

Department of Juvenile Justice
Human Research & De-Identified Case Specific Data Requests
Annual Report FY 2026

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. This Administrative Code requires the establishment of a Human Research Review Committee (HRRC) and sets out the conditions required for approval of external research proposals. The Administrative Code was most recently revised on April 15, 2021. 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) 2026, the Department of Juvenile Justice's (DJJ) HRRC was comprised of members from various backgrounds. The following members were active as of June 30, 2026:

- Nina Hyland (Chair) – Research Manager, DJJ*
- Robin Binford-Weaver, Ph.D. – Clinical Treatment Program Director, 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 2026, the Deputy Director of Education and Rehabilitative Care maintained a hold on the review of new human research proposals due to the need to focus on other agency priorities. During the year, DJJ approved two human research proposals and one de-identified case-specific data proposal. The following sections summarize the nine studies that were active during FY 2026, including those approved in prior years, as well as three proposed/pending studies, two denied proposals, and one administratively closed proposal. (Amendment dates indicate the most recently approved amendment; several projects involve multiple amendments over the course of the project.) The Research Unit also reviewed two VLDS studies in which DJJ was not the sponsoring agency; these studies are not included in the report.

In accordance with § 32.1-162.19, *Human research review committees*, this report includes executive summaries of projects completed during the previous year. No projects were completed in FY 2026, and two projects were closed by the researchers prior to completion.

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 19, 2025

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 the researchers plan to complete the study in 2027 after collecting complete data for 2026.

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

Researcher: Gary Cuddeback

Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: August 28, 2025

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 include supported employment, access to peer recovery specialists, comprehensive case management, and trauma-informed care. All services are provided by appropriately credentialed professionals at Virginia Commonwealth University. Additional data for the study is being 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.

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 29, 2026

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 from DJJ have since been merged with data from other states. The project is scheduled to be completed in December of 2026; however, a no cost extension has been submitted to the grant provider, the National Institute of Justice, to request time to complete additional work products in 2027. These products include an integrative database and dashboard, reports, online training materials, and presentations to the states whose data were used in the study.

An Exploration of Dual System Youth Capacity and Service Delivery across Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Systems

Researcher: Denise Herz and Carly Dierkhising

Institution: California State University, Los Angeles

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: June 22, 2026

The purpose of this study is to better understand the extent to which jurisdictions across the country engage in practices aimed to assist youth involved with both child welfare and juvenile justice systems, as well as to assess the data infrastructure of systems across the nation. The study is funded through a National Institute of Justice grant. DJJ involvement in the study consists of seven randomly sampled CSU directors completing a survey provided by the researchers.

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

Closed Date: October 20, 2025

The purpose of this study was to use VLDS data and data from DJJ's data management system to identify if variation in sentencing exists, and if so, which sentencing/programs lead to the best outcomes. The study population was juveniles in the state of Virginia who interacted with the court system as identified through DJJ's data management system during the years 2010 to 2020. To account for changes in the court system as a result of COVID-19, the study did 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. On October 20, 2025, the researchers requested to close the project due to a lack of progress.

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, 2025

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. Work on the project was temporarily paused in 2025, but the researcher plans to complete their analysis in October of 2026 and provide a final report to DJJ by May of 2027.

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 23, 2026

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 included in the fall 2025 release of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2023*. Data for calendar year 2024 were approved for aggregate release in January 2026. In October 2024, archive staff were awarded a grant to continue data collection through September 2027.

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
Closed Date: March 30, 2026

This study proposed 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 aimed 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. On March 30, 2026, the researchers requested to close the project after determining they would not be continuing any of the proposed research activities.

Secondary Analyses of Youth Protective Factor Study (YPFS) Data

Researchers: Gina Vincent

Institution: University of Massachusetts, Chan Medical School

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: April 20, 2026; amended June 12, 2026

The purpose of this study is to conduct additional analysis on data previously provided to the researchers as part of a previously approved and concluded project—a study titled, “Optimizing Supervision and Services Strategies to Reduce Reoffending: Accounting for Risks, Strengths, and Developmental Differences.” An executive summary of the previously concluded project can be found in the FY 2025 version of DJJ’s annual report on Human Research & De-Identified Case Specific Data Requests. Findings from the original report indicated that providing strengths-based services to youth predicted an increase in violent recidivism after involvement with Virginia DJJ. This secondary analysis seeks to use new statistical methods to (1) confirm the findings from the original report and (2) determine if some strengths-based services are more effective than others in predicting recidivism. The proposal for the secondary analysis was approved in April of 2026. Shortly thereafter, the researcher submitted a request to amend the proposal. While the original proposal had requested no new data from DJJ, the amended proposal requested a single new data field intended to account for variability in probation and parole officer assignments among youth in the original study. In June of 2026, the amendment was approved through the expedited review process for minor amendments described in [6VAC35-170-69](#).

