



Overview of
LFC Policy Spotlight Report: Juvenile Justice
(Report Released Nov. 2025)

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Overview: What this presentation covers.

- LFC's Policy Spotlight Report on juvenile justice was finalized and presented at the November 2025 LFC hearing.
- This presentation summarizes the report's main findings and recommendations.
- Physical copies of the full report have also been provided and the full report is available online at https://www.nmlegis.gov/Entity/LFC/Program_Evaluation_Unit_Reports



Background: Research Findings

- Research shows simply incarcerating juveniles does not address the root causes of delinquency and can increase the chances of reoffending.
- Programs that focus on therapy, mentoring, life skills, and family support can help reduce juvenile recidivism when implemented well in community and institutional settings.

Overview of Research Findings on the Effectiveness of Different Juvenile Interventions

Intervention	Effectiveness at Reducing Juvenile Crime
Juvenile incarceration (commitment/detention).	Ineffective at reducing recidivism and associated with increased recidivism.
Diverting youth away from judicial system to punitive programs (scared straight or boot camp programs).	Ineffective at reducing recidivism and associated with increased recidivism.
Diverting youth away from court system to therapeutic interventions (counseling, skills building, mentoring, victim-offender mediation).	Effective at reducing recidivism, but effectiveness varies based on intervention and target population.
Therapeutic interventions for incarcerated juveniles.	Effective at reducing recidivism, but effectiveness varies based on intervention, program quality, and population.
Early social skills and self-control training to prevent antisocial behavior in children.	Effective at reducing future delinquent or antisocial behaviors.

Source: LFC review of research studies.

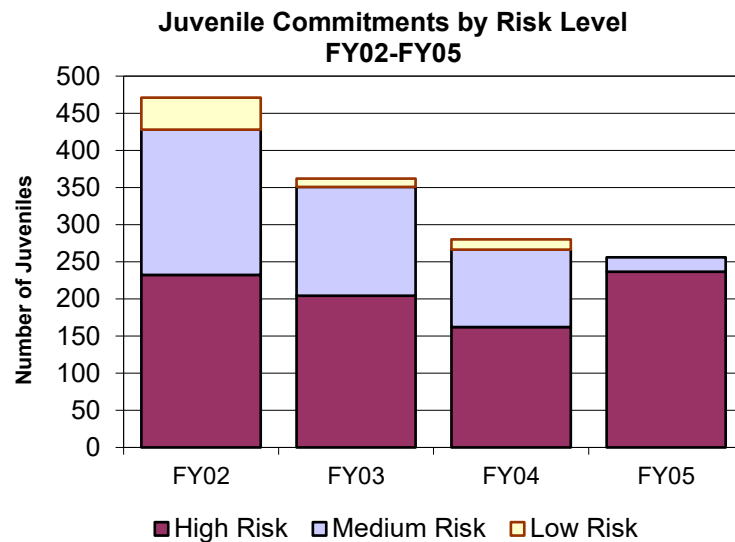


Background:

New Mexico's Juvenile Justice Reforms in the 2000s

- Based on the research, New Mexico implemented two sets of evidence-based, data-driven juvenile justice reforms in the early- and mid-2000s: (1) diverting more low-risk youth away from the justice system and (2) making Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) facilities for high-risk youth more rehabilitative (“Cambiar” initiative inspired by the Missouri Model).

More Diversion Away from the System



Source: LFC (2006) Review of Juvenile Justice Oversight. p.15

More Rehabilitative Secure Facilities

(Before)



(After)



Remodeling at John Paul Taylor Center CYFD Juvenile Secure Facility
in Response to New Mexico's “Cambiar” Initiative

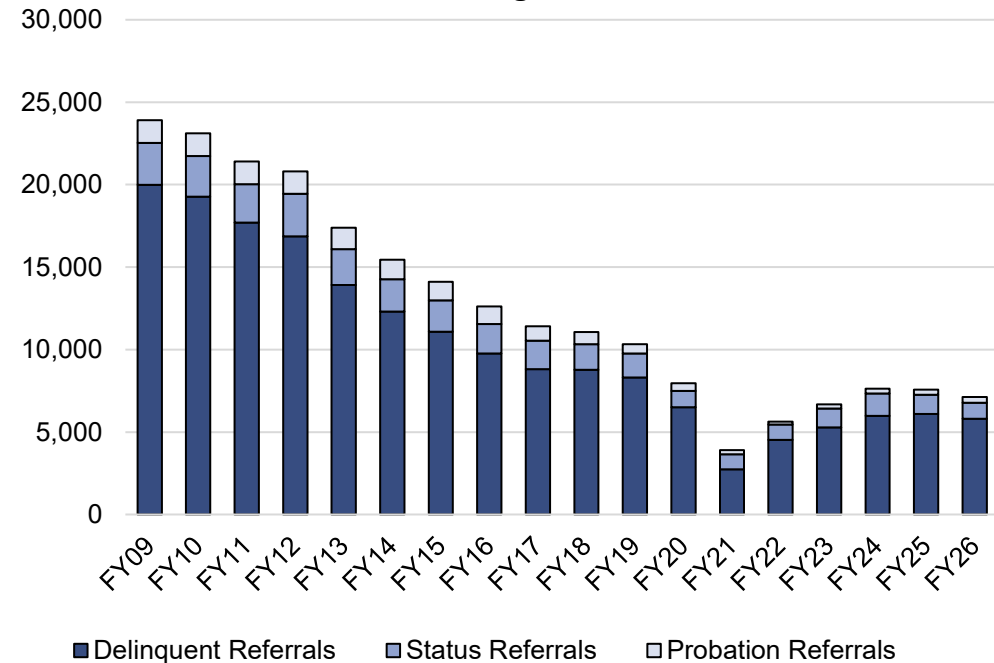


Background:

Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System steadily decreased, reached a pandemic low point, and then rose after the pandemic low point.

- Reports of juvenile crime (referrals) to the juvenile justice system have steadily decreased, reached a low point in FY21 during the pandemic, and recently increased since the pandemic.
- New Mexico's trends in juvenile justice mirror national juvenile justice trends.

Referrals to the Juvenile Justice System,
FY09 through FY26



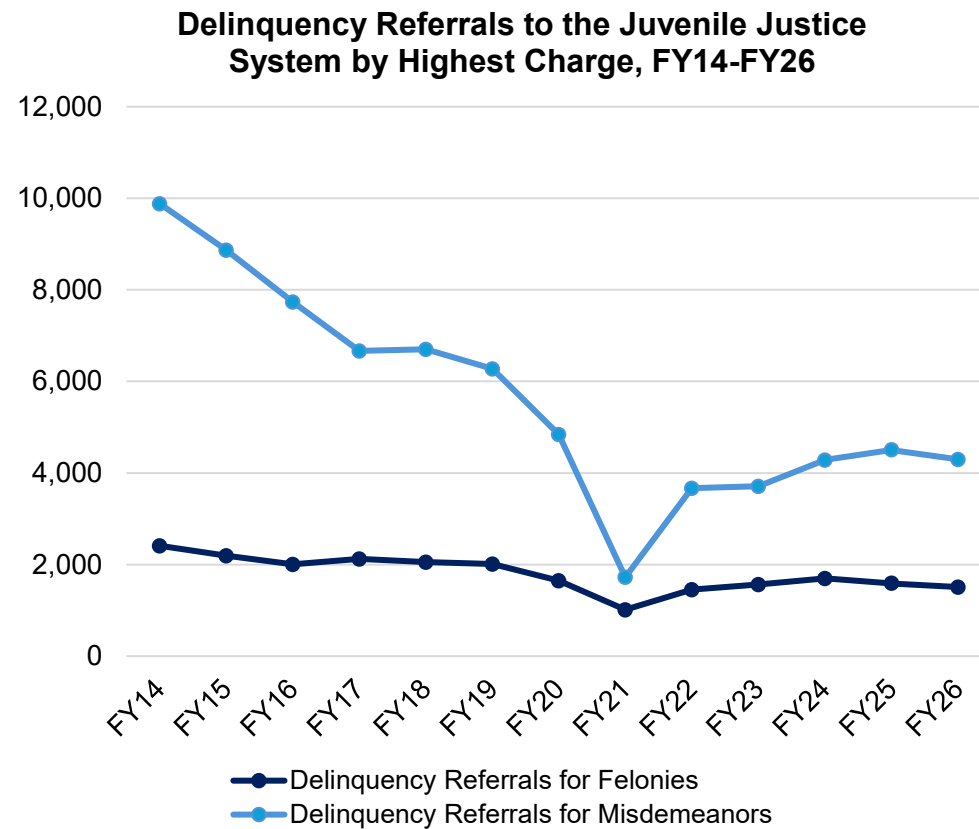
Note: FY26 data is still preliminary. The final FY26 numbers may vary with an expected fluctuation of about 10 to 15 cases. Exact data before FY09 is limited but past LFC reports indicate referrals were over 20 thousand in early 2000s.

Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



Background:

Most Juvenile Justice Referrals are for Lower-Level Offenses.



Note: FY26 data is still preliminary and the final data may vary by an expected 10 to 15 cases.

Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.

Top Charges for Juvenile Delinquency Referrals, FY14 through FY25			
Charge Type	Charge	Number of Charges	Percent of Total
Top Five Juvenile Misdemeanor Charges	Battery	12,023	9%
	Use or Possession of Drug Paraphernalia	9,303	7%
	Shoplifting (\$250 or less)	7,478	5%
	Battery (Household Member)	7,323	5%
	Public Affray (Fighting)	6,618	5%
Top Five Misdemeanor Charges		42,745	31%
Total Misdemeanor Charges		102,391	75%
Top Five Juvenile Felony Charges	Aggravated Assault (Deadly Weapon)	2,063	2%
	Unlawful Carrying of a Deadly Weapon on School Premises	1,645	1%
	Criminal Damage to Property (Over \$1000)	1,553	1%
	Burglary (Automobile)	1,487	1%
	Battery Upon a Peace Officer	1,317	1%
Top Five Felony Charges		8,065	6%
Total Felony Charges		34,333	25%
Total Charges		136,724	100%

Notes: The last three months of data from FY25 were not provided by CYFD due to data availability. A single referral to the juvenile justice system can include multiple charges.

