

Department of Juvenile Justice
Human Research & De-Identified Case Specific Data Requests
Annual Report FY 2025

Administrative Code

On February 9, 2005, 6 VAC 35-170, *Minimum Standards for Research Involving Human Subjects or Records of the Department of Juvenile Justice*, adopted by the Board of Juvenile Justice, became effective. The Administrative Code was most recently amended on April 15, 2021, requires the establishment of a Human Research Review Committee (HRRC), and sets out the conditions required for approval of external research proposals. Select sections of the regulations are included below to provide an overview of the review process:

6VAC35-170-130. Human Research Review Committee

A. In accordance with § 32.1-162.19 of the *Code of Virginia*, the department shall establish an HRRC composed of persons of various backgrounds to ensure the competent, complete, and professional review of human research activities conducted or proposed to be conducted or authorized by the department. No member of the HRRC shall be directly involved in the proposed human research or have administrative approval authority over the proposed research except in connection with his role on the HRRC.

6VAC35-170-150. Committee review of human research proposals.

In reviewing the human research proposal, the HRRC shall consider the potential benefits and risks to the human subjects and shall recommend approval only when:

1. The benefits to the human subjects outweigh the risks;
2. The methodology is adequate for the proposed research;
3. The research, if nontherapeutic, presents no more than a minimal risk to the human subjects;
4. The rights and welfare of the human subjects are adequately protected;
5. Appropriate provisions have been made to get informed consent from the human subjects, as detailed in 6VAC35-170-160;
6. The researchers are appropriately qualified;
7. The criteria and means for selecting human subjects are valid and equitable; and
8. The research complies with the requirements set out in this chapter.

6VAC35-170-50. Conditions for department approval of external research and data requests.

A. The department may approve research projects and data requests only when it determines, in its sole discretion, that the following conditions have been met:

1. The department has sufficient financial and staff resources to support the request, and, on balance, the benefits of the request justify the department's involvement;
2. The request will not interfere significantly with department programs or operations, particularly those of the operating units that would participate in the proposed research; and
3. The request is compatible with the purposes and goals of the juvenile justice system and with the department's organization, operations, and resources.

6 VAC 35-170-190. Committee reports required.

A. In accordance with § 66-10.1 of the *Code of Virginia*, the HRRC shall submit to the Governor, the General Assembly, and the director at least annually a report on human research projects approved by the HRRC and the status of such research, including any significant deviations from the proposals as approved.

B. The HRRC also shall submit annually to the Board of Juvenile Justice the same report as required by subsection A of this section.

Human Research Review Committee

During fiscal year (FY) 2025, the Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) HRRC was comprised of members from various backgrounds. The following members were active as of June 30, 2025:

- Nina Hyland (Chair) – Research Manager, DJJ*
- Robin Binford-Weaver, Ph.D. – Director, Behavioral Services Unit, DJJ*
- Lara Todd – Deputy Director of Education and Rehabilitative Care, DJJ*
- Rebecca Westfall – Resident Rights and Legal Support Manager, DJJ*
- William Stanley – Director, 12th Court Service Unit, DJJ*
- Will Egen – Policy Analyst, Virginia Commission on Youth
- Rebecca Smith, Ph.D. – Program Manager for Undergraduate Research, Institute for Research on Behavioral and Emotional Health at Virginia Commonwealth University
- Erin K. Maloney – Superintendent, Northwestern Regional Juvenile Detention Home

*Members also served on the internal sub-committee that reviewed de-identified case-specific data requests.

DJJ Senior Research Associate, Peter Gregory, Ph.D., served as the Coordinator of External Research.

In addition to reviewing the human subjects research studies as defined in the Administrative Code, an internal sub-committee reviews requests for de-identified case-specific data, including those made through the Virginia Longitudinal Data System (VLDS) where DJJ is the sponsoring agency. The following report includes projects involving either human subjects research or de-identified case-specific data.

During FY 2025, the Deputy Director of Community Programs and the Deputy Director of Education and Rehabilitative Care reviewed only one new human research proposal due to the need to focus on other agency priorities. During the year, DJJ approved one de-identified case-specific data proposal, and, as of June 30, 2025, there was also one human research proposal under review. The following sections summarize the 12 studies that were active during FY 2025, including those approved in prior years and/or closed this year, as well as one proposed/pending study.

(Amendment dates indicate the most recently approved amendment; several projects involve multiple amendments over the course of the project.) The Research Unit also reviewed eight VLDS studies in which DJJ was not the sponsoring agency. These studies are not included in the report.

In accordance with *Code of Virginia* § 32.1-162.19, *Human research review committees*, an executive summary of completed projects can be found in Appendix A. Five projects were completed in FY 2025.

I. Active Studies

Evaluation of a Comprehensive Community-Level Approach to Youth Violence Prevention

Researchers: Derek Chapman and Diane Bishop

Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: November 28, 2017; amended December 30, 2024

Most Recent Progress Report Received: December 5, 2024

The study is part of a larger project aimed at learning more about youth violence in low-income neighborhoods of Richmond, Virginia. The researchers are examining de-identified data for youth between the ages of 10 and 24 associated with intake cases at Richmond City Court Service Unit (CSU) between January 2012 and December 2026. The researchers requested data on intake decisions, youth demographics, offense information, Detention Assessment Instrument (DAI) ranking, select Youth Assessment & Screening Instrument (YASI) items, length of stay (if applicable), and recidivism rates. The researchers are interested in studying low-income neighborhoods in Richmond (e.g., Mosby Court, Gilpin Court, Creighton Court), and requested individual block-level geographical data to do so. In 2024, the researchers submitted a study amendment to extend the length of the study period through 2026. This amendment was approved, and updated data were shared with the researchers in June of 2025.

Exploring Perceptions of Juvenile Court Service Personnel: Do Cognitive-Communicative Skills Impact Outcomes for Juvenile Offenders?

Researcher: Allison Chappell

Institution: Old Dominion University

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: December 9, 2021

Final Report Received: February 28, 2025 (See Appendix A)

The purpose of the study was to examine CSU staff's views on the relationship between youth's communication skills and the legal process, including outcomes and decision-making. Existing research found that nearly half of juvenile offenders have a cognitive-communicative disorder that can impact their ability to communicate effectively and appropriately. The researcher gathered qualitative data at CSUs 2 (Virginia Beach) and 4 (Norfolk) on staff and other stakeholders' views on cognitive-communicative impairments and their impacts. Data analysis is complete. Findings and recommendations were provided to DJJ in a final report in February 2025.

