



JUVENILE JUSTICE STATISTICS

NATIONAL REPORT SERIES BULLETIN

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August 2022

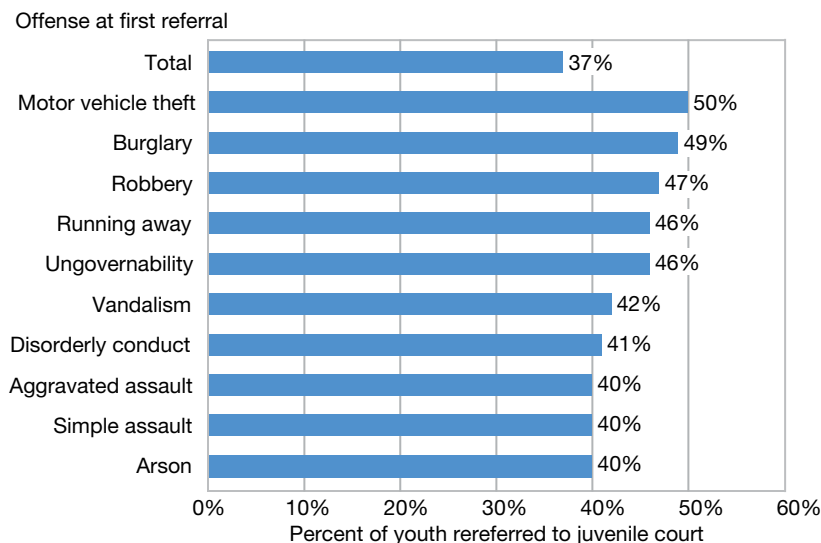
Patterns of Juvenile Court Referrals of Youth Born in 2000

Charles Puzzanchera and Sarah Hockenberry

Highlights

This bulletin describes the official juvenile court referral histories of more than 160,000 youth born in 2000 from 903 selected United States counties. Using data from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive, this bulletin focuses on the demographic and case processing characteristics of youth referred to juvenile court and the proportion of the cohort that was referred to juvenile court more than once, as well as histories defined as serious, violent, and chronic.

Youth initially referred to juvenile court for motor vehicle theft, burglary, and robbery were the most likely to be rereferred



- About 1 of every 8 (12%) youth born in 2000 from participating jurisdictions were referred to juvenile court at least once prior to aging out of juvenile court jurisdiction in their state.
- Fewer than 1 in 13 (7%) youth in the cohort were initially referred to juvenile court for a violent crime and nearly one-third (29%) of youth were first referred for a property offense.
- The majority (63%) of youth in the cohort did not return to juvenile court after their first referral. Of those that did return, 71% were male, 38% were white, and 39% were between the ages of 13 and 14 at the time of their first referral.
- The likelihood of rereferral varied by demographics: males (40%), Black youth (43%), and youth younger than age 15 at first referral (49%) were most likely to return to juvenile court at least once more.
- Youth who received a formal sanction at their first referral were more likely to be referred for a subsequent offense, especially if the youth was ordered to residential placement.

A Message From OJJDP and NIJ

With funding from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, researchers at the National Center for Juvenile Justice studied the patterns of juvenile court referrals for youth born in 2000. The researchers reviewed the histories of more than 160,000 young people referred to juvenile court in 903 select counties in the United States to document demographic and case processing characteristics and to determine how many entered the system for serious, violent, or repeat incidents.

More than 60% of youth in the cohort did not return to juvenile court after their first referral. A small percentage of youth (7%) were initially referred to juvenile court for a violent crime. Males are still more likely to return to juvenile court than their female peers. Black and American Indian youth were most likely to be referred more than once.

For professionals working with youth, these data are encouraging and can help build support for additional alternatives to out-of-home placement, especially for male and minority populations. Using data, we can better serve the youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

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Official court data can be used to understand youth offending behavior

Examining patterns of reoffending can help inform policy and practice decisions

Understanding the nature of youth offending is paramount to driving juvenile justice policy. To address the needs of the youth as well as the community, policymakers and juvenile justice professionals must not only examine the prevalence and characteristics of youth offending but should also study patterns of subsequent offending. For example, subsequent offending can be examined by selecting youth who were disposed in a specific year or years to determine whether they return to the system for subsequent charges or have subsequent guilty findings. A birth cohort sample (i.e., examining youth born in a given year or years) enables an understanding of onset and desistance that is not possible with annual measures of reoffending and can be used to clarify the onset in serious, violent, and chronic offending by youth.