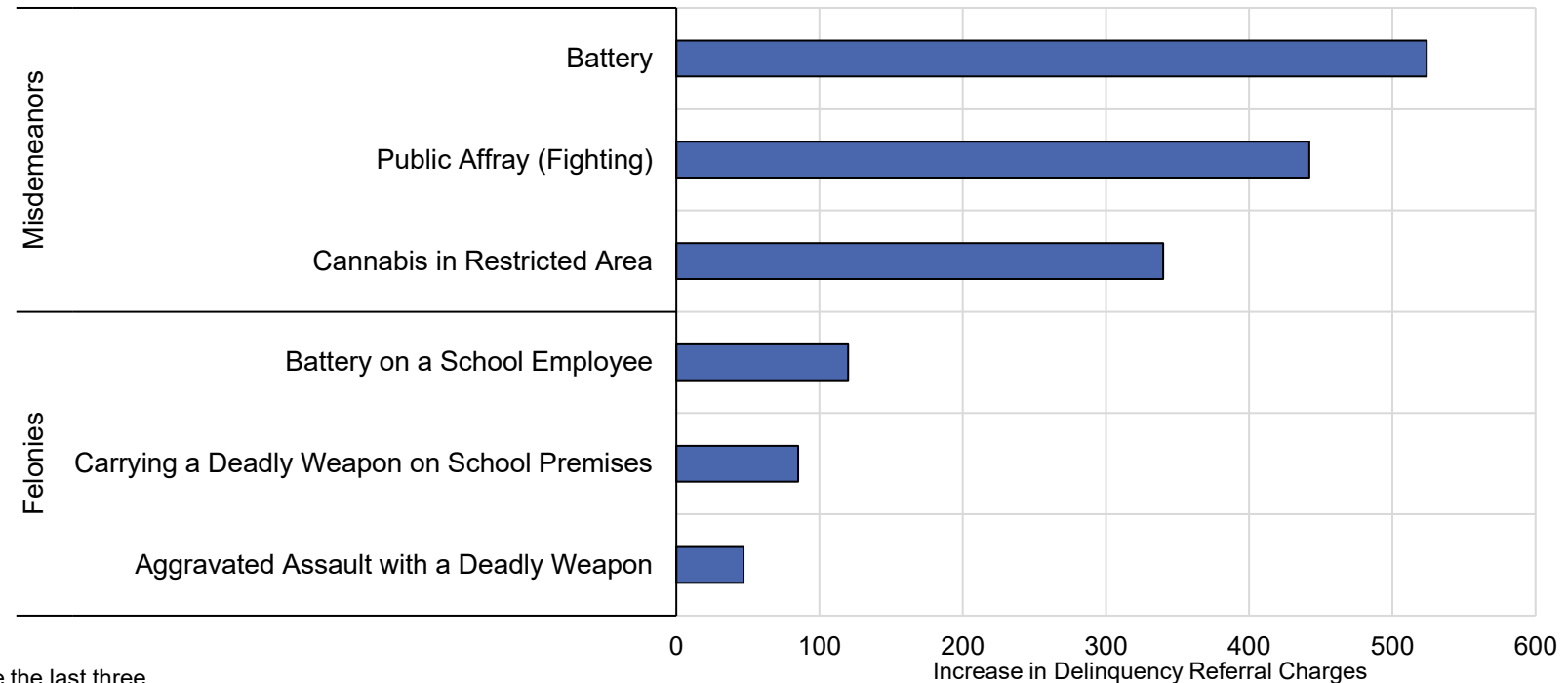
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



Background:

Charges with the largest increases since the pandemic.

Misdemeanor and Felony Charges in New Mexico Delinquency Referrals with the Largest Increases From FY21 Pandemic Low Point to FY25



Note: FY25 data does not include the last three months due to data availability.

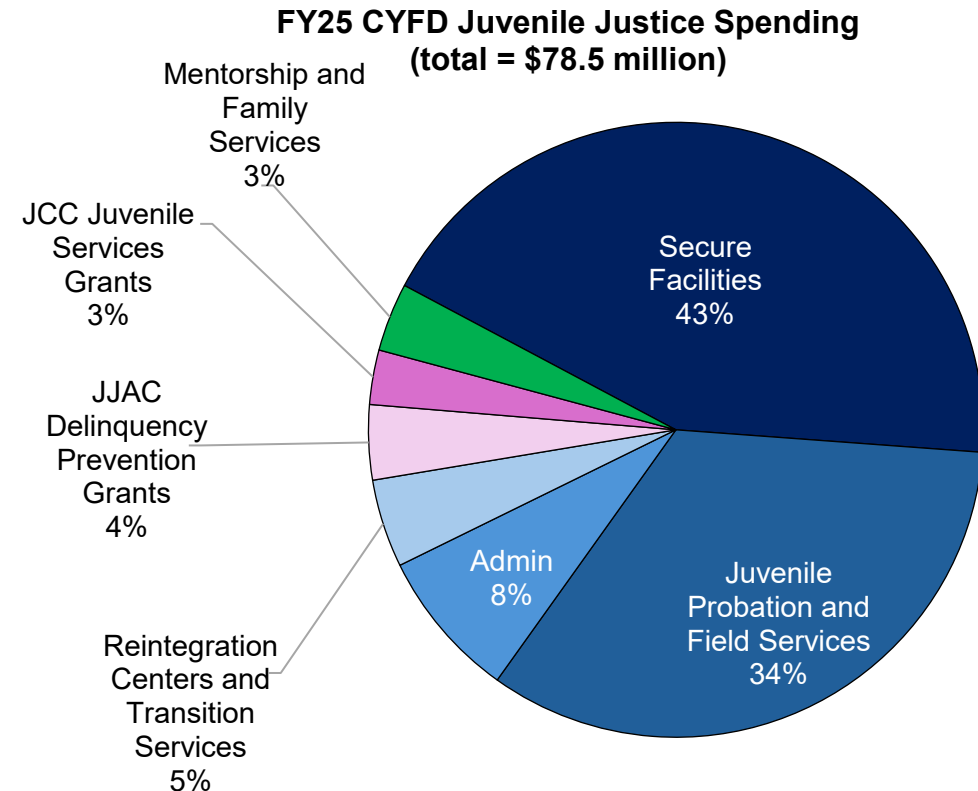
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



Background:

Children, Youth and Families Department (CYFD) juvenile justice spending is primarily on secure facilities and juvenile probation and parole offices.

- CYFD spending on the juvenile justice system was about \$78.5 million in FY25.
- Juvenile justice spending was roughly \$81 million in FY26, compared to a budget of \$86 million.
- CYFD's juvenile justice budget this year for FY27 is \$94 million.



Notes: JJAC means Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee.
JCC means Juvenile Community Corrections.

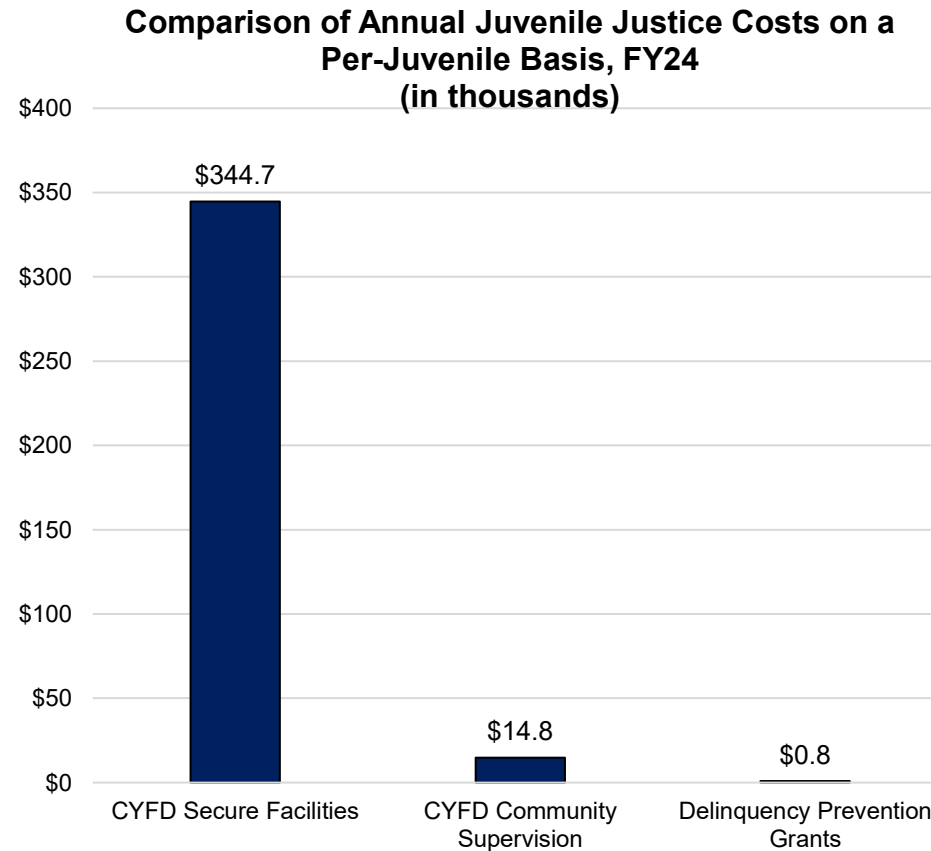
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



Background:

On a per-juvenile basis, placing a juvenile in a secure facility is more expensive than community supervision or delinquency prevention programming.

A single two-year commitment of a juvenile to a CYFD secure facility costs the taxpayer roughly \$690,000.

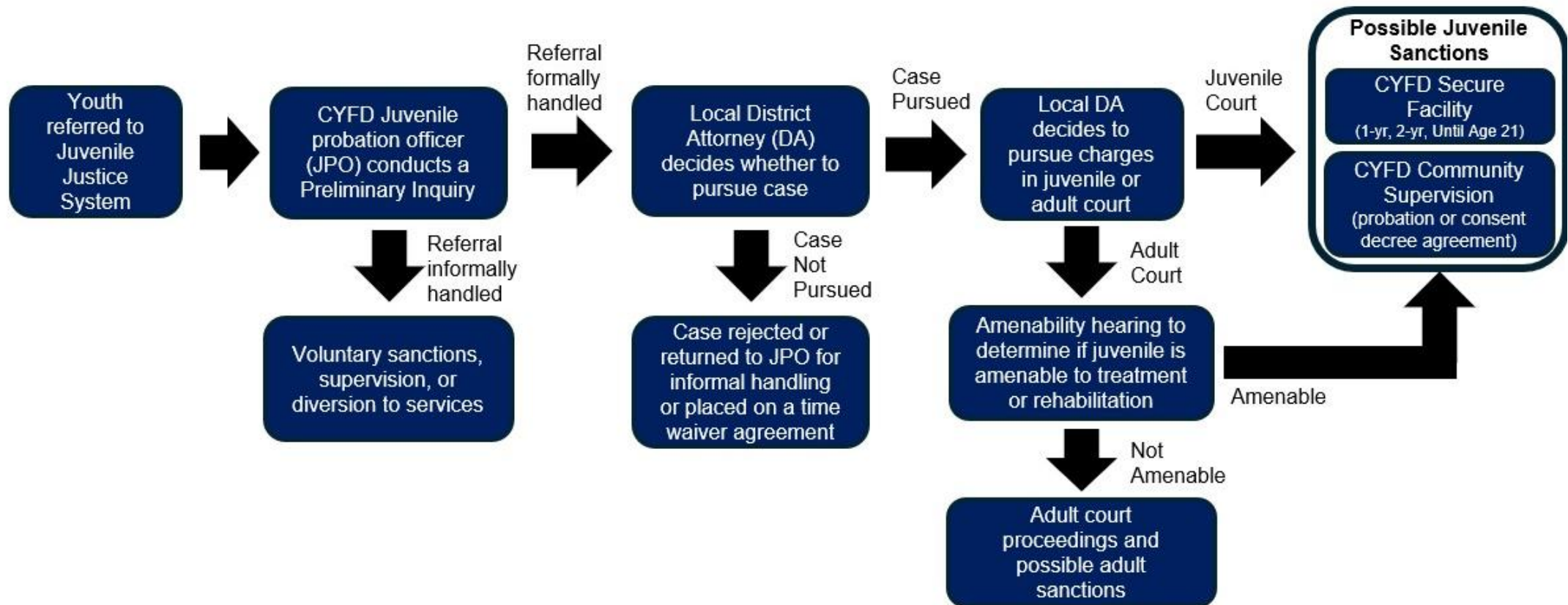


Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.