OJJDP Juvenile Justice System Reform Initiative: Virginia

Researcher: Rebecca Cohen

Institution: Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: November 15, 2022

Final Report Received: August 14, 2025 (See Appendix A)

The purpose of this study was to support DJJ in conducting a comprehensive assessment of the “front-end” (e.g., diversion and intake) of Virginia’s juvenile justice system. The assessment aimed to identify system strengths and support DJJ in coming to consensus on opportunities to better align system referral, screening, and diversion policies, practices, and funding with what research shows works to improve community safety, improve youth outcomes, and reduce disparities. Findings from the quantitative and qualitative data analysis were included in a presentation to DJJ on June 28, 2023. The researchers submitted an executive summary of key findings and recommendations in August 2025.

Multi-State Assessment of Juvenile Reoffending

Researcher: Zachary Hamilton

Institution: Nebraska Center for Justice Research, University of Nebraska – Omaha

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: August 31, 2022; amended March 7, 2025

Most Recent Progress Report Received: July 16, 2025

The purpose of this study is to examine YASI risk and needs profiles in relation to gender, race, ethnicity, family structure/type, rural and urban settings, and poverty. The study aims to advance the researcher’s original work in a previously approved project by analyzing additional variables. The original study examined data from 10 states’ risk assessments and identified advancements for state, agency, or youth-specific gender responsiveness and outcomes. In addition to the main goals, the researcher will provide DJJ with a state recidivism comparison, a task which DJJ’s Research Unit is unable to complete due to various barriers that the researcher can overcome with direct access to other states’ data. The researcher requested data from FY 2015-2021, to include risk assessment, demographic, offense history, treatment need, supervision location, case management, and recidivism data. Data cleaning was initiated in 2023, prior to merging with data from other states included in the study. Additional data were requested via a study amendment in FY 2025. This amendment was approved, and updated data were shared with the researchers in June of 2025. Next steps include merging Virginia’s data with data from other states and working with Virginia to ensure the proper interpretation of study findings. The researchers estimate the project will be completed in December 2026.

Identifying Variation in Juvenile Judicial Sentencing

Researcher: Karen Kitchens

Institution: Virginia Tech

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request through VLDS

Approval Date: October 19, 2022

Most Recent Progress Report Received: October 31, 2024

The purpose of this study is to use existing BADGE and VLDS data to identify if variation in sentencing exists, and if so, which sentencing/programs lead to the best outcomes. The study population is juveniles in the state of Virginia who interacted with the court system as identified through the BADGE system during the years 2010 to 2020. To account for changes in the court system as a result of COVID-19, the study does not include juveniles whose first encounter with DJJ occurred after the start of the pandemic. In 2023, the researchers received data, created basic models, and met with the members of the Research Unit to determine the plausibility of adding judge-level information to the VLDS system. In 2024, the researchers met again with several key stakeholders to find a way to access and collect judge-level data; however, those discussions did not yield any solutions despite stakeholders' general support for the project. Next steps involve determining alternative pathways to move the project forward, finalizing models, and utilizing models as a proof of concept for grant funding.

Process Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Regional Service Coordinator Model

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: August 10, 2018; amended August 26, 2022

Final Report Received: September 6, 2024 (See Appendix A)

The purpose of the study was to conduct an in-depth evaluation of DJJ's Regional Service Coordinator (RSC) model by conducting focus groups and semi-structured interviews with CSU staff, RSC staff, and youth as well as analyzing administrative data. The study had three primary objectives: (i) conduct a process evaluation of the RSC model to understand the extent to which it is being implemented as intended; (ii) provide an initial assessment of the extent to which implementation of RSC model is associated with youth outcomes; and (iii) translate and disseminate findings to target audiences, such as DJJ, other systems that are interested in similar models, and stakeholders. The researcher conducted 17 interviews with direct service providers and 14 focus groups with CSU staff. The researcher worked with the Deputy Director of Community Programs to increase recruitment efforts with the CSU staff. The researcher was unsuccessful in recruiting youth to be interviewed. In addition, after some outreach assistance from DJJ, the researcher paused judge interviews due to COVID-related limitations. Findings and recommendations were provided to DJJ in a final report in September 2024.

Rigorous Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's Second Chance Act Reentry Reform

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: October 30, 2019; amended May 24, 2023

Final Report Received: January 8, 2025 (See Appendix A)

The purpose of the study was to conduct an evaluation of DJJ's reentry reform efforts. The researcher aimed to examine (i) the extent to which DJJ is implementing the recommendations developed during the Second Chance Act Juvenile Reentry Reform Planning Grant, (ii) the extent to which the agency's services align with the youth's needs, (iii) what the youth's participation in reentry services look like, and (iv) how the implementation of the reforms have impacted youth outcomes. The evaluation was conducted over a four-year period, including a pilot period. The evaluation included focus groups with various stakeholders, such as DJJ's reentry advocates, parole officers, juvenile correctional center (JCC) counselors, and more. The researcher also created a VLDS data request to examine long-term outcomes for youth involved with the juvenile justice system, which was submitted and approved as a separate project proposal. Findings and recommendations were provided to DJJ in a final report in January 2025.

Rigorous Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's Second Chance Act Reentry Reform (VLDS)

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request through VLDS

Approval Date: October 19, 2022

Most Recent Progress Report Received: August 16, 2024

The researchers conducted an in-depth evaluation of DJJ's Second Chance Act reentry reform efforts to better understand the quality of implementation and effectiveness. The purpose of this project was to add VLDS data to the analysis to investigate educational outcomes through data matched with the Department of Education. Although the process of requesting VLDS data was started, no subsequent action was ever taken to procure VLDS data. The researchers elected not to move forward with the investigation of educational outcomes with VLDS data, resulting in a voluntary closeout of the project by the researchers.

Analysis of DAI in Fairfax County

Researcher: Courtney Porter
Institution: Marymount University
Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request
Approval Date: October 25, 2023; amended March 15, 2024
Most Recent Progress Report Received: October 24, 2024

The purpose of this study is to evaluate the public safety impact of the Detention Assessment Instrument (DAI) in Fairfax County. The public safety impact will be examined by looking at the rates of new offenses and failures to appear in court for the youth released or under various forms of community supervision as detention alternatives. The researcher notes that it is important to reassess whether the instrument continues to be used correctly with minimal bias. The researcher requested data from FY 2013-2022, to include intake, demographic, DAI, and offense data. Since receiving the data, the researcher has focused on cleaning and recoding the data in preparation for analysis. The researcher anticipates providing preliminary reports in fall of 2025 and providing a final report in spring of 2026.