Data submitted to the National Juvenile Court Data Archive provide a rich source of information on youth offending

The National Juvenile Court Data Archive (Archive) project collects juvenile court data from around the nation to create national estimates detailing case processing characteristics of delinquency and status offense cases. Over the years, data systems in many jurisdictions have become increasingly sophisticated and data capacity has been greatly enhanced, allowing juvenile justice practitioners and researchers to

answer research questions more robustly and with more detailed information. The introduction of unique youth identifiers in many jurisdictions has greatly increased the ability to conduct analyses of the juvenile court referral histories of youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

This bulletin serves to expand upon the project's prior work in this area.¹ Findings in this bulletin focus on the demographic and reoffending characteristics of a cohort of youth who were born in 2000 and who had at least one contact with the juvenile justice system before aging out of juvenile court jurisdiction in their state.

Data are from 17 jurisdictions representing 34% of the U.S. youth population at risk of juvenile court involvement

From the more than 40 jurisdictions that provide detailed case level data to the Archive project, 17 were identified for inclusion in the current study. To be considered for inclusion, a jurisdiction had to: (1) have unique youth identifiers to enable youth records to be linked across years and file formats, (2) have enough consistent historical data (i.e., no major changes in data between 2000 and 2018) that would support a 2000 birth year cohort analysis, (3) report both petitioned and nonpetitioned delinquency cases and all status offense cases handled in juvenile court, and (4) have at least 75% complete data for key case processing characteristics for all data years included in the analysis. It is important to note that there are systematic differences in the cases that reach juvenile court due to

¹ Snyder, H. 1988. *Court Careers of Juvenile Offenders*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

jurisdictional variation in referral practices that are not controlled for in the analysis. (See page 19 for more information on the selection criteria.)

The resulting sample from the 17 jurisdictions included 903 counties, which included a juvenile population that covered an estimated 34% of all youth under juvenile court jurisdiction (age 10 through the upper age) in the United States. From these sample counties, 161,057 youth had at least one referral to juvenile court before they aged out of juvenile court jurisdiction in their state. The prevalence rate of juvenile court referral among the cohort was 12%; that is, of all youth born in 2000 in the sample counties, about 1 of every 8 youth were referred to juvenile court at least once prior to aging out of juvenile court jurisdiction in their state.

Nearly half (49%) of participating counties are classified as “mostly urban” by the U.S. Census Bureau,² 37% are mostly rural, and 15% are completely rural. The overwhelming majority (88%) of youth in the sample lived in mostly urban areas, 11% lived in mostly rural areas, and 1% were from completely rural counties.

About half (49%) of all participating counties can be characterized as persistent-poverty areas, i.e., counties where the proportion of children living in poverty was at or above 20% for 5 consecutive years.³ Thirty-eight percent of the youth in the sample lived in counties characterized by persistent poverty.

In general, the profiles for age at first referral were similar for males and females

Males accounted for the majority of youth (65%) in the cohort. However, age profiles were similar for males and females. Fewer than 1 in 5 youth were younger than age 13 at the time of their first referral; 17% for males and 15% for females. A small proportion of cases did not identify the gender of the youth (less than 1%).

Age at referral	Male	Female	Total
Total	100%	100%	100%
Younger than 10	3	3	3
10	2	1	2
11	4	3	4
12	8	8	8
13	13	13	13
14	17	18	17
15	19	21	20
16	19	20	20
17	14	13	13
Older than 17	1	1	1

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding

More than half of youth were between the ages of 14 and 16 at the time of their first referral for both groups (55% for males and 59% for females); a small proportion of males and females were 17 or older.

White youth accounted for the largest proportion of youth in the cohort

Of youth in the cohort with race identified, approximately 4 in 10 (44%) were white, 3 in 10 (30%) were Black, and 2 in 10 (22%) were Hispanic. A small proportion were American Indian (2%) and Asian (2%).

Racial profiles for both males and females were very similar and followed the overall pattern of the birth cohort.

Race/ethnicity	Male	Female	Total
Total	100%	100%	100%
White	43	44	44
Black	30	30	30
Hispanic	23	22	22
American Indian	2	2	2
Asian	2	2	2

Throughout this bulletin, racial groups (white, Black, American Indian, and Asian) exclude persons of Hispanic ethnicity. Persons of Hispanic ethnicity are treated as a distinct race group and are excluded from the other race groups, with one important exception: the American Indian group includes an unknown proportion of Hispanic youth. Data provided to the Archive from many jurisdictions did not include any means to determine the ethnicity of American Indian youth. Rather than assume ethnicity for these youth, they are classified solely on their racial classification.

² Based on the U.S. Census Bureau’s County Rurality Level: 2010, available from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/geography/guidance/geo-areas/urban-rural.html>. Mostly urban refers to areas with less than half of their population living in rural settings, mostly rural refers to areas with 50% to 99.9% of their population living in rural areas, and completely rural refers to areas with 100% of the population living in rural areas.