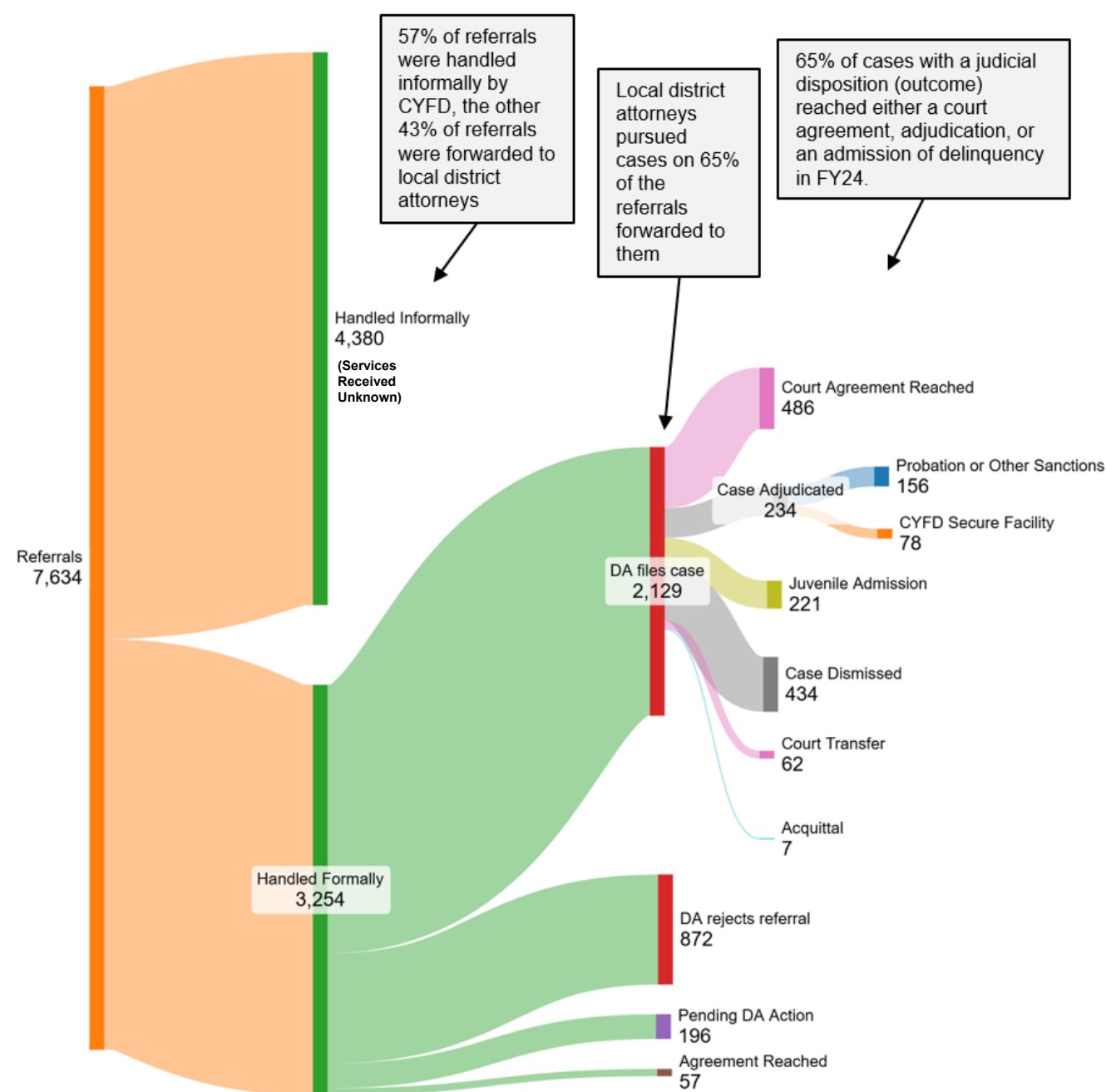


Finding 1: Youth are often diverted away from the juvenile justice system, but services are lacking and many youth return to the system.

The juvenile justice process is a multi-stage process where CYFD staff, district attorneys, and courts make decisions on how to handle juveniles.



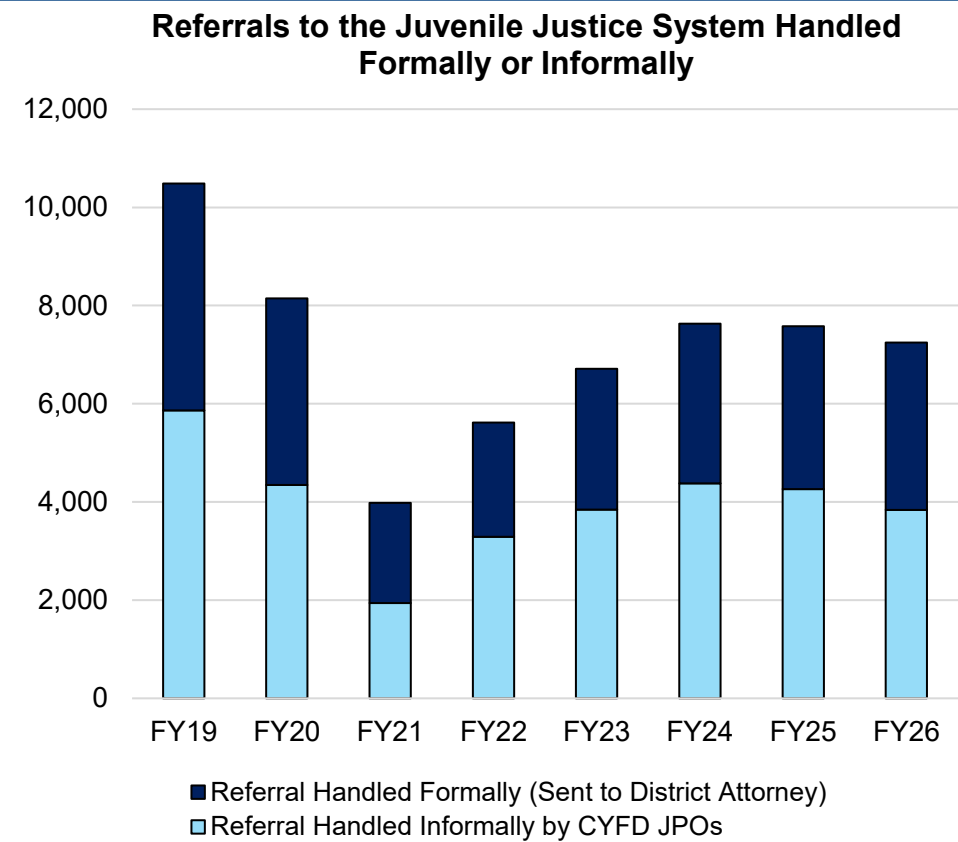
Flow Chart on Outcomes of FY24 Juvenile Referrals to CYFD and Court System



Source: LFC analysis of CYFD and AOC data.

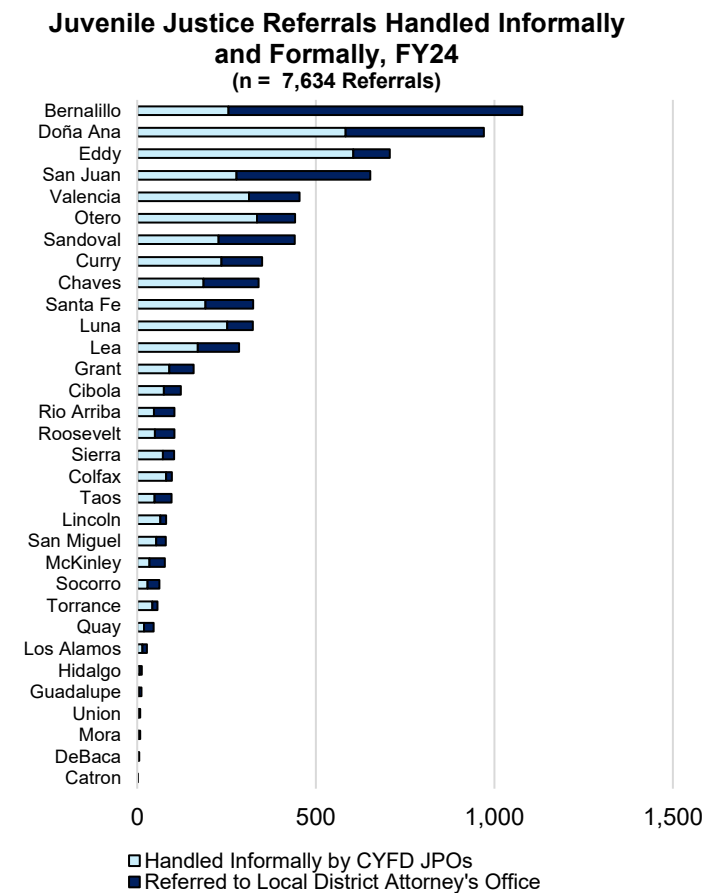


A majority of juvenile justice referrals are handled informally by CYFD Juvenile Probation Officers. Only referrals for lower-level offenses can be handled informally.



Note: FY26 data is still preliminary and the final data may vary by an expected 10 to 15 cases.

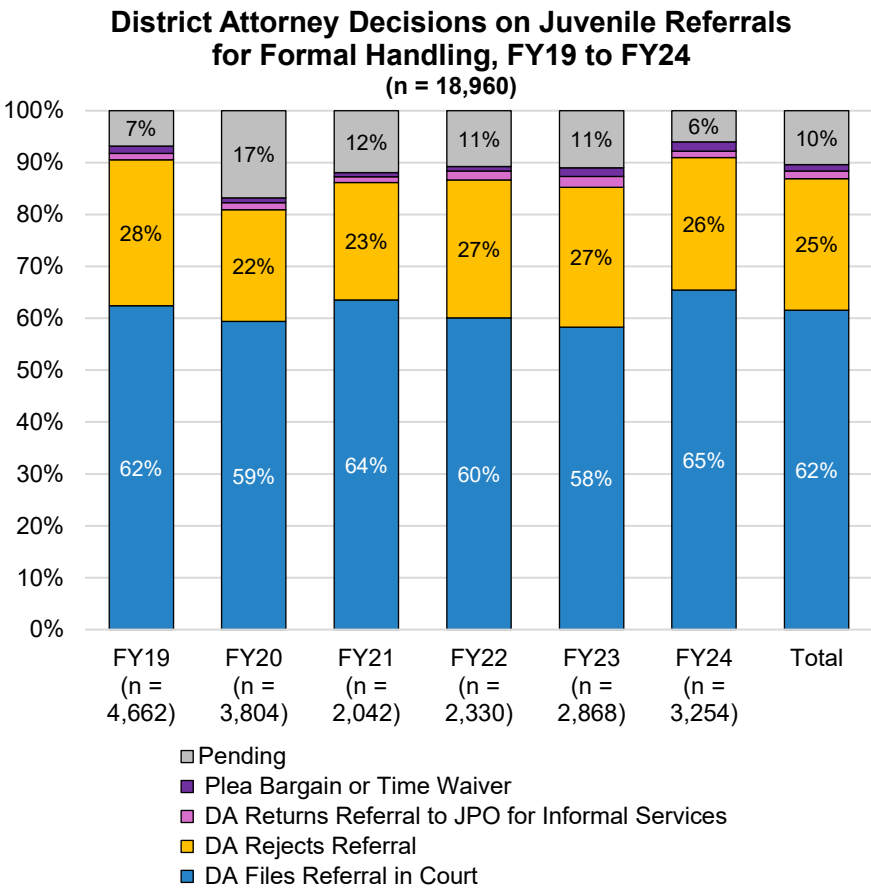
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