The Trauma to Prison Pipeline: Exploring the Nexus of Childhood Adversity, the K-12 Education System, and the Risk of Incarceration

Researcher: Charol Shakeshaft and Dana Ainsworth
Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University
Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request
Approval Date: September 24, 2024; amended March 7, 2025

This study proposes an expansion of the school-to-prison-pipeline metaphor to include discussion of the intersection of childhood adversity, student behavior in schools, exclusionary discipline, and the heightened risk of incarceration. The research aims to highlight the role of schools in mitigating or mediating the impact of adversity and the socioeconomic variables that increase the risk of trauma exposure. Data shared with the researchers primarily included items from the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) questionnaire and items from the YASI risk assessment pertaining to youths' family, peers, and experiences in school.

National Juvenile Court Data Archive Project

Researchers: Charles Puzzanchera and Sarah Hockenberry
Institution: National Center for Juvenile Justice
Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request
Approval Date: August 15, 2022; amended April 2, 2025
Most Recent Progress Report Received: July 16, 2025

This study is not a traditional research study. Rather, its purpose is to contribute data to an archive that creates national estimates of juvenile court delinquency, status offenses, and case processing. Historically, DJJ has participated in the data archive project; however, due to revised internal processes, the HRRC requested an updated amendment packet for consideration, which it subsequently received and approved. Data for calendar year 2023 were approved for aggregate release in May 2025, and the team hopes to include them in the fall 2025 release of *Juvenile Court*

Statistics 2023. In October 2024, archive staff were awarded a grant to continue data collection through 2027.

Optimizing Supervision and Services Strategies to Reduce Reoffending: Accounting for Risks, Strengths, and Developmental Differences

Researcher: Gina Vincent

Institution: University of Massachusetts Medical School

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: December 30, 2021; amended May 10, 2022

Final Report Received: May 6, 2025 (See Appendix A)

The purpose of the study was to (i) identify which risk and protective factors are most strongly associated with reduction in recidivism to inform supervision practices, (ii) examine which services and supervision practices facilitate positive youth development and reduce reoffending, and (iii) assist with capturing data regarding protective factors, service usage, and reoffending to inform decision-making. The researcher requested archival data from 2015-2017 to serve as a baseline, to include risk assessment, demographic, offense history, case management, service, and recidivism data. The researcher also requested prospective data from five CSUs, which piloted a protective factors survey for comparison purposes and to understand how services impact youth outcomes. After receiving the data, the researchers shared a brief summary of preliminary study findings with DJJ in July of 2024. Final findings and recommendations were provided to DJJ in a final report in May 2025.

II. Proposed / Pending Studies as of June 30, 2025

Improving Reentry Outcomes for Justice-involved Adults with Behavioral Health Disorders

Researcher: Gary Cuddeback

Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: Pending

The purpose of this study is to track outcomes associated with the provision of services to high-risk young adults with behavioral health disorders who are transitioning from Bon Air Juvenile Correctional Center. Services will include supported employment, access to peer recovery specialists, comprehensive case management, and trauma-informed care. All services will be provided by appropriately credentialed professionals at Virginia Commonwealth University. Data for the study will be collected through interviews at recruitment and at 6- and 12-month follow-up periods. The researchers plan to observe the following outcomes over the course of the study period: employment, behavioral health, housing and social support, and recidivism. As of June 30, 2025, this study was under review by the HRRC.

III. Denied Proposals

One research proposal was denied during this fiscal year. Projects withdrawn by the researcher are not included in this report.

Prevalence Estimation of Co-occurring Disorders in Juvenile Justice Facilities

Researcher: Ashlin Oglesby-Neal and Sarah Aukuamp

Institution: Urban Institute

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Denied Date: September 25, 2024

The purpose of this study was to estimate the prevalence of youth with co-occurring mental health and substance use disorders (COD) in select state juvenile justice residential facilities and examine disparities in diagnoses and treatment by race and ethnicity. The study had three main objectives: 1) determine the prevalence of youth with COD in particular juvenile justice residential facilities in five selected states over a multi-year period, as determined by a clinical assessment; 2) examine variation in prevalence rates by race and ethnicity and other demographics, time period, and agency facility type through statistical analyses; and 3) assess the approaches, attitudes, and perceptions of juvenile justice agency staff and behavioral health professionals in identifying and treating youth with mental health and substance use disorders via a process evaluation. The proposal for this project was denied after the HRRC determined that the data being requested were too broad and that the project did not align with the conditions set out in 6VAC35-170-50.

IV. Administratively Closed Proposals and Studies

Administratively closed proposals and studies include proposal packets the Coordinator of External Research or the HRRC reviewed, but the agency did not hear back from the researcher(s) after providing feedback and/or requesting revisions. They also include studies for which no significant progress has been reported and for which DJJ determined it could not continue to provide resources. There were no administratively closed studies during this fiscal year.

Appendix A: Executive Summaries of Completed External Projects

Note: Executive summaries are completed by the researchers, and the content is not revised by DJJ.

Exploring Perceptions of Juvenile Court Service Personnel: Do Cognitive-Communicative Skills Impact Outcomes for Juvenile Offenders?

Researcher: Allison Chappell

Institution: Old Dominion University

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: December 9, 2021

Final Report Received: February 28, 2025

Statement of the Problem and Study Aims

International research suggests that upwards of 50% of youth offenders have a cognitive communication disorder (CCD), but little research exists on CCD in the United States. CCD can have behavioral manifestations that are common amongst system-involved youth, such as impulsivity and impaired decision making, making it difficult for some youth to benefit from programming and treatment. Through interviews with Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) personnel, our study aimed to improve our understanding of the incidence of system-involved youths' problems with communication and language, and how they shape experiences, opportunities, and outcomes for youth in the juvenile justice system (JJS).

Key Findings

- Overall, environment is the primary predictor of success/failure in the JJS as identified by DJJ personnel
 - Family (and presence/absence of other support) are main environmental factors
 - Other factors include peers, neighborhoods, mental health, and trauma
- Communication and language issues are prevalent among system-involved youth
 - Rarely seen as a disorder
 - Attributed to educational deficits, role modeling, fear
- Communication and language can affect outcomes and decision making in the JJS
 - It may dictate case planning and programming
 - Cognitive communication skills can be interpreted as disrespect or noncompliance and lead to harsher punishments, such as detention
- JJS personnel rely on their training, education, and experiential knowledge to address communication difficulties when they encounter them
 - Trust and rapport are keyways in which personnel “meet [the youth] where they are” to address communication problems
 - Most staff consider it their responsibility to ensure that youth and families understand JJS processes and other information relevant to their case.