³ Based on analysis of the U.S. Census Bureau’s Small Area Income and Poverty Estimates for the years 2014–2018, available from <https://www.census.gov/programs-surveys/saipa/data/datasets.html>. The 20% threshold for identifying “persistent poverty” was adapted from the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Economic Research Service, available from <https://www.ers.usda.gov/data-products/county-typology-codes/descriptions-and-maps/#ppov>. Counties were categorized as “persistent poverty” if the average proportion of youth under age 18 living in poverty was 20% or more for the 2014–2018 period.

The majority of youth were first referred to juvenile court by law enforcement

Nearly 9 in 10 youth referred for a delinquency offense were referred by law enforcement

Although law enforcement referred 78% of youth to juvenile court, there was some variation for different offense groups. For example, 88% of youth initially referred for a delinquency offense were referred by law enforcement, compared with 36% of youth referred for a status offense. School officials referred 55% of youth referred for a status offense, and another 5% were referred by a relative or family member.

Source of referral	Delinquency offense		
	All	Delinquency offense	Status offense
Total	100%	100%	100%
Law enforcement	78	88	36
School	15	5	55
Relative	1	0	5
Other	6	7	4

Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding

Law enforcement was the referral source for at least 87% of youth referred for a person, property, or drug offense, and 73% of youth referred for a public order offense. Youth referred for public order offenses accounted for the largest proportion (17%) of youth

referred to juvenile court by other sources such as probation officers, correctional facilities, or rehabilitative or service agencies. This may be attributed in part to the fact that this offense category includes probation violations and contempt-of-court cases, which are most often referred by court personnel.

Although a youth may be charged with committing more than one offense, each case is categorized according to the most serious offense in the referral, based on a severity ranking developed by the Archive.

The use of detention varied by offense type and demographics

Juvenile courts sometimes hold youth in secure detention facilities during court processing to ensure their appearance at subsequent court hearings, to protect the community, to secure the youth's own safety, or for the purpose of evaluating the youth. This bulletin describes the use of detention between court referral and case disposition only and excludes instances where a youth was detained by law enforcement prior to court referral or when a youth was detained post disposition pending placement at a correctional facility.

Fewer than 1 in 5 youth (15%) were detained between court referral and disposition. Compared with other offense groups, youth referred for person offenses were most likely to be detained (27%) and youth referred for status offenses were least likely to be detained (3%). The likelihood of detention was similar for all other offense groups.

Offense	Percent of youth detained
Total	15%
Person	27
Property	13
Drugs	13
Public order	14
Status	3

Note: Total excludes youth for whom detention information was missing (28%).

Males were more likely to be detained than females (16% and 11%, respectively). Approximately 1 in 5 youth (19%) age 16 at the time of their first referral were detained. For all other age groups, the likelihood of detention was 17% or less. In general, younger youth were less likely to be detained than older youth. The likelihood of detention was greatest for Hispanic youth (21%) compared with Black (17%), white (11%), and youth of other races (8%).

Few youth were initially referred to juvenile court for a violent crime

Among youth in the cohort, 29% were first referred to juvenile court for a property offense, 26% were referred for a person offense, 14% were referred for a drug offense, and 13% were referred for a public order offense. About 1 in 6 youth were first referred for status offenses (17%).

Fewer than 1 in 14 (7%) youth in the cohort were charged with a violent offense at their first referral to juvenile court; violent sexual assault and aggravated assault were the most common violent crimes. Although not considered a violent crime, simple assault was by far the most common charge among youth referred for a person offense. The number of youth referred for simple assault

outnumbered those referred for a violent crime by more than 2 to 1. Compared with youth referred for a violent crime, a larger proportion of youth were referred for a property offense: 29% of youth were initially referred to juvenile court for such offenses, and larceny-theft was by far the most common property offense among the cohort.