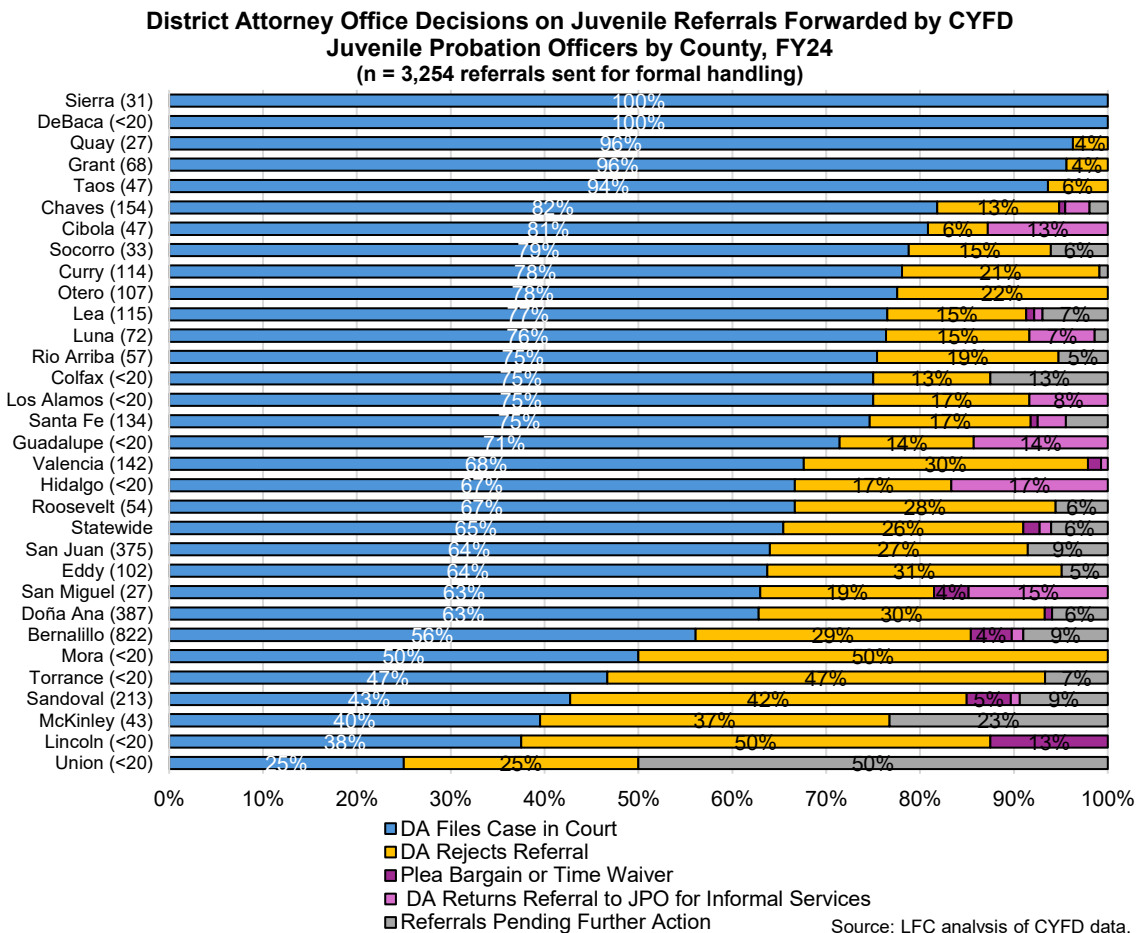
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



District attorneys file court cases on roughly two-thirds of juvenile justice referrals forwarded to them by CYFD and decline to pursue a quarter of juvenile justice referrals in court.



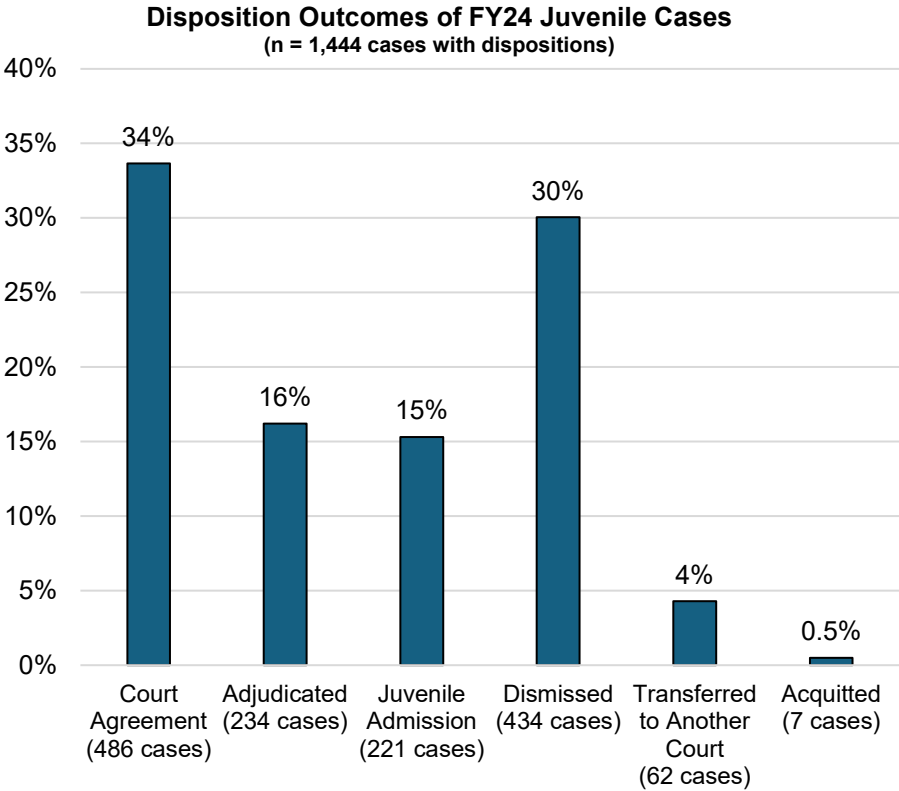
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



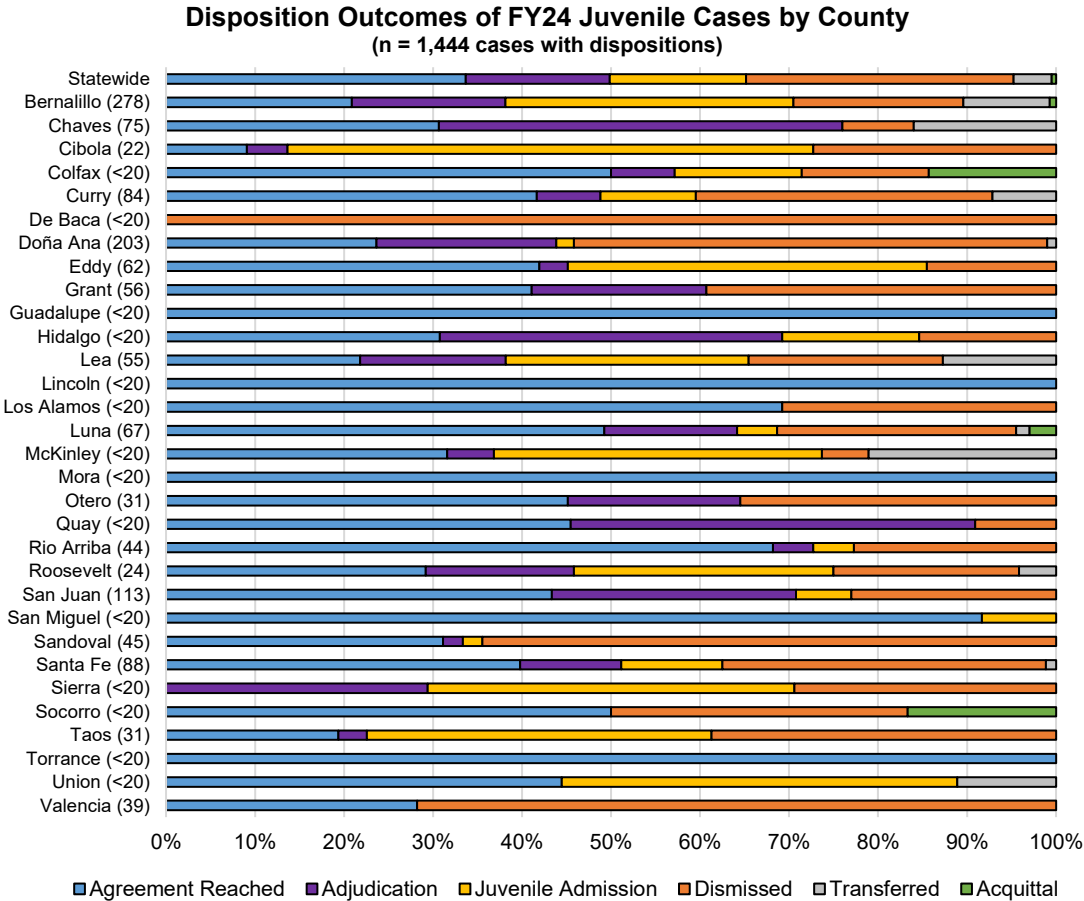
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



Roughly two-thirds of juvenile cases filed in court result in a court agreement, adjudication, or admission of delinquency.



Source: LFC analysis of Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) data.

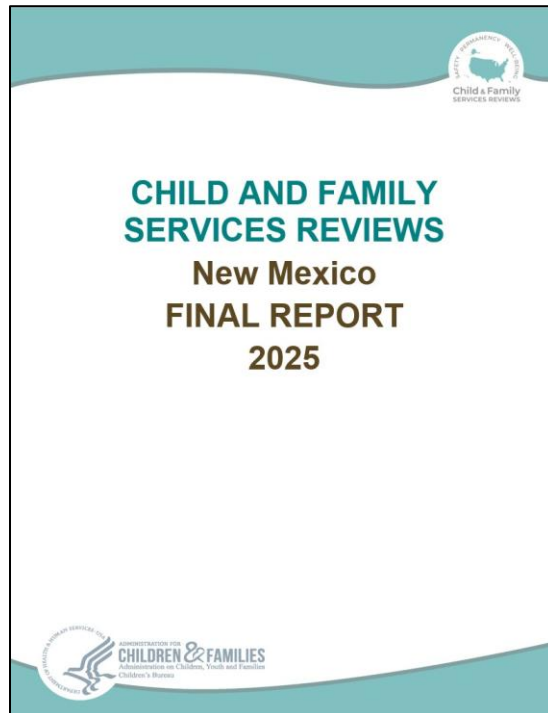


Source: LFC analysis of AOC data.

