

JUVENILE JUSTICE IN CALIFORNIA

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► **California’s juvenile justice system is a network of county and state agencies and programs.**

In recognition of developmental differences between adults and juveniles, the juvenile justice system is intended to emphasize guidance, education, treatment, and rehabilitation over punishment. The system deals with juveniles who were under age 18 at the time of their offense. In addition to local law enforcement, county probation departments and juvenile courts work with local school districts and child welfare and behavioral health departments. County probation departments are also responsible for operating juvenile halls, camps, and ranches. At the state level, the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) maintains three secure facilities and a conservation camp for lower-risk offenders.

► **Minors can be arrested for felony, misdemeanor, or status offenses.**

In 2012, 30% of reported arrests were for felonies, 56% for misdemeanors, and 13% for status offenses (truancy, curfew violations, or other charges applicable only to minors). Of the 36,289 juvenile felony arrests reported in 2012, 23% were of African Americans, 20% were of whites, and 52% were of Latinos. Of the 67,817 reported misdemeanor arrests, 15% were of African Americans, 24% were of whites, and 54% were of Latinos.

► **Local law enforcement, probation departments, and juvenile courts have many options short of incarceration.**

The response to a juvenile offense depends on its seriousness and also on the offender’s background. For example, a 15-year-old arrested for the first time for skipping school might be counseled and released. At the other extreme, the most serious cases may be directly filed in or remanded to the adult criminal system. Most of the time, however, law enforcement refers the arrestee to a county juvenile probation department. (Referrals may also come from other agencies or individuals—e.g., schools or parents.) About half the time, the probation department either closes the case or prescribes informal probation or a diversion program (including education, community service, or restorative justice). More serious cases warrant a juvenile court hearing, but judges have a range of options short of committing youth to a county or DJJ facility. Of the approximately 150,000 juvenile arrests made in 2011, only 11% resulted in confinement, and fewer than 1% resulted in commitment to a DJJ facility.

► **A series of reforms has lowered the number and changed the composition of DJJ wards.**

In the mid-1990s, the state began to shift responsibility for juvenile offenders to the counties. A 2007 reform permitted counties to commit only the most serious offenders to state facilities. Between 2007 and 2013, the year-end number of juvenile offenders in DJJ institutions and camps fell from 2,115 to 659. The share of youth in DJJ facilities for homicide increased from 5% to 12.4% and for assault from 32.2% to 39.7%. A subsequent reform gave counties responsibility for all offenders released from DJJ, resulting in a drop in state parole numbers from 2,462 to zero between 2007 and 2013.

► **The reforms have not increased county caseloads—in part due to declining youth felony arrest rates.**

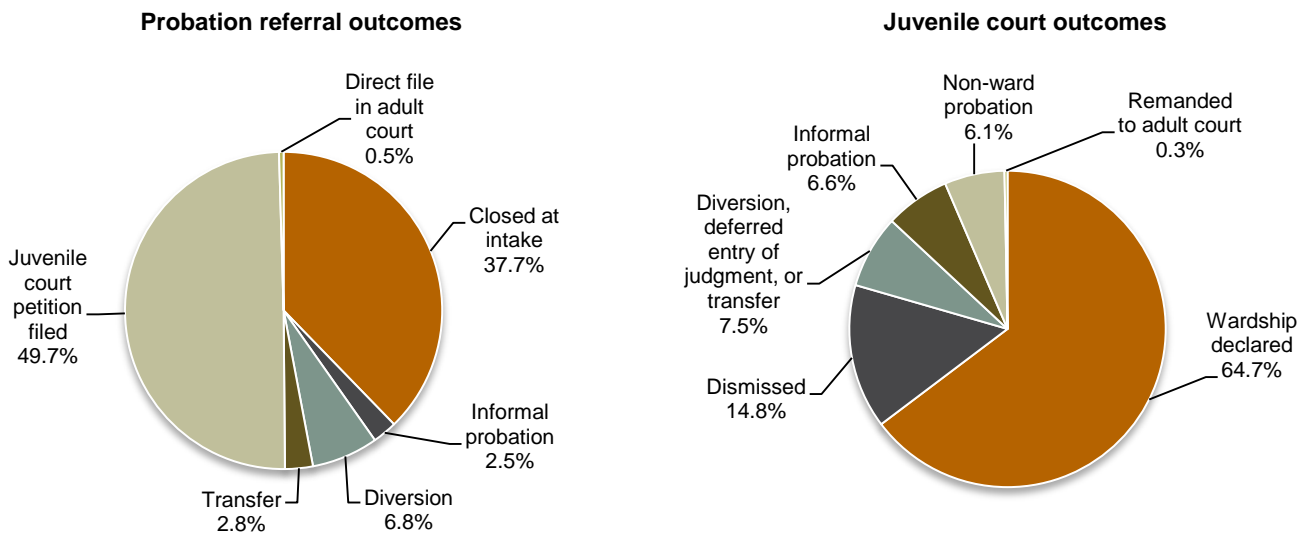
At year-end 2007, counties held an average of 10,843 youths in their juvenile halls and camps. By year-end 2012 that figure fell to 6,892—a 36% decline. The number of youth supervised under alternative programs dropped from 2,268 to 1,645 during the same period. One contributing factor is that between 2007 and 2012 the juvenile arrest rate fell by 42%—to its lowest level in decades. This trend mirrored a general decline in felony arrest rates for young adults.