Recommendations

- Increase awareness
 - Studies show that simply increasing awareness of CCD can alter the way that staff perceive and respond to youth behavior
- Staff Training
 - Staff training is a low investment/high yield strategy shown to have positive outcomes for both youth and staff
- Screening and Assessment

- Youth should be screened for CCD
 - Current risk assessment instruments may need to be reviewed
- Communication Intermediaries
 - Speech language pathologists (SLP) who work with offenders, victims, and witnesses to ensure understanding of processes and facilitate communication

OJJDP Juvenile Justice System Reform Initiative: Virginia

Researcher: Rebecca Cohen

Institution: Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: November 15, 2022

Final Report Received: January 23, 2025

Background and Project Overview

The Council of State Governments Justice Center conducted a comprehensive assessment of Virginia's juvenile justice intake and diversion practices as part of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) System Reform Improvement Initiative. This analysis examined complaint handling, diversion decisions, and petition practices across Virginia's Court Service Units (CSUs) from fiscal years 2016-2021.

The study combined multiple methodologies including:

- Review of statutes and administrative policies
- Statewide listening sessions with CSU supervisors and intake staff
- Analysis of case-level data covering over 200,000 juvenile intake complaints
- Descriptive analyses of complaint trends and predictive modeling to estimate petition likelihood for first-time system-involved youth

The primary goal was to identify opportunities for statewide intake and diversion improvements that would enhance public safety, improve youth outcomes, reduce disparities, and increase system efficiencies.

Key Findings

Key Finding #1: Complaints have declined substantially since 2020, including felony/person cases, though the proportion of felony complaints that are against a person has increased as overall felonies declined.

Key Finding #2: Status offenses are the single largest category of complaints (17-23% annually), contributing to a broad perception that DJJ is the "dumping ground" for youth in need of services statewide.

Key Finding #3: Status complaints are petitioned at a high rate and CSUs differ significantly on the frequency and nature of how these complaints are handled.

Key Finding #4: Diversion decisions are generally guided by the nature of youth's offense.

Key Finding #5: Petition rates vary widely across CSUs, driven by both internal and external factors. CSUs differ in their policies and practices, including procedures for establishing probable cause, diversion agreement requirements, discretionary decision-making authority, and the extent to

which judges and prosecutors dictate diversion policies. The probability of receiving a petition for first-time complaints varies dramatically between CSUs.

Key Finding #6: DJJ petition practices don't substantially exacerbate racial and ethnic disparities, but males have a higher probability of receiving a petition than females. Black youth are twice as likely to be referred to DJJ compared to White youth. Black males have a significantly higher probability of receiving a petition on first-time complaint compared to similar female and non-Black peers.

Key Finding #7: Diversion practices and services vary statewide, and Virginia lacks a clear vision and criteria for maximizing the use of VJCCCA funding.

Key Finding #8: Youth are generally successful on diversion (nearly 90% completion rates for most offense types), but youth diverted on status complaints and youth of color have a lower probability of success compared to their peers.

Key Finding #9: The probability of a subsequent complaint within one year for diverted youth is low overall, but higher for youth diverted on status complaints.

Recommendations

System Reform Initiatives

1. **Restructure status offense handling:** Rethink structure of status offense cases, whether these cases (as well as youth 12 and under) should be referred to DJJ, and if so what types (CHINS services?), and develop/pilot alternative service/responder systems, more robust and well-funded service/support initiatives, as well as structures (such as 988 and assessment centers) for families to learn about/receive services without system involvement.
2. **Establish formal referral criteria:** Create statewide statutory requirements for status offense complaints, including mandatory interventions schools must complete before making complaints.
3. **Reform CSU structure:** Rethink current structure of CSU diversion/intake units including probable cause responsibilities, domestic case responsibilities, and personnel authority of judiciary over CSU leadership.
4. **Clarify governmental roles:** Define clear lines of authority across branches of government for intake/diversion decisions, ensuring DJJ has final discretion over diversion.
5. **Restructure VJCCCA funding:** Dedicate funding specifically for diversion programs overseen by DJJ, emphasizing evidence-based practices and restorative justice.

DJJ Policy and Practice Improvements

1. **Standardize diversion policies:** Establish detailed statewide policies for diversion eligibility, decision-making processes, supervision expectations, and success criteria while maintaining CSU discretion.
2. **Implement evidence-based screening:** Utilize validated risk assessment tools (YASI pre-screening) and trauma/mental health screening to guide diversion decisions and service referrals.
3. **Enhance staff training:** Develop comprehensive initial and ongoing training programs covering policies, Risk-Need-Responsivity principles, family engagement, restorative justice, and cultural competence.
4. **Formalize stakeholder engagement:** Establish regular meetings with schools, service providers, and other systems for information sharing, joint decision-making, and system improvement initiatives.
5. **Strengthen intake working group:** Formalize DJJ's intake working group to lead statewide diversion improvements, pilot programs, restorative justice expansion, and VJCCCA funding oversight.

Process Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice Regional Service Coordinator Model

Researcher: Kelly Murphy

Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: August 10, 2018; amended August 26, 2022

Final Report Received: September 6, 2024

Project Summary

In 2017, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) initiated the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model as part of its broader Transformation Plan. The primary goal of this initiative was to establish a statewide continuum of community-based services and alternatives to incarceration for youth involved in Virginia's juvenile justice system. The RSC model aimed to reduce reliance on restrictive interventions, increase service availability, and address disparities in service access between rural and non-rural areas.

To support this transformative effort, DJJ partnered with Child Trends to conduct a comprehensive six-year process evaluation. The study aimed to evaluate the effectiveness of DJJ in implementing the RSC model and to assess how it affects service delivery and outcomes for youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Child Trends' evaluation of the RSC model focused on assessing four key aspects of the model's implementation: Adherence to the model; Quality of implementation; Service access and youth participation; and Youth outcomes.

The study had four core research questions:

1. To what extent is the RSC model being implemented as intended? If changes have been made, why were they made?
2. To what extent are the services provided to youth aligned with their needs?
3. What does youth participation in the services received through the RSC model look like?

How, if at all, are youth outcomes associated with implementation of RSC Model?

Methodology and Data

Child Trends adopted a utilization-focused evaluation approach to conduct the evaluation—an approach designed to support evidence-informed decision-making by fostering a close partnership between the evaluator (Child Trends) and the intended users of the evaluation results (DJJ). To ensure that the evaluation served DJJ's specific needs, Child Trends actively involved DJJ in all phases of the evaluation process.

Child Trends employed a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data to provide a comprehensive analysis of the RSC model. Qualitative data were gathered through interviews and focus groups with key partners, including Court Service Unit (CSU) staff, Regional Service Coordinators (RSCs), judges, and direct service providers. Unfortunately, Child Trends was unable to recruit youth to participate in this study, which was a significant limitation. Quantitative data included administrative datasets regarding youth background characteristics, Youth

Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) data, and youth participation in RSC model-funded programs and services.