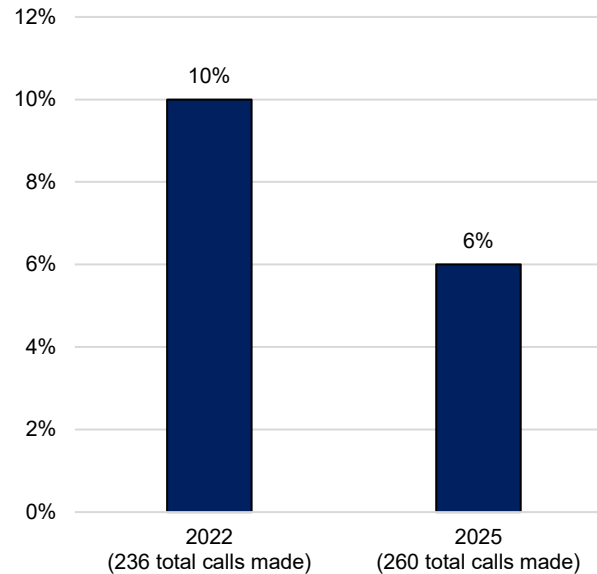


As the state diverts low risk juvenile referrals, New Mexico has documented gaps and declines in its behavioral health and treatment services. This means the state lacks enough services to divert juveniles to.

Child and Family Services Review of New Mexico, 2025

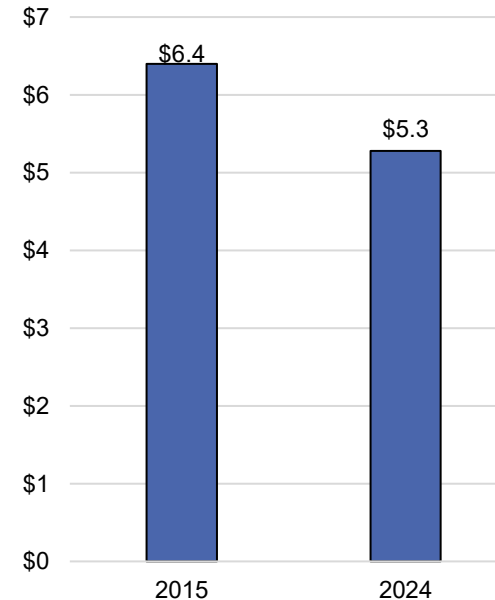


Percent of calls to New Mexico Medicaid Behavioral Health Providers Resulting in an Appointment Being Offered



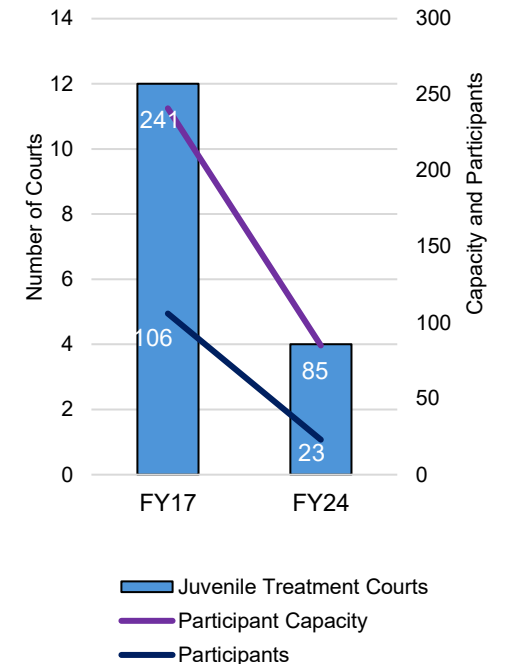
Source: LFC staff Medicaid secret shopper surveys.

New Mexico Medicaid Spending on Multisystemic Therapy (MST) for Youth (in millions)



Source: LFC analysis of Medicaid data.

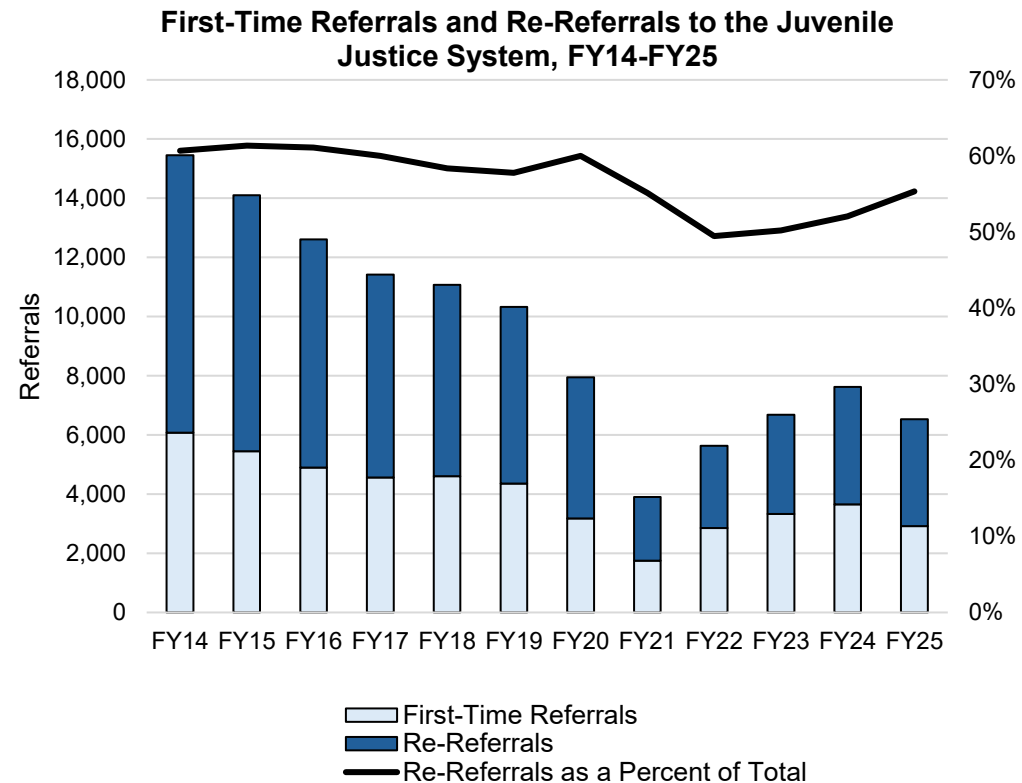
Number of Juvenile Treatment Courts and Capacity



Source: LFC analysis of Administrative Office of the Courts data.



As the state diverts most juvenile justice referrals to unknown services and is lacking behavioral health services, many youth are re-referred back to the juvenile justice system



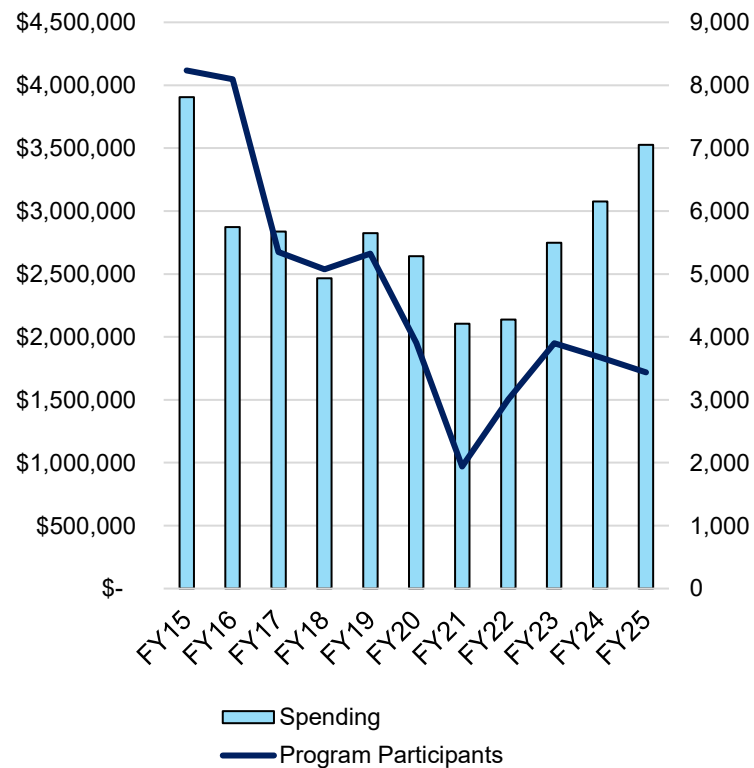
Note: FY25 data does not include the last three months due to data availability.

Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



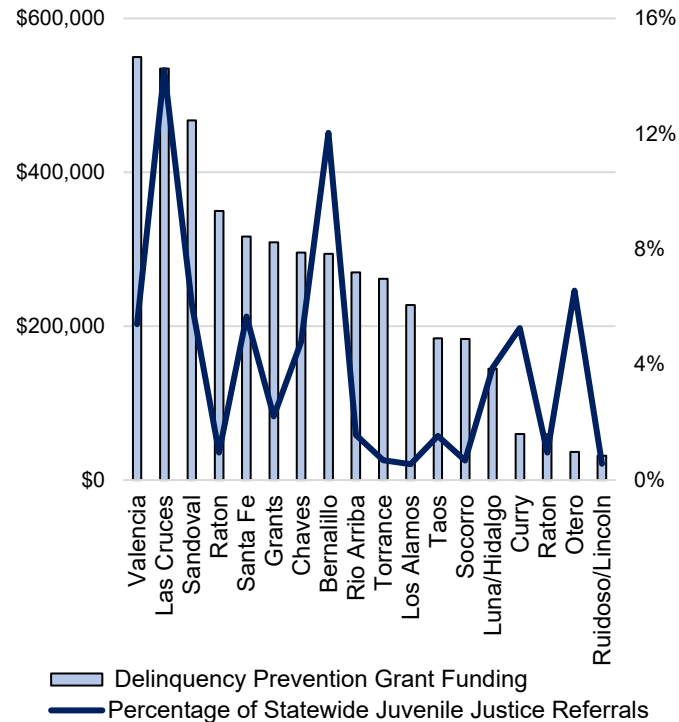
The state funds delinquency prevention grants through the state Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee (JJAC) but participation has decreased, funds are not targeted to where the most referrals occur, and local communities do not fully leverage grant funds.

JJAC Spending and Participation



Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.

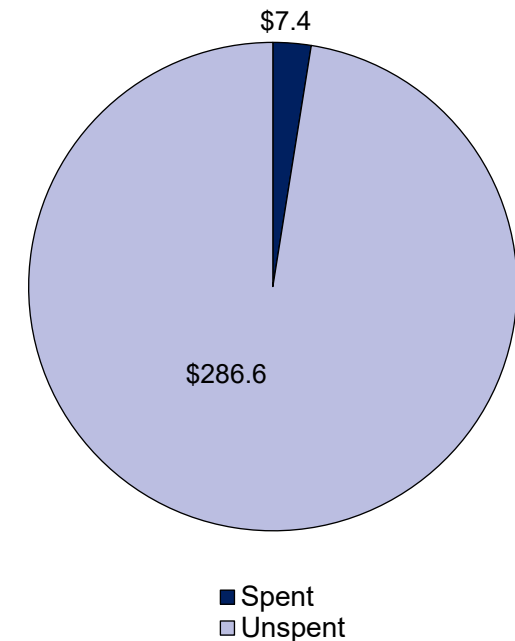
FY25 JJAC Continuum Grants and Percentage of Juvenile Referrals



Note: Referral data for FY25 does not include the last three months due to data availability.

Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.

Bernalillo County's FY25 Delinquency Prevention Grant Funding from JJAC (in thousands)



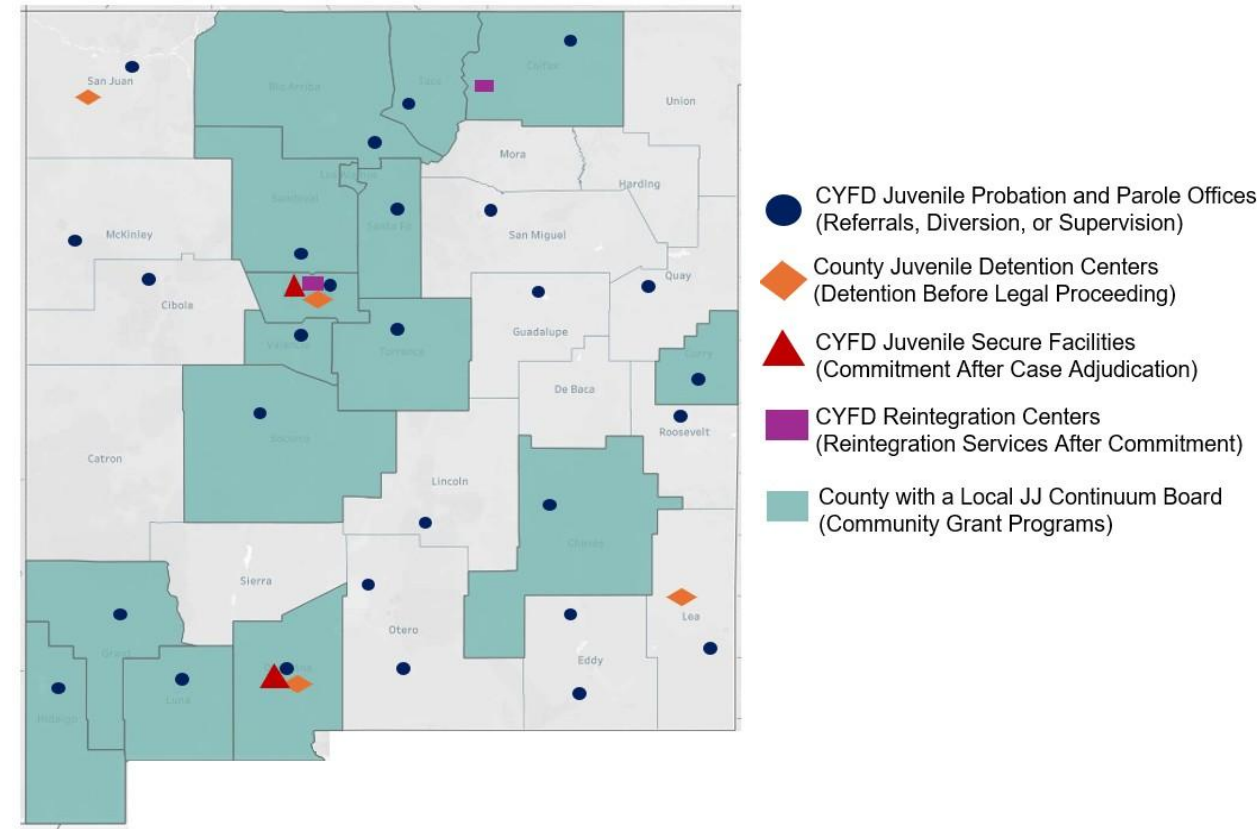
Source: LFC review of CYFD documentation.



A Quick Note about County Juvenile Detention Centers and CYFD Secure Facilities.

- The next two sections of the report will discuss County Juvenile Detention Centers and CYFD Juvenile Secure Facilities, respectively.
- **County Juvenile Detention Centers** detain youth **before and during legal proceedings** if CYFD and courts determine a youth is a high risk to themselves or others.
- Four counties (Bernalillo, Doña Ana, Lea, and San Juan) choose to operate Juvenile Detention Centers. All other counties transfer juvenile detainees to these detention centers.
- **CYFD Secure Facilities** house a juvenile **after legal proceedings and being formally committed** to secure confinement in a facility.
- CYFD operates one secure facility in Albuquerque (Youth Development and Diagnostic Center) and one in Las Cruces (John Paul Taylor Center).

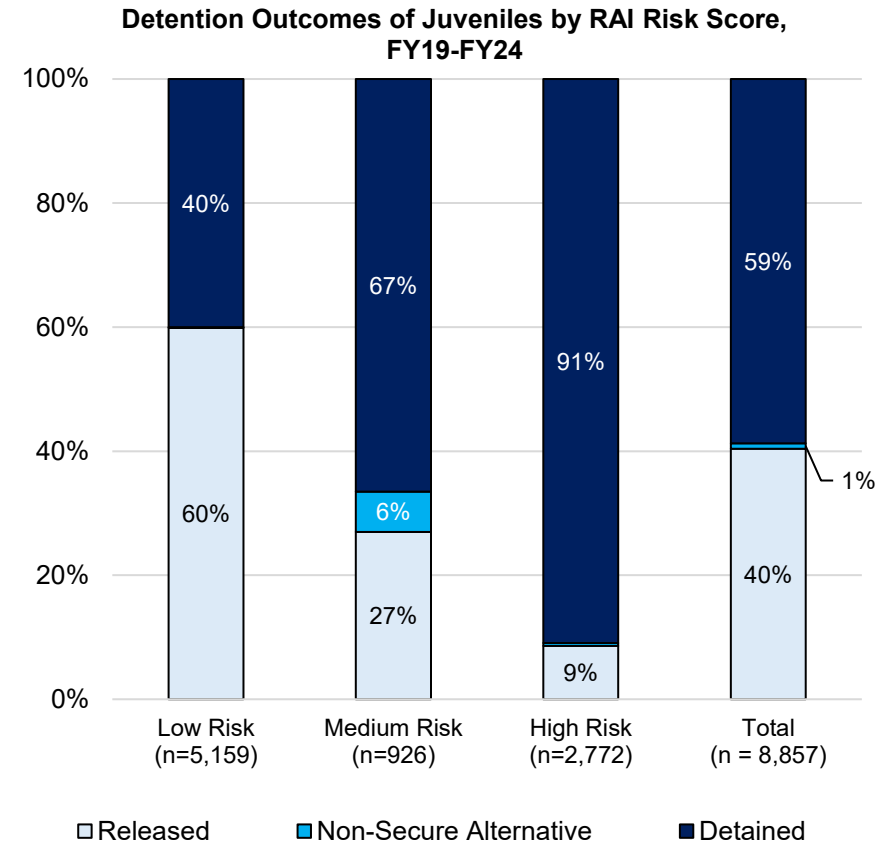
Map of Juvenile Justice System



Finding 2: County juvenile detention centers have increased populations and staffing pressures, which could be alleviated by prioritizing detention solely for the highest risk youth.

State law requires CYFD and courts to use a risk assessment instrument (RAI) to determine if a youth is enough of a risk to detain before legal proceedings in a county juvenile detention center.

- The RAI takes into account risk factors to numerically score a juvenile as either high, medium, or low risk.
- Before and during legal proceedings, most low-risk youth are released and most high-risk youth are detained.
- However, CYFD sometimes overrides its RAI tool to detain lower-risk youth, leading to unavailable capacity at detention centers to detain higher-risk youth
- CYFD last statistically validated its RAI tool in 2022 despite making modifications to the tool since then to automatically detain youth possessing a weapon or committing assault or battery against a CYFD employee.
- Risk assessment tools in criminal justice settings should be statistically validated, according to best practice and research.

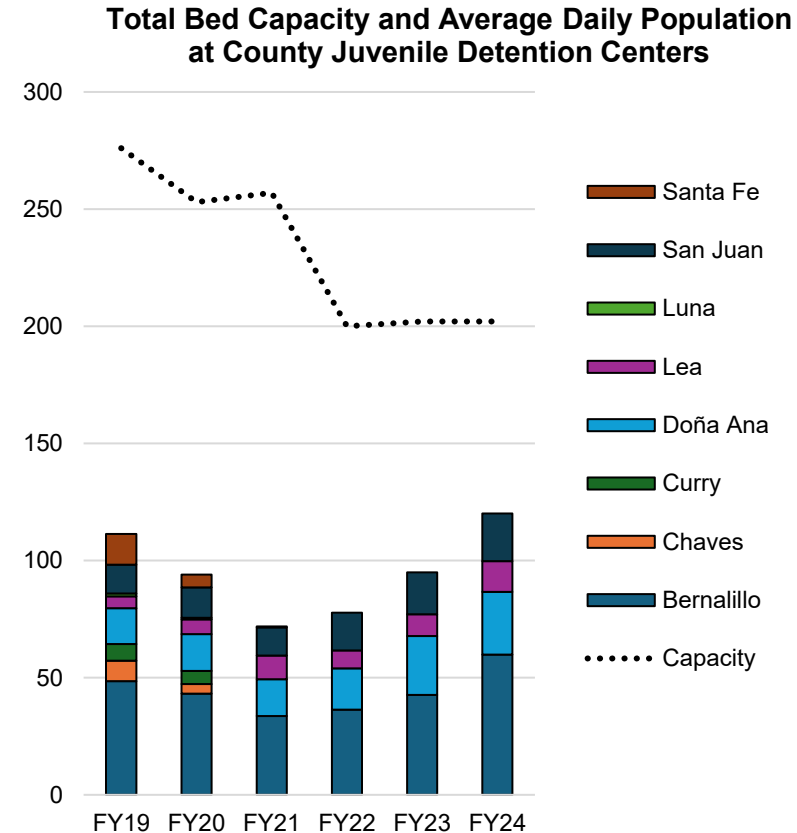


Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



County juvenile detention centers have recently had capacity pressures, but this is due to a lack of staff rather than a lack of facility space.

- Under state law, counties are responsible for either operating a juvenile detention center or agreeing to transfer their juvenile detainees to another county's center.
- As overall referrals to the juvenile justice system decreased, the number of counties choosing to operate a juvenile detention center also decreased.
- The four remaining county juvenile detention centers are still below total bed capacity and **youth generally stay for only 70 days on average**.
- Juvenile detention centers still sometimes cannot always house juveniles because of limited available staff to oversee the youth (and still meet federally required staff-to-youth ratios).