II. Proposed / Pending Studies as of June 30, 2026

The Role and Effectiveness of Correctional Education Programs in Recidivism Rates and Reentry into Society Among Incarcerated Youth

Researcher: Carol Cash and Deana Williams

Institution: Virginia Tech

Study Type: De-Identified Case-Specific Data Request

Approval Date: Pending

The purpose of this study is to identify a possible relationship between participation in correctional education programs and reentry outcomes, specifically recidivism and credential attainment, among justice-involved youth released from Virginia's juvenile correctional system between calendar years 2018 and 2023. The proposal requests that relevant education and recidivism data be collected from DJJ's data management system as well as various separate data sources accessible only by DJJ education staff. Data from these sources will then be merged and deidentified prior to being shared with the researcher. As of June 30, 2026, this study was under review by the HRRC's internal committee.

The Role of Career and Technical Education in Combatting the School-to-Prison Pipeline

Researcher: Michael Kosloski and Adriane Graham

Institution: Old Dominion University

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

Approval Date: Pending

The purpose of this study is to determine how career and technical education (CTE) coursetaking relates to a youth's potential for coming into contact with Virginia's juvenile justice system, as well as their risk of future and/or extended involvement in the criminal justice system. The study will leverage DJJ and Virginia Department of Education data from VLDS to answer these questions using regression analysis. As of June 30, 2026, this study was under review by the HRRC's internal committee.

Interagency Collaboration in Community Policy and Management Teams: Insights from Virginia and Implications for Policy and Practice

Researcher: Michael Southam-Gerow and Juliet Wu

Institution: Virginia Commonwealth University

Study Type: Human Research

Approval Date: Pending

The purpose of this study is to survey members of local Community Policy and Management Teams (CPMTs). These teams are composed of representatives from multiple child-serving agencies. The proposed survey seeks to measure members' perceived levels of interagency collaboration and examine associations between collaboration measures and system-level factors such as locality characteristics. As of June 30, 2026, this study was being reviewed by DJJ's Coordinator of External Research.

III. Denied Proposals

Two research proposals were denied during the fiscal year.

Leadership in Juvenile Justice

Researcher: Vincent Giordano and Nathalie Grey

Institution: Liberty University

Study Type: Human Research

Denied Date: March 12, 2026

The purpose of this study was to use semi-structured interviews and a focus group to ask 18-22 juvenile justice leaders at DJJ about (1) their experiences aligning policies and practices with behavioral science findings; (2) their perceptions regarding the strategies they use to address systemic racial and socio-economic disparities in the juvenile justice system; and (3) their perceptions regarding their own efforts to implement and sustain evidence-based prevention, intervention, and rehabilitation programs. DJJ determined the project did not align with the conditions set out in 6VAC35-170-50.

Self-Efficacy in Preventing Juvenile Recidivism

Researcher: Alexandra Patzak and Destanie Skinner

Institution: George Mason University

Study Type: Human Research

Denied Date: May 7, 2026

The purpose of this study was to use a survey created by the researchers to develop and validate a self-efficacy measure for professionals who work directly with justice-involved youth. The researchers proposed sending a voluntary survey to DJJ staff throughout the agency via email, collecting responses, and analyzing the results to (1) construct a scale for measuring self-efficacy, (2) evaluate the reliability and validity of said scale, (3) identify differences in reported self-efficacy levels across roles, and (4) identify additional factors associated with reported self-efficacy levels. DJJ determined 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. One research proposal was administratively closed during this fiscal year.

Failing the Youth: Addressing the Matter of Racial Disparities in the Juvenile Justice System

Researcher: Allura Casanova and Jae'Lyn Davis

Institution: Hampton University

Study Type: Human Research

Closed Date: June 1, 2026

The purpose of this proposed study was to identify and analyze factors that contribute to the overrepresentation of minority youth in the juvenile justice system. Specifically, the researchers proposed interviewing and surveying youth in juvenile detention centers to ask how well current rehabilitation programs and practices address the needs of minority youth. Proposal documents were submitted to the Coordinator of External Research on March 25, 2026, and the Coordinator of External Research provided feedback to the researchers on April 1, 2026. The proposal was closed on June 1, 2026, after receiving no further response from the researchers.