Study Findings

Overall, Child Trends found that the implementation of the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model has been a pivotal shift in Virginia's juvenile justice landscape. This change required the coordinated adoption of a complex, statewide systems-change intervention across a diverse array of organizations and partners, including state-level authorities such as the State Assembly, the governor, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), local Juvenile & Domestic Relations courts, Court Service Units (CSUs), the Central Admission and Placement (CAP) Unit, Regional Service Coordinators (RSCs), and various contracted direct service providers. Given the complexity and range of entities involved, some variation in the adoption and implementation of the model was anticipated.

Key findings from the study are summarized below. For a comprehensive account of the findings, see the study's final report (Murphy et al., 2023).

Implementation Success: The RSC model, which integrates multiple partners across autonomous agencies, has largely operated as intended. This success persisted even during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Efficiency and Improved Service Access: CSU staff praised the model's efficiency in connecting youth with services, reducing administrative burdens, and increasing the range of services available to youth and families. The pandemic-induced shift to telehealth has also enhanced service accessibility—a practice that both DJJ and RSCs plan to sustain moving forward.

Collaboration and Funding: The model fostered improved collaboration and trust among stakeholders, particularly RSCs and CSU staff. Guaranteed funding streamlined service initiation and referrals, addressing previous uncertainties and administrative delays.

Responsive Improvement and Challenges: The RSC model demonstrated adaptability to feedback, especially in streamlining referral processes. However, several implementation challenges arose, including initial knowledge gaps among judges and service providers regarding the model's purpose and implementation; concerns about the continuation of services post-supervision; and ongoing skepticism and limited buy-in from judges.

YASI Implementation: The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI) is central to the RSC model, helping standardize goal setting and case planning and creating a “common language” among different stakeholder groups. However, concerns were raised about its comprehensiveness. Further discussions with DJJ revealed the availability additional tools and resources, indicating a need for better awareness, support, and training among staff.

Service Expansion and Efficacy: The model significantly expanded the number and range of services available to youth and families, particularly evidence-based programs such as Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT). High approval and initiation rates for service referrals were also observed. However, challenges with service availability persisted, particularly for youth and families in rural areas, non-English speakers, and youth transitioning from direct care placements.

Recidivism Rates and Service Impact: Recidivism remains a challenge, with rearrest rates of youth who have received one or more services funded through the RSC model reaching 37.5%

within 12 months and 52.2% by 24 months. However, completing at least one RSC-funded service significantly reduced the likelihood of rearrest and reconviction, underscoring the importance of service engagement. Specifically, youth who completed a service had 29% lower odds of being rearrested (OR = 0.71, $p < .01$) and 33% lower odds of reconviction (OR = 0.67, $p < .001$) within 12 months of service initiation.

Recommendations

The shift to the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model marks a significant advancement in Virginia's approach to juvenile justice, focusing on community-centered practices that prioritize rehabilitation and support over punitive measures. The insights from this study offer a valuable framework for other states seeking to transform their juvenile justice systems. Continued commitment to implementing the recommendations from this study will be essential for ensuring sustainable impact and ongoing improvements in the system.

Based on the evaluation findings and identified limitations, we propose the following recommendations to enhance the implementation and impact of the RSC model:

- **Strengthen Supervisory Support:** Engaging supervisors more actively in the implementation process can provide Court Service Unit (CSU) staff with focused guidance, helping ensure adherence to policies, procedures, and greater awareness of resources, such as assessments and tools that complement the YASI.
- **Enhance Communication:** Initial communication challenges between Regional Service Coordinators (RSCs) and CSU staff were overcome through additional outreach, community-building, and sharing evidence of program effectiveness. In addition to these efforts, RSCs also built trust by adapting procedures based on CSU staff feedback. These initiatives should be continued and extended to judges, many of whom expressed skepticism or misunderstandings about the RSC model. Although some resistance may persist, much of it can be mitigated with an inclusive, participatory approach that respects professional judgment while clearly conveying the rationale behind the change, supported by research evidence.
- **Incorporate Youth and Family Perspectives:** A key gap in the evaluation was the absence of direct input from youth and families affected by the RSC model. DJJ should prioritize including these perspectives in future assessments and program improvements. Youth and family feedback is critical for understanding participation barriers and ensuring services are aligned with their needs.
- **Continuous Monitoring and Evaluation:** By 2022, a rigorous quality assurance process was established to monitor and enhance the quality of direct service providers funded through the RSC model. Ongoing internal performance monitoring as well as external research partnerships are vital for identifying areas of improvement and strengthening the model.
- **Address Disparities in Service Access:** The evaluation revealed disparities in service access, particularly for youth released from direct care, those in rural areas, and non-English speakers. DJJ should develop targeted strategies to ensure equitable access to services, focusing on overcoming barriers specific to these communities. This may involve expanding

resources in underserved areas and enhancing cultural responsiveness in service delivery. Thoughtfully engaging youth and families in identifying and addressing these barriers is crucial to overcoming this challenge.

Conclusion

Through innovative financing, data-driven strategies, and collaboration, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model offers key lessons for states transitioning to community-centered treatment models. Virginia's approach, focused on reducing incarceration and increasing local investment to address service disparities, engaged a wide range of stakeholders, including policymakers, probation offices, the judiciary, service coordinators, and community providers.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, our evaluation of the RSC model yielded positive results and practical recommendations for juvenile justice reform. The model has demonstrated its potential to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of community-based treatment services, with a significant link between completed services and reduced recidivism. For sustained impact, it is essential to continue internal performance monitoring—disaggregating data by youth demographics to ensure equity—and foster external research partnerships. These steps will help the RSC model evolve into a more equitable, efficient, and impactful system. Virginia's shift to the RSC model represents a major advancement in youth justice reform, emphasizing the importance of community engagement and trust-building among stakeholders. This model holds the potential to inspire similar transformations in other states, benefiting both youth and their communities.

Disclaimers

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Further, the findings of this study are the responsibility of the researchers, and cooperation by the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice in facilitating this research should not be construed as an endorsement of the conclusions drawn by the researchers.

Finally, portions of this report received copy editing support from OpenAI's Chat GPT, a machine learning model. While Chat GPT assisted in refining the text for clarity and readability, the content, analysis, and conclusions presented in this report are solely those of the authors and do not reflect the views or opinions of OpenAI.

Rigorous Evaluation of the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice’s Second Chance Act Reentry Reform

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Institution: Child Trends

Study Type: Human Research

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To achieve better outcomes for the youth, families, and communities it serves, the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) has spent the past decade since 2015 transforming its juvenile justice system. In response to persistently high recidivism rates among youth returning home from correctional placements, DJJ implemented significant changes to reentry policies, programs, and practices to better prepare young people for successful reintegration to their communities.

