

Juvenile Legal System Analysis

2019 vs. 2020

January – June 30th

Please note that 2020 data is likely affected by COVID-19 and shelter in place orders.

Summary of Headline Findings

- Both referrals and filings are down 16% compared to the first half of 2019, with mostly boys benefitting from the decrease.
- Young people who are Black experienced a 28% decrease in referrals into the system, equating to 75 fewer Black young people. Referrals of Latinx young people dropped 23%.
- Similarly, filings are down 16% due to fewer filings on young people who are Black or Latinx; this translates to 42 fewer unique Black and Latinx young people being filed on.
- Referrals and filings of misdemeanors drove the decrease; referrals of with Person and Property offenses were down in the first half of 2020, and filings of DV and Property offenses dropped, and offenses against Persons were flat.
- Filing of truancy petitions were greatly affected by COVID-19, dropping 62% in the first half of 2020.
- Referrals by the PAO to diversion programs increased 22% compared to the first six months of 2019¹.
- Black, Indigenous, and other youth of color (BIPOC) made up 83% of youth in alternatives to secure detention, and 78% of the young people in secure detention.
- The number of youth placed in alternative to detention (ASD) fell 60% in the first half of 2020 when compared to 2019, causing the average number of youth in alternatives each day to fall to 26, while length of stay increased by an average of 24 days. In other words, there were fewer young people ordered to ASD, but those youth that were in alternatives, were there much longer than in the previous year.
- Even after factoring in that young people are staying in detention longer, on average, admissions plummeted 42% in the first half of 2020, resulting in the lowest ADP for this time period on record, and affecting BIPOC young people the most. There were 14 fewer young people in detention who were Black, Indigenous, or youth of color from January to June 2020 than there were for the same timeframe in 2019.
- There were decreases in nearly every admission category in secure detention (page 10) with the most notable decreases in bookings on Felony Person, Felony Property, Warrants, and Probation Violations, and admissions of youth on Becca or Dependency Contempt warrants.

¹ It is not possible to tell how much of the increase is due to a change in methodology or to an increase in the number of referrals to court run diversion. A more accurate comparison will be made in 2021 when there are two years using the same methodology for court run diversion referral counts (“Diversion” in the report).

- Although the number of a days a youth was in secure detention increased overall, the average number of young people in detention each day for an admission reason² of Adult Holds, Felony Property, Warrants and Probation Violations did fall dramatically.

² It is important to remember that a youth can be booked for one reason, and can then remain in detention on another. An example of this is Probation Violations. A young person could be booked on the probation violation and be held for x number of days for committing a new offense and then held longer on that new offense. The length of stay would show under the Probation Violation, regardless of the status they were in the rest of the time they are detained.