► **Maintaining the remaining state juvenile facilities is costly.**

The educational and specialized treatment needs of DJJ wards, their diminishing numbers, and court-imposed remediation of deficiencies in staffing, facilities, and educational, medical, and mental health services have resulted in a high per-ward cost. The annual cost to house a DJJ ward is \$179,400—more than three times the per-inmate cost in the adult system. DJJ has contained some of these costs by closing four institutions and one conservation camp. The remaining facilities were filled to about 60% capacity in 2012.



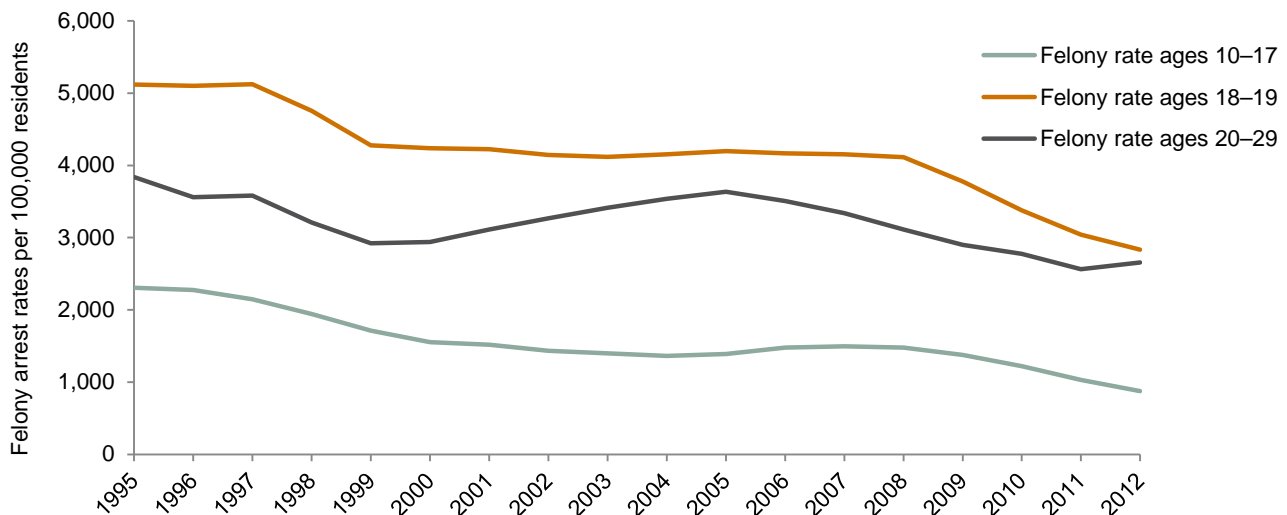
County probation departments and juvenile courts have a range of options



Source: California Department of Justice, 2011 Juvenile Justice in California.

Notes: "Transfer" includes cases referred to traffic court and Immigration and Customs Enforcement deportations. Non-ward probation, informal probation, diversion, and deferred entry of judgment are statutorily defined options that judges can use to give youth the opportunity to avoid deeper involvement in the justice system. For further detail, see Welfare and Institutions Code §652.2, §725(a), §790.

Felony arrest rates have dropped for both juveniles and young adults



Sources: California Dept. of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center, published tables. (accessed Feb. 19, 2014). California Dept. of Finance, Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, July 2000–2010; Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, 1990–1999 (May 2009). U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population. April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2012 (June 2013).

Sources: BSCC, Juvenile Detention Profile Survey Query. CDCR Division of Juvenile Justice Population Overview (Dec. 31, 2007 and Dec. 31, 2013). California Department of Finance: Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, July 2000–2010; Race/Ethnic Population with Age and Sex Detail, 1990–1999 (May 2009). California Department of Justice: Criminal Justice Statistics Center, published tables. (accessed Feb. 19, 2014); 2011 Juvenile Justice in California. Legislative Analyst’s Office: California’s Criminal Justice System: A Primer; The 2012–13 Budget: Completing Juvenile Justice Realignment in California. U.S. Census Bureau, Population Division, Annual Estimates of the Resident Population. April 1, 2010 to July 1, 2012 (June 2013).

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