In 2014, DJJ was chosen as one of six state agencies to receive a federal Second Chance Act grant to develop a Comprehensive Statewide Juvenile Reentry System Reform Planning Program. DJJ used this planning grant—in conjunction with additional support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and Evidence Based Associates—to comprehensively assess its reentry policies, practices, and procedures, ultimately developing a strategic plan for reform. DJJ's Second Chance Act planning grant culminated in a report outlining recommendations to improve outcomes for youth who experience incarceration or “direct care” placement in Virginia (Edwards & Yeager, 2015). The recommendations are organized around four “Core Principles” designed to enhance outcomes in juvenile reentry, with each principle offering specific, actionable strategies aligned with DJJ’s reform goals. The next year, DJJ received an implementation grant through the federal Second Chance Act to operationalize this strategic plan.

Four Core Principles Guiding Virginia’s Second Chance Act Reforms

Principle 1: Base supervision, service, and resource-allocation decisions on the results of validated risk and needs assessments.

Principle 2: Adopt and effectively implement programs and services demonstrated to reduce recidivism and improve other youth outcomes, and use data to evaluate system performance and direct system improvements.

Principle 3: Employ a coordinated approach across service systems to address youth’s needs.

Principle 4: Tailor system policies, programs, and supervision to reflect the distinct developmental needs of adolescent.

Source: Edwards, D., & Yeager, C. (2015). Improving reentry outcomes for youth in Virginia’s juvenile justice system: Assessment findings and recommendations.

This executive summary provides an overview of a multi-year evaluation, conducted by Child Trends, of DJJ’s Second Chance Act reforms. This evaluation used state administrative data and qualitative insights from key stakeholders—including parole officers, residential facility staff,

reentry advocates, and representatives from state agencies that DJJ partners with—to answer four questions:

- To what extent is DJJ implementing the recommendations developed during the Second Chance Act Juvenile Reentry Systems Reform Planning Grant?
- What does youth participation in reentry services look like?
- To what extent are services—including those provided in detention and when youth return to their communities—aligned with the needs of youth?
- How are youth outcomes impacted by implementation of reforms made under the Second Chance Act grant?

Four Critical Elements of Virginia’s Juvenile Justice Reform Efforts

The findings of this evaluation hold significant promise for enhancing reentry practices within the juvenile justice system and informing broader policy frameworks. Best practices in reentry have long emphasized the need for programs that begin prior to release and [ensure a sustained continuum of care](#). By highlighting the roles of community-based alternatives, continuous service provision, and data-driven decision making, Virginia’s DJJ lays the foundation for transformative changes in juvenile justice policies and practices. These efforts, particularly those to expand alternatives to incarceration and reduce barriers to service access, provide a model that can be adapted by other jurisdictions striving to enhance youth outcomes. Ultimately, these foster a more supportive and rehabilitative environment for youth in transition, enabling them to reintegrate successfully into their communities without increasing the likelihood of recidivism.

Below, we provide additional detail regarding the most critical elements of Virginia’s practice, and recent reforms.

Risk assessment and screening

The Youth Assessment and Screening Instrument (YASI; see box at right) is a well-established and [validated risk and needs assessment tool](#). It evaluates two key aspects of risk: the likelihood of youth reoffending and the presence of risk and protective factors across 10 domains. These domains are legal history, community and peers, family, school, alcohol and drugs, mental health, violence and aggression, attitudes, adaptive skills, and use of free time and employment. DJJ has used this tool to inform case planning since 2008. Over the years, DJJ has engaged in three validation studies, all of which have demonstrated that the YASI, as administered by DJJ, meets the field standards for [accurately predicting youth reoffending](#). While the YASI itself is not a recent reform, it does serve as the foundation for much of Virginia’s reform efforts: It delivers on the first core principle identified during DJJ’s Second Chance Act planning grant. (i.e., “Base supervision, service, and resource-allocation decisions on the results of validated risk and needs assessments.”)

Changes to the length of stay policy

Youth committed to DJJ fall into two categories: indeterminate commitments, where the judge grants DJJ discretion to determine a youth’s release date within a specified time window (an earliest and latest release date are provided); and determinate commitments, which are for youth who have committed more severe offenses and for whom [the court maintains discretion over their release and](#)

[specifies a specific length of stay](#). In 2015, the Board of Juvenile Justice updated its guidelines for [assigning lengths of stay to youth with indeterminant commitments](#)—that is, commitments where a judge grants DJJ discretion to determine a youth’s release date within a specified time window. Previously, the most commonly assigned length of stay for indeterminate admissions was 12 to 18 months; following the 2015 revisions, however, 6 to 9 months became the most common assignment.

Continuum of direct care placements

Like [many jurisdictions](#) across the country, the overall population of youth committed to direct care in Virginia has [significantly decreased over time](#). In response to the declining direct care population, DJJ [closed four of its five state-run juvenile correctional centers](#) from 2014 to 2017. Therefore, the Virginia General Assembly and governor granted DJJ the authority to [reinvest savings from the closures](#) in support of DJJ’s transformation goals.^{iv} Funding for maintaining two of the four closed juvenile correctional centers (JCCs) was primarily reallocated to support the implementation of DJJ’s Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model, while the funding from the closure of the other two JCCs was reallocated toward staff training and programming and treatment services for youth in direct care placements. The reallocation of these resources helped expand the continuum of placement options in Virginia’s DJJ system.

Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model

Finally, a cornerstone of [DJJ’s Transformation Plan](#) was the establishment of the Regional Service Coordination (RSC) model, launched in 2016. The [RSC model](#) was designed to leverage funding from the closure of JCCs to create and maintain a comprehensive, statewide continuum of community-based services and alternatives to incarceration. As part of this effort, DJJ partnered with two service coordination agencies, AMIkids and Evidence Based Associates, to do the following:

- Identify service needs and gaps across DJJ’s five administrative regions.
- Select and contract with direct service providers to meet those needs.
- Review and approve youth service plans.
- Provide technical assistance and supports to direct service providers and Court Service Unit (CSU) staff (e.g., probation and parole officers).
- Monitor service quality and utilize data for continuous improvement.

Key Findings

This section reviews key findings from the evaluation of each of the study’s four research questions.

To what extent is DJJ implementing the recommendations developed during the Second Chance Act Juvenile Reentry Systems Reform Planning Grant?

DJJ’s YASI tool plays a central role in DJJ’s decision-making process, guiding interventions from adjudication through post-release supervision. Administration is supported by a wide array of staff, including probation/parole officers and residential facility staff.