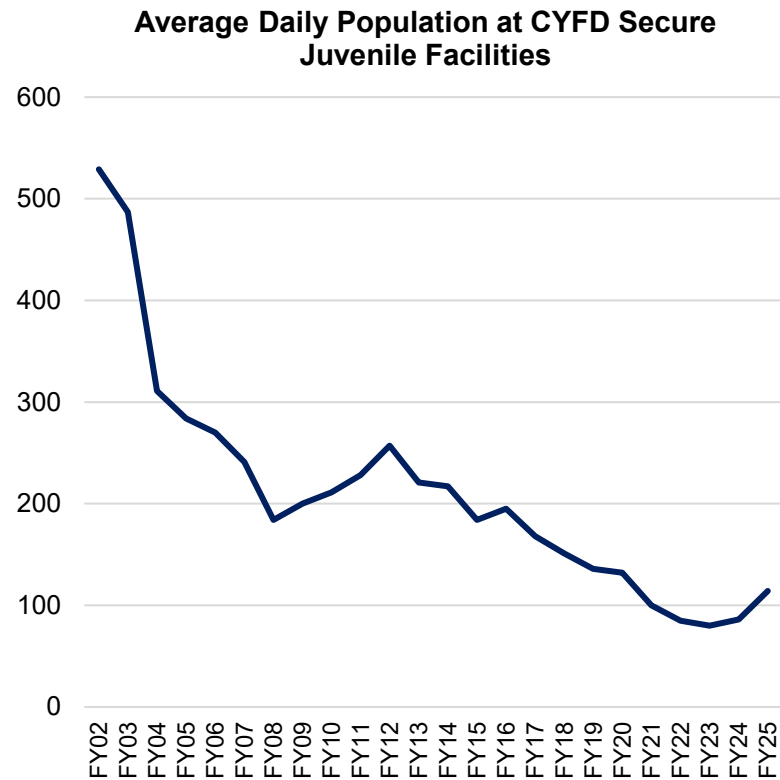


Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.

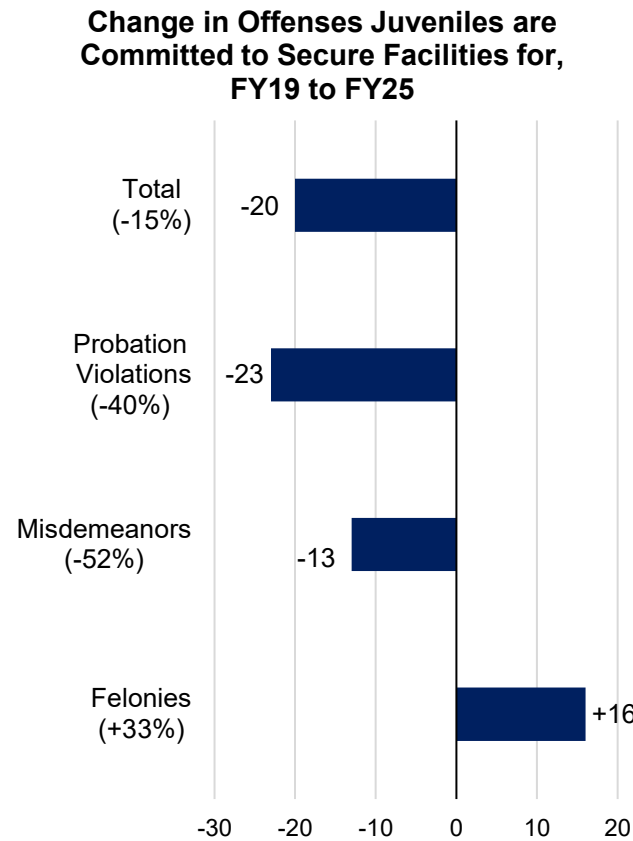


Finding 3: CYFD secure facilities have staffing pressures, unused facility capacity, and outdated projections.

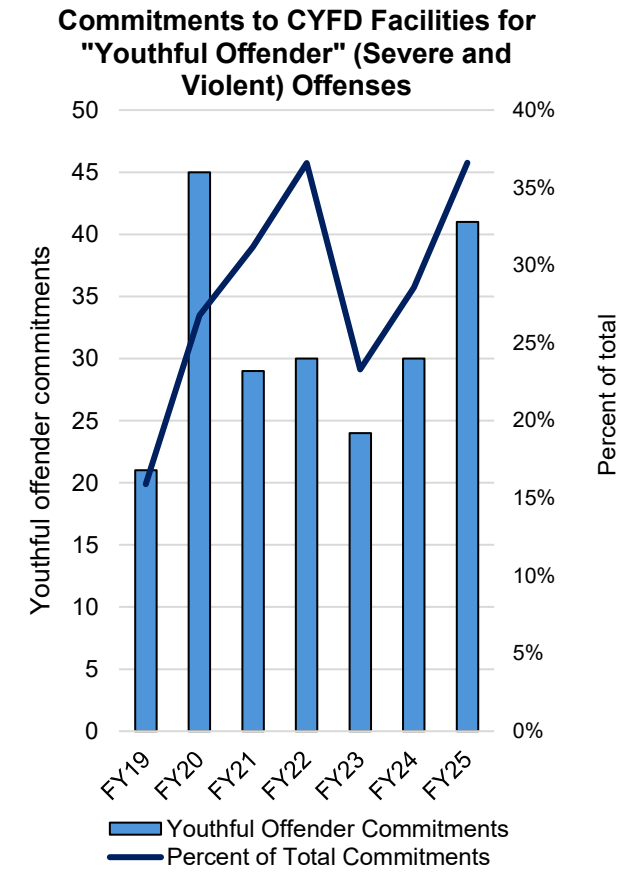
Aligned with best practice, fewer youth are being sentenced to CYFD secure facilities for probation violations or misdemeanors than in the past. New Mexico is reserving secure confinement for juveniles committing more severe offenses.



Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



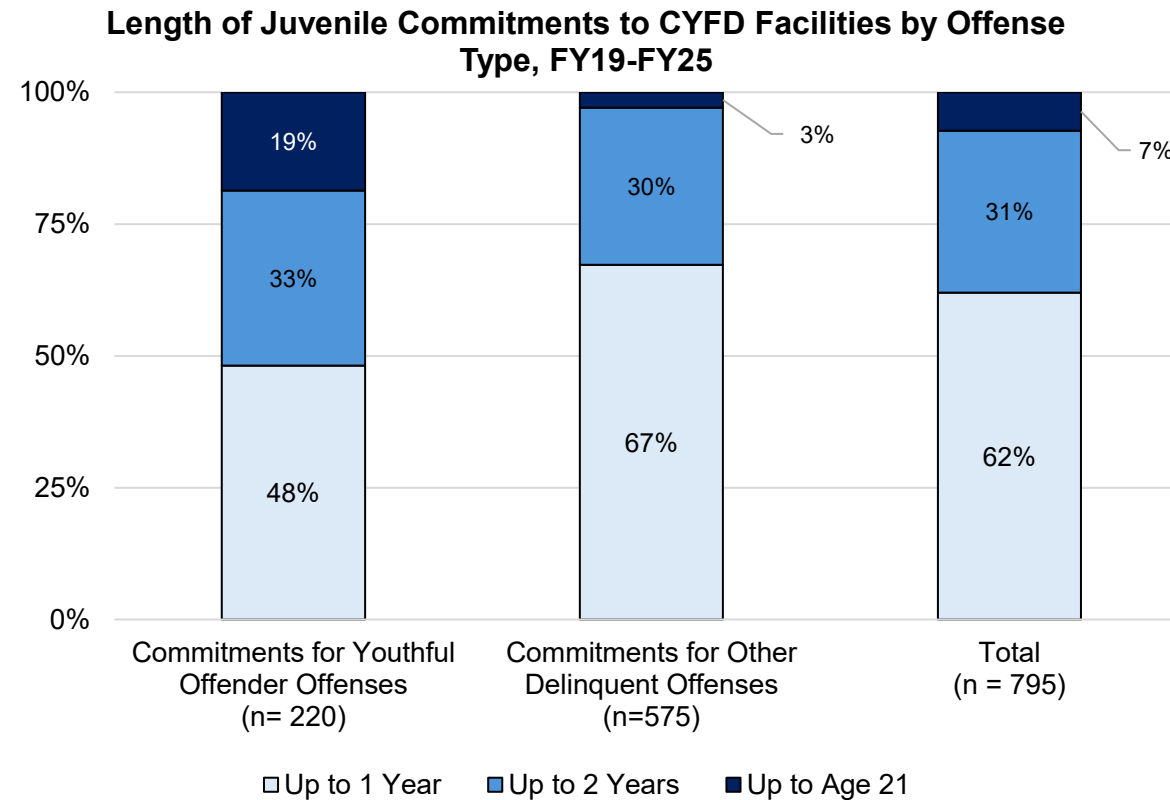
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



The majority of juvenile commitments (sentences) to CYFD secure facilities are for one year, but commitments for more severe youthful offender offenses are often longer than one year



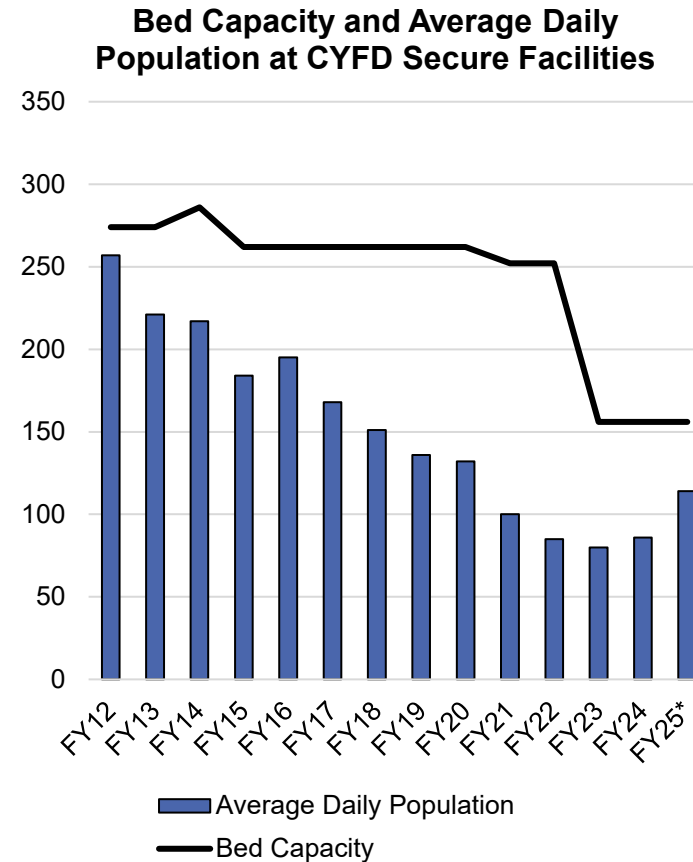
Note: A juvenile can be committed for multiple offenses.
Some delinquent offenses can be committed up to age 21 if the juvenile was also committed for a youthful offender offense.

Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.

