissioner Edward Dolan
• Massachusetts Trial Courts, in particular Chief Justice Michael Edgerton, James Morton, and Harry Spence
• CfJJ Interns and Volunteers Andrew McArdell, Catherine Morrissey-Bickerton, and Lisa Cohn

MISSION

Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CfJJ) advocates for a fair and effective juvenile justice system in Massachusetts, designed to promote the healthy development of children and youth so they can grow up to live as responsible and productive adults in our communities.
The Massachusetts juvenile justice system is charged with protecting the public and guiding some of our most vulnerable children and youth toward successful lives. These are tough and important tasks. But how do we know how well our system is performing – is it both fair and effective? Citizens for Juvenile Justice believes answering that question requires an understanding of the system that is based on current, reliable data. Our DATA•POINTS reports are designed to inform policymakers and the public about our juvenile justice system – who it serves, where it is functioning best, and where it needs to improve.

Our 2013 DATA•POINTS report, Current Trends, highlights multi-year downward trends at several key points in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system: arrest, court processing, pre-trial detention, and post-adjudication commitment to the Department of Youth Services (DYS). This report also provides an overview of the age, race and ethnicity, and gender of youth in our system, offering a glimpse of the thousands of teens who travel through our juvenile court system each year.*

The good news is that the data shows consistent, long-term declines in juvenile arrest and crime rates, court filings, and confinement of youth both pre-trial and after adjudication. These drastic reductions in youth crime may never make it into today’s sensation-seeking headlines, but they are nevertheless excellent news for kids, families and communities across the Commonwealth.

The bad news is that racial disparities continue to plague our juvenile justice system and are worsening over time. Our system also fails to track or make public basic information – such as the number of youth who are actually found to have committed the crimes of which they are accused – which is necessary in order to understand whether our system is working as it should.

We hope that this report can inspire a more informed and thoughtful discussion of how best to improve our system so that it ensures that all of our youth have an opportunity to succeed and contribute to our communities.

*One key piece of information is not featured in this report: the anticipated influx of seventeen-year-olds following the passage of legislation to raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction. Because the law was passed in September 2013, it is too early to have sufficient data to assess how this age group is altering the overall picture. CfJJ will be assessing the impact of this reform as it is implemented.
YOUTH CRIME RATES IN LONG-TERM DECLINE

While Massachusetts’ annual juvenile arrest rate is substantially lower than the national rate, both have declined significantly since their peak in the mid-1990s to the lowest levels in over 30 years. Property and violent crime rates among youth 10 to 17 have dropped by nearly half in the last decade.

**JUVENILE ARREST RATE**
PER 100,000 YOUTH AGES 10-17¹,²

**PROPERTY CRIME RATE**
PER 100,000 YOUTH AGES 10-17³,⁴

**VIOLENT CRIME RATE**
PER 100,000 YOUTH AGES 10-17⁵,⁶

*Preliminary estimates. See endnotes.
Annual delinquency complaints and youthful offender indictments have both declined steadily since 2007. The overall number of cases has almost been cut in half over the past decade.

While the majority of youth who are charged in the juvenile court are 14 or older, roughly 13% of youth who are arraigned and 7% of youth who are detained are 13 or younger.
Pre-trial detention admissions have been consistently decreasing since their peak in 2003. The number of youth detained in 2012 was roughly one-third of the 2003 level.

### YOUTH DETAINED PRE-TRIAL

![Graph showing the decrease in youth detention admissions from 2002 to 2012 with a 62% decline.]

In addition to substantial reductions in the number of youth confined prior to trial, there has been a large drop in the number of youth committed to DYS in the past decade.

### YOUTH COMMITTED TO DYS AS OF JANUARY 1

![Graph showing the decrease in youth committed to DYS from 2002 to 2013 with a 73% decline.]

2002-2012: 62% decline

2003-2013: 73% decline
Large racial and ethnic disparities persist among those involved with the Massachusetts juvenile justice system. Despite substantial evidence that white youth and youth of color display similar rates of delinquent behavior, youth of color are overrepresented at all stages of the juvenile justice system.

FBI arrest data available for most of Massachusetts does not include ethnicity, and for almost one-third of Massachusetts’ 2012 juvenile arrests, race was not recorded. This makes it difficult to determine what is causing youth of color to enter the juvenile justice system at disproportionate rates. Even among those who are arraigned, however, black and Latino youth are over 1.6 times more likely to be detained pre-trial than whites, leading to larger disparities as youth progress through the system. Moreover, while detention rates continue to drop for youth of all races, they are dropping more slowly for youth of color, resulting in increasing racial disparities in the pre-trial detention population.
GENDER IN THE MA JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Boys continue to outnumber girls in our system by a large margin. Almost three-quarters of complaints involve boys, and girls appear to be formally arraigned less frequently. Once arraigned, boys and girls are detained pre-trial at similar rates, but boys appear to be more likely to be committed.

PERCENTAGE OF YOUTH BY GENDER AT DIFFERENT STAGES OF THE MASSACHUSETTS JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

CONCLUSION

The past year has seen a number of exciting reform efforts in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system, including bringing seventeen-year-olds into the system for the first time in state history, continuing to reduce unnecessary use of detention and confinement, increasing efforts to divert youth with low-level offenses from our system entirely, and bringing legal challenges to our unconstitutional practice of sentencing youth to die in prison.

While there is a tremendous amount to celebrate, there is still a lot of work to be done. National and Massachusetts data show that arrests are declining for youth in all racial groups, but youth of color make up an increasing fraction of the youth we confine in secure facilities. Our system also fails to share (or, in some cases, collect) basic information that we need in order to understand certain critical issues. Finally, our system must become proficient in combining the data that we do have with evidence-based practice to continue improving its ability to get youth on the right track.

*The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.*

DIETRICH BONHOEFFER
ENDNOTES


5 See endnote 3.

6 See endnote 4.


8 2012 data provided by Department of Probation Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

9 2012 data provided by Department of Youth Services Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

10 Data provided by Department of Youth Services Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

11 Id.


13 2012 data provided by Department of Probation Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

14 2012 data provided by Department of Youth Services Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

15 Average of January 1, 2011, 2012, and 2013 data provided by Department of Youth Services Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

16 Data provided by Department of Youth Services Research Division. On file with CfJJ.


18 Data provided by Department of Probation Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

19 Data provided by Department of Youth Services Research Division. On file with CfJJ.

20 Average of January 1, 2011, 2012, and 2013 data provided by Department of Youth Services Research Division. On file with CfJJ.