The YASI has increasingly informed disposition decisions, with higher-risk youth targeted for direct care. Prior to the reentry reforms, 75 percent of youth placed in direct care were identified as high-risk for recidivism based on their YASI risk score at admission. Following the reforms, this percentage rose to 81 percent, accompanied by a significant decrease in placements of youth classified as low or moderate risk.

The reforms significantly expanded placement options, with more youth placed in alternatives to juvenile correctional centers JCCs. Placements in JCCs decreased from 92 percent to 35 percent during the fiscal years included in the study. This shift has allowed more youth to remain closer to their home environments. The introduction of the RSC model in 2016 further broadened placement options, adding other alternatives—such as residential treatment facilities, group homes, and independent and transitional living programs—to serve older youth. These changes have enhanced access to community-based services and increased opportunities for family engagement.

The percentage of determinant commitments nearly doubled, increasing from 12 percent to 21 percent following the implementation of reentry reforms. To further explore this trend, we analyzed changes in the types of offenses youth committed before and after the reentry reforms. This analysis revealed no significant changes in the nature of offenses during the fiscal years included in the study. However, the length of stay in indeterminant commitments were statistically reduced from pre-reentry reform to the reentry implementation period. There was only a slight increase (<2%) in indeterminant commitments for felony offenses, such as offenses against persons, weapons-related crimes, and narcotics distribution.

Youth at all risk levels spent less time in direct care following implementation of the reentry reforms, with youth identified as low risk on the YASI experiencing the greatest reductions in their length of stay. Overall, the length of stay in direct care placements significantly decreased following implementation of the revised guidelines, which also aligned with the timeline for reentry reforms ($p < .001$). During fiscal years (FYs) 2012–2015, the average length of stay for youth in direct care was 16 months, which decreased to 12 months from FYs 2017–2020.

What does youth participation in reentry services look like?

Almost half of the direct care releases received at least a service referral, and most referrals resulted in service initiation. From FYS 2018-2020, 425 out of 927 direct care releases (46%) received at least one RSC service referral during their reentry service period. While only half of direct care releases received at least a service referral, most referrals resulted in service initiation. Once a referral is approved, the regional service coordinator supports a parole officer in identifying an appropriate local service provider within the RSC model network. Among approved referrals, 78 percent resulted in services being initiated.

Of the approved referrals resulting in services, 20 percent of services began within two weeks of referral while an additional 31 percent began between two weeks and a month after referral. The median duration to service initiation was 29 days, indicating that most youth began receiving services within a month of their release from direct care.

Of the 566 services that began, 67 percent (n=377) were recorded as completed. The highest completion rates were observed for services targeting the mental health (76%) and alcohol and drugs (75%) domains. Services that targeted the family domain had a 68 percent completion rate, followed closely by 62 percent completed services in the community and peers domain and 58 percent in the employment and free time domain. However, services in the remaining four domains—skills, school, attitudes, and aggression—had minimal initiation or completion rates, indicating significant gaps in these areas.

To what extent are services—including those provided in detention and when youth return to their communities—aligned with the needs of youth?

At direct care admission, aggression and skills were the most commonly identified youth needs, while employment/leisure, school, and mental health were rarely identified. The two most common needs identified at direct care admission were aggression (74%) and skills (66%), followed by attitudes (53%), alcohol and drugs (50%), and community and peers (46%). Less than 15 percent of youth were identified as needing services to address family concerns (13%), employment/free time (8%), school (7%), and mental health (1%). While each youth can have up to three distinct priority areas, these needs are not mutually exclusive.

There is significant variability across the percentage of direct care releases matched to services based on youth's priority needs, with some of the highest priority needs experiencing the least match.¹ Youth with a priority need in the mental health domain had a 100 percent match, but this finding was based on a sample size of just two releases. The employment and free time and family domains had match rates of 54 percent and 42 percent, respectively, with sample sizes less than 50. Larger groups, such as community and peers (n=164) and alcohol and drugs (n=172), had lower match rates of 34 percent and 27 percent, respectively. Aggression and skills, the two most commonly identified youth needs, had match rates of 0.4 percent and 0.0 percent, respectively.

How are youth outcomes impacted by implementation of reforms made under the Second Chance Act grant?

Reentry reforms had a small but positive trend toward reducing reconviction and recommitment rates (although not rearrest rates), but these treatment effects were not statistically significant. This finding indicates that the reforms neither increased nor decreased the likelihood of recidivism among youth released during the implementation period. Notably, given that the reentry reforms coincided with reduced lengths of stay due to changes in guidance, these results also suggest that shorter lengths of stay did not lead to increased recidivism. This finding highlights the potential for reentry reforms to achieve at least comparable outcomes while reducing the time youth spend in direct care.

¹ This finding should be interpreted with caution. The service alignment matrix we used to code youth services relies on a conservative approach to service mapping—coding each service for a single priority need domain—to avoid the risk of inappropriate referrals. This is important to note because, although a service could potentially impact multiple domains—a workforce development program, for example, that addresses employment and skill development—each service is only aligned to a single priority need domain.

Policy and Practice Implications

Below, we outline the study's implications for the Virginia DJJ and for members of the broader research, practice, and policy communities who are interested in pursuing similar transformative efforts.

Implications for Virginia

DJJ successfully reduced the average length of stay in direct care, despite the number of determinant commitments having increased. This reduction suggests that reentry reforms are fostering quicker reintegration into the community, which is vital for youth who may face challenges in adjusting to post-release life. By maintaining a focus on timely transitions and effective discharge planning, DJJ can further improve outcomes for youth and help them navigate the complexities of reentry with greater support.

The increase in higher-risk youth entering direct care reflects DJJ's strategic focus on identifying and serving youth who require intensive interventions. This targeted approach aligns with reentry reforms aimed at reducing recidivism, ensuring that resources are allocated effectively to support the most vulnerable populations. By continually refining risk assessment tools, DJJ can enhance its capacity to prioritize interventions based on individual needs.

Early identification of youth needs—such as housing, employment, and mental health support—should be integrated into reentry case planning to ensure timely referrals that are better aligned with youth needs. With services mismatched to the priority needs identified by the YASI, DJJ may want to explore improved methods for service mapping, ensuring that youth receive interventions targeting their highest-risk areas. The two most common priority needs identified—aggression and skills—should guide DJJ's future reentry programming. Efforts to expand services that target these areas may lead to more effective reentry outcomes. By establishing collaborative efforts among parole officers, direct care staff, and reentry advocates, DJJ can create individualized, transparent, and accountable reentry plans that facilitate smoother transitions into the community and mitigate potential service gaps. By leveraging data from the YASI to match services to identified needs, DJJ can enhance the effectiveness of reentry services and support youth in their reintegration efforts.