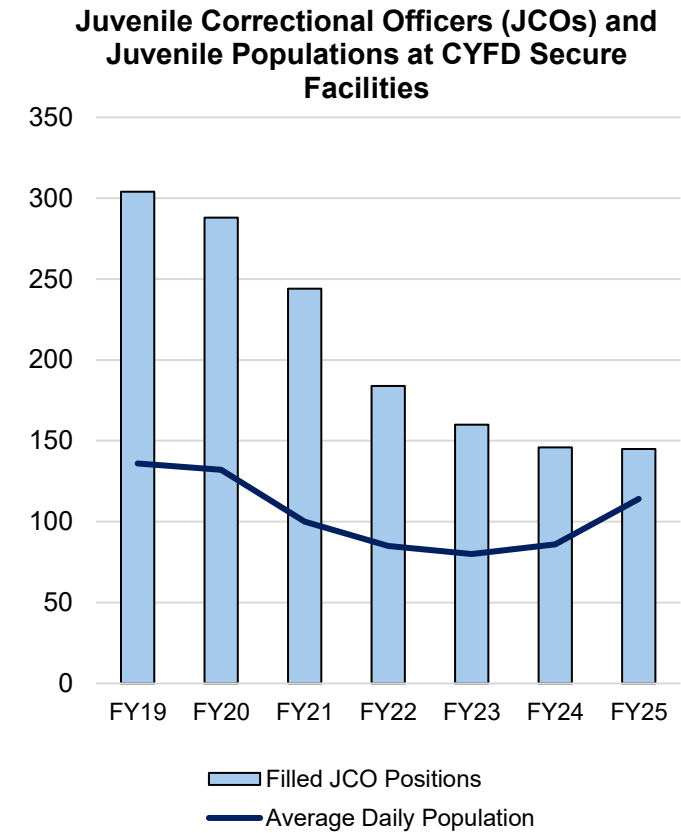


CYFD secure facilities are not staffed up to fully use existing bed capacity and facility space.

- CYFD reduced staffing and closed a secure facility after a decade of population declines but right before recent population increases, which created recent capacity pressures at CYFD.



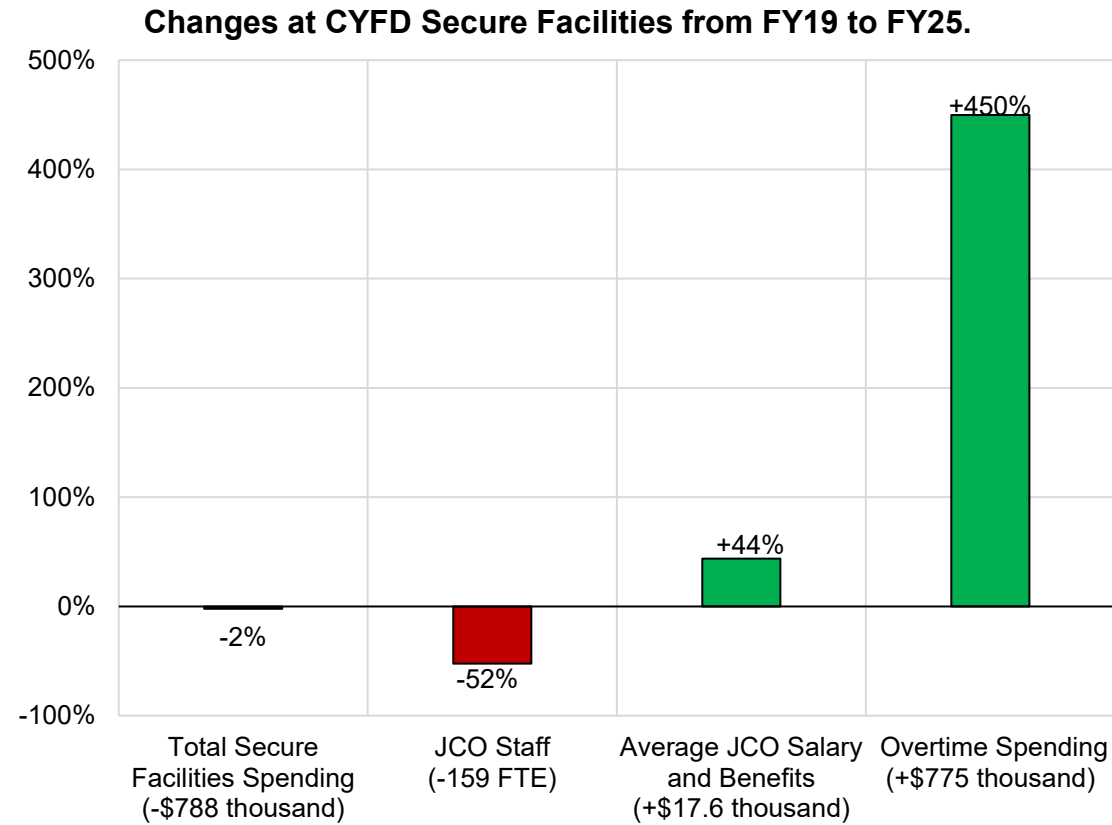
Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data



Source: LFC analysis of State Personnel Office (SPO) and CYFD data.



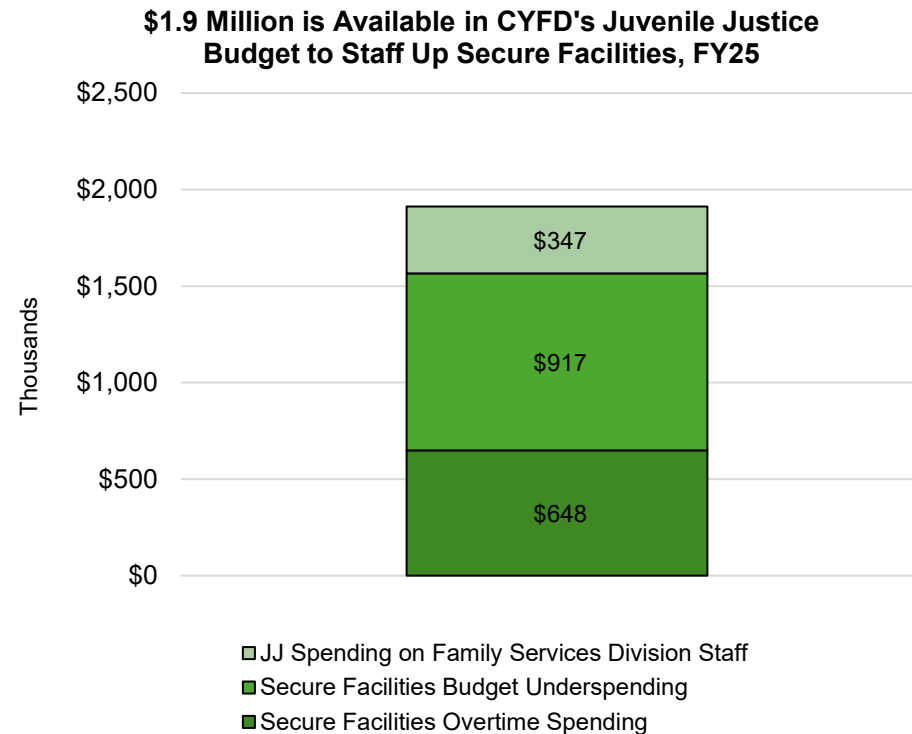
CYFD's secure facilities spending has stayed relatively flat even with decreased staffing because of raises and overtime increases.



Source: LFC analysis of CYFD and SPO data.



The report found CYFD had at least \$1.9 million in juvenile justice budget capacity in FY25 to help staff up secure facilities by an additional 32 juvenile correctional officers and increase capacity.



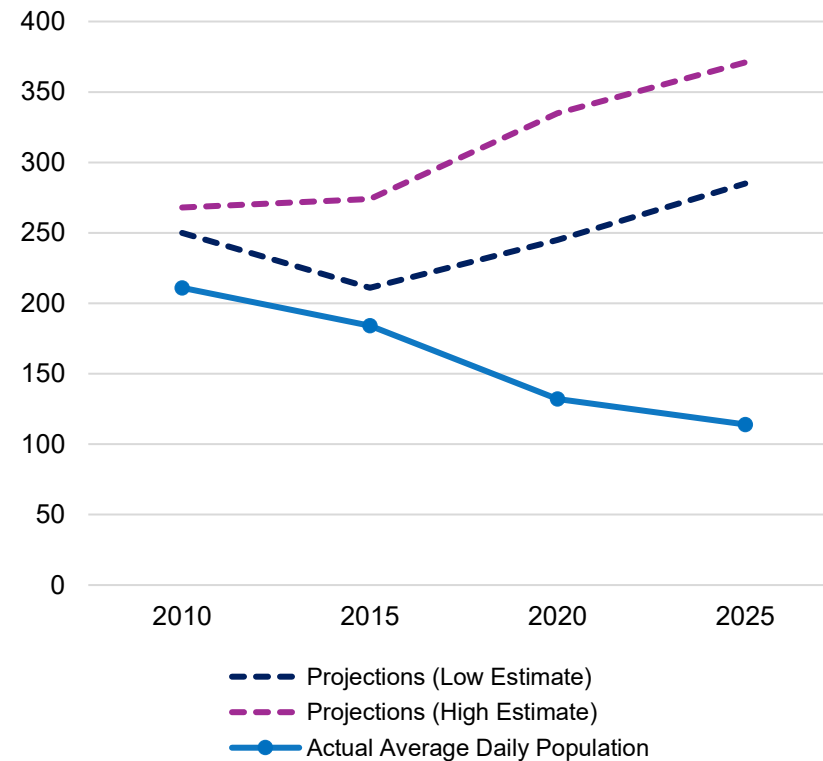
Note: Actual spending on overtime was \$948K in FY25, but this assumes CYFD will need \$300K for overtime costs.

Source: LFC analysis of SHARE and SPO data.



A CYFD juvenile justice facilities master plan from 2010 planned to build small regional facilities across the state, but this plan overestimated the 2025 juvenile justice population by at least 150 percent and would cost up to \$261 million to implement.

**2010 Facility Master Plan Population Projections
vs. Actual Average Daily Populations in CYFD
Secure Facilities**



Source: LFC analysis of CYFD data.



Conclusions

- Youth are often diverted away from the juvenile justice system, but a lack of behavioral health and treatment services means many are re-referred back rather than truly diverted.
- County detention centers have capacity pressures because of limited staffing and CYFD sometimes overriding its risk assessment tool.
- CYFD secure facilities are not staffed up to fully use existing bed capacity and facility space despite available budget.



Key Recommendations

The Legislature should consider:

- Prioritizing potential future funding for evidence-based prevention and therapeutic interventions, and
- Requiring CYFD to validate its pre-adjudication risk assessment instrument every three years.

CYFD should:

- Develop and publish an action plan for building up the state's capacity for front-end, evidence-based behavioral health and treatment services;
- Minimize overrides of the risk assessment instrument to detain low-risk youth or release high-risk youth;
- Prioritize staffing its secure facilities by reducing overtime spending, fully spending budgeted funds, and reducing juvenile justice funds spent on other divisions.



Key Recommendations

District attorney offices should:

- Redirect juvenile referrals back to CYFD juvenile probation officers for informal handling when the district attorney office declines to pursue a juvenile referral in court.

The Juvenile Justice Advisory Committee should:

- Target more delinquency prevention funds to areas where the most juvenile justice referrals occur.

Bernalillo County, Doña Ana County, the city of Albuquerque, and the city of Las Cruces should:

- Build local capacity to apply for and manage JJAC delinquency prevention grant funding.



Appendix: Juvenile Justice Terminology

The legal terminology in juvenile delinquency cases is technically different from adult criminal proceedings which reflects an intent within the legal system to treat juvenile delinquency proceedings as non-criminal in nature. (New Mexico Juvenile Justice Handbook, 2011, 1.5)

Adult Criminal Case Term	Juvenile Delinquency Case Term
Defendant	Respondent
Trial	Adjudication
Convicted	Adjudicated
Sentence	Disposition
Incarceration	Commitment
Indictment	Petition



Appendix: Process Map