Implications for broader research, policy, and practice

The findings underscore the need for juvenile justice systems to adopt evidence-based practices in reentry services and a service coordination model to efficiently connect youth to services. By demonstrating the positive impact of structured interventions and comprehensive service delivery on youth outcomes, this evaluation may encourage policymakers and practitioners to prioritize data-driven approaches in program development and implementation.

The success of DJJ's transition to community-based services for high-risk youth highlights the potential for broader policy reforms. This shift illustrates the benefits of reducing reliance on

incarceration in favor of alternatives that foster family engagement and reintegration, and could encourage other jurisdictions to adopt similar approaches. By showcasing successful models of community-based interventions, this research can serve as a blueprint for other states, promoting a cultural shift within juvenile justice systems.

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Optimizing Supervision and Services Strategies to Reduce Reoffending: Accounting for Risks, Strengths, and Developmental Differences

Researcher: Gina Vincent

Institution: University of Massachusetts Medical School

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Youth Protective Factors Study is an unprecedented multistate, multiyear examination of the risk- need-responsivity (RNR) and positive youth justice (PYJ) approaches, that also examined whether the effectiveness of these approaches differed by youths' age among 10 to 13 year-olds. This was a collaboration between the research labs at UMass Chan Medical and UC-Berkeley, the Council of State Governments Justice Center, and juvenile justice (JJ) agencies in three states. Overall, across three states, the project examined violent recidivism after youths' JJ involvement via two studies: 1) a retrospective study ($N = > 30,000$) to lengthen follow-up periods, and 2) a prospective study of youth referred to the JJ systems ($N = 3,380$) to obtain novel measures of protective factors and service participation. The prospective study involved unparalleled tracking of all services (risk-reduction and strengths-based services), results of risk /needs assessments and protective factors. The primary outcome measure was long-term (up to two years) violent recidivism (new petitions) after youths' first completion of juvenile justice involvement (post-supervision violent recidivism). This report provides only the findings for the Virginia Department of Juvenile Justice (VA DJJ).

A slight majority of youth referred to the system were low risk--48.2% of the retrospective sample of 12,904 youth, and 43.9% of the prospective sample of 817 youth, according to the Youth Assessment Screening Instrument (YASI) pre-screen. In the retrospective sample, post-supervision recidivism rates for any recidivism were 37% and 16.3% for violent recidivism specifically, with the highest rates for the high-risk youth. However, 25% of low-risk youth recidivated and 10% of them engaged in violent recidivism. Recidivism rates were lower in the prospective sample with 25% having any post-supervision recidivism and 14.8% having violent recidivism specifically. The YASI risk level accurately predicted recidivism in both studies with low risk youth having the smallest recidivism rates. The YASI risk domains most strongly predictive of violent recidivism post-supervision that were replicable across both studies were family-related problems, aggression, community and negative peers, and school-related behavioral problems. Other risk domains (e.g., attitudes supporting crime) only predicted post-supervision violent recidivism in the retrospective sample, which had a longer follow-up period. Substance misuse was the weakest predictor of violent recidivism in both samples and was the only risk domain that showed developmental differences in its relevance to recidivism. It was most predictive for younger youth.

Protective factors were measured in only the prospective study. The most common protective factors among youth referred to the VA DJJ were Prosocial Identity (> 79%) and Self-Efficacy (> 60%), with Prosocial Engagements being the least common (13.6%). Two protective factors were consistently protective (across all states) against post-supervision violent recidivism despite youths' risk levels: self-control and self-efficacy. This was especially true for younger youth. Other

protective factors appeared to be protective only for younger youth—having a supportive caregiver and school connectedness.

Among the 817 youth in the prospective sample, 424 received at least one rehabilitative service. VA DJJ had a higher proportion of youth receiving risk-reduction services than any other state in the study (68.9%), most commonly EPICS or Anger Management, and had the highest proportion of youth receiving services that would be considered evidence-based (18.9%). Low risk youth, appropriately, rarely received these services but there was no difference in the dosage of risk-reduction services between moderate and high risk youth. A sizeable percentage of youth (40%) received at least one strengths-based service, most commonly prosocial skills training, life skills, or mentoring. Similar to the other states, the most common service received by all youth was generic mental health counseling, even though the lack of effect for these services on recidivism is well-known. In robust, well-controlled analyses, participation in any strengths-based services significantly increased the likelihood of both any and violent recidivism post-supervision, while risk-reduction services had no effect. However, the most common services youth received were mental health and very few services were evidence-based. More research is needed to develop guidance for effective implementation of PYJ.

The report provides several recommendations. A few of the key recommendations are:

1. For the study counties, youth referred to CSUs were 71% first-time offenders and 44% were assessed as low risk. For all youth referred, 24% appear to have received no or minor sanction and another 44% received an informal disposition. For low-risk youth, particularly, 86% received no or minor sanction or an informal disposition. Additionally, as described below, 43.5% of all referred youth did not receive or engage in services during the study period. Taken together, these findings—along with research on the harms caused by formal system processing—support the need for Virginia to explore alternative pathways for youth to obtain needed services/supports outside of an arrest and DJJ involvement.
2. Half of all youth referred to the participating CSUs spent time in placement, most commonly detention. Given the lower risk nature of the referred population, this use of placement should be reevaluated.
3. Case plans should target the risk domains that mattered most—Family, Aggression, Community and peers, and School—which were not necessarily the most common risk factors among the population of youth referred to DJJ. Similarly, we recommend DJJ consider services that will bolster the protective factors that matter most—self-control and self-efficacy.
4. DJJ should review the evidence-base of the services for which it contracts; explore if and how Medicaid could be used to fund and expand evidence-based service capacity across the state; identify what if any steps are needed to train providers in EBPs and related techniques; and consider adopting a more formal service quality assessment instrument such as the SPEP to measure and promote service matching, dosage, and quality.

5. The most common service that youth received—mental health counseling—does not target the risk factors that best predict long-term, serious reoffending for VA youth (family, aggression and violence, community and peers, and school). In addition, while it's important to address mental health as a responsivity factor when indicated, mental health counseling on its own generally has no impact on recidivism. DJJ should review CSU's use of these services, particularly since a mental health screening is not conducted at intake across most CSUs to help identify the need for further evaluation and potential mental health services.

6. The aggregate data available raises questions on whether youth are consistently matched to services based on their individualized risk factors. It appears that some types of risk reduction services are used more frequently than expected given the prevalence of related risk factors in the population served by DJJ, particularly alcohol/drug services when this risk factor seems to influence only younger youth's reoffending. DJJ should explore opportunities to strengthen its case planning and service matching policies and to develop service matrices for each CSU to clearly identify what services are available and the risk/responsivity/protective factors these services address