The majority (83%) of youth were initially referred for a delinquency offense

Offense at first referral	Number of youth	Offense profile											
		Total	Gender		Age at first referral				Race/ethnicity				
			Male	Female	Younger than 15	15	16	17	White	Black	Hispanic	Amer. Indian	Asian
Total	161,057	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Delinquency	133,388	83	87	76	82	83	83	84	80	90	85	75	63
Person	41,709	26	26	25	29	25	23	21	23	33	25	21	15
Violent crime	11,413	7	9	3	7	7	7	6	6	10	7	4	4
Murder	89	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Violent sexual assault	4,509	3	4	0	4	2	2	2	3	2	2	2	2
Robbery	2,123	1	2	0	1	2	2	2	0	3	1	0	1
Aggravated assault	4,692	3	3	2	3	3	3	3	2	4	3	2	1
Simple assault	26,410	16	15	19	19	16	14	12	14	20	17	13	9
Property	47,409	29	31	27	30	31	29	25	29	32	29	31	29
Property Crime Index	34,669	22	21	22	22	23	21	19	20	25	21	23	23
Burglary	8,014	5	7	2	5	6	4	4	5	6	5	6	2
Larceny-theft	24,325	15	13	19	15	16	15	14	14	17	15	15	20
Shoplifting	5,630	3	2	5	3	4	4	4	3	4	3	5	4
Other larceny-theft	18,695	12	10	14	12	13	11	10	11	13	11	9	16
Motor vehicle theft	1,665	1	1	1	1	1	2	1	1	1	1	1	0
Arson	665	0	1	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Vandalism	6,637	4	5	2	5	3	3	3	5	3	4	6	2
Drugs	22,431	14	16	11	9	13	19	25	16	7	19	15	11
Drug trafficking	2,214	1	2	1	1	1	2	3	2	1	2	1	1
Other drug	20,217	13	14	10	8	12	17	22	15	6	17	13	10
Public order	21,216	13	14	13	14	14	12	12	11	17	13	9	8
Disorderly conduct	7,703	5	4	6	6	5	4	3	3	8	3	3	2
Weapons	3,702	2	3	1	3	2	1	1	2	3	2	2	2
Status	27,669	17	13	24	18	17	17	16	20	10	15	25	37
Running away	5,265	3	2	6	3	4	4	3	3	3	4	3	15
Truancy	15,454	10	8	13	11	9	8	6	12	4	9	17	15
Curfew	920	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	2
Ungovernability	2,309	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	1	2	1	2	2
Liquor	2,408	1	1	2	1	1	2	4	2	0	1	2	2

■ Fewer than 1 in 5 youth were initially referred for a status offense.

■ Males and Black youth were more likely than their counterparts to be referred for a violent crime.

Notes: Totals include offenses not shown. Percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Demographic profiles of the cohort varied by offense at first referral

Females accounted for a larger proportion of youth referred for status offenses than delinquency offenses

Nearly one-third (32%) of youth referred for a delinquency offense at first referral were female, as were nearly half of those referred for a status offense (49%). More than half (60%) of youth referred for a runaway offense were females. Additionally, females accounted for equal proportions of youth referred for either a larceny-theft or a disorderly conduct offense (44% each) and 41% of youth referred for simple assault.

Youth younger than age 15 at first referral accounted for 46% of youth referred for delinquency offenses and nearly half (49%) of those referred for status offenses, but their proportion varied by offense. For example, youth younger than age 15 accounted for 75% of youth referred for arson, 66% of youth referred for a weapons offense, and 60% of youth referred for vandalism.

Race profiles varied considerably by offense at first referral. For example, Black youth accounted for a larger share (41%) of youth referred for a violent crime offense (murder, violent sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault) than white (36%) or Hispanic (21%) youth. Conversely, white youth accounted for a larger share (42%) of youth referred for a property offense, followed by Black (32%) and Hispanic (22%) youth. American Indian and Asian youth combined to account for 5% or less of violent crimes and property offenses.

Among youth first referred to juvenile court for violent crimes, females accounted for 16%, youth younger than 15 accounted for 49%, and white youth accounted for 36%

Offense at first referral	Number of youth	Percentage of birth cohort						
		Female	Younger than 15	White	Black	Hispanic	Amer. Indian	Asian
Total	161,057	35%	47%	44%	30%	22%	2%	2%
Delinquency	133,388	32	46	42	32	23	2	1
Person	41,709	33	52	38	38	21	2	1
Violent crime	11,413	16	49	36	41	21	1	1
Murder	89	22*	22*	49*	25*	24*	2*	0*
Violent sexual assault	4,509	4	59	51	27	20	1	1
Robbery	2,123	12	32	12	69	17	1	1
Aggravated assault	4,692	28	48	32	43	23	1	1
Simple assault	26,410	41	54	38	37	23	2	1
Property	47,409	32	48	42	32	22	2	2
Property Crime Index	34,669	36	47	40	34	22	2	2
Burglary	8,014	12	50	39	37	20	3	1
Larceny-theft	24,325	44	46	41	33	22	2	2
Shoplifting	5,630	53	43	40	33	22	3	2
Other larceny-theft	18,695	42	48	42	32	22	2	2
Motor vehicle theft	1,665	29	28	34	39	24	3	0
Arson	665	18	75	47	26	24	3	1
Vandalism	6,637	18	60	51	22	23	3	1
Drugs	22,431	27	29	51	15	30	2	2
Drug trafficking	2,214	19	32	50	20	28	2	1
Other drug	20,217	27	29	51	15	30	2	2
Public order	21,216	33	49	37	38	22	1	1
Disorderly conduct	7,703	44	54	31	52	16	1	1
Weapons	3,702	16	66	38	38	22	1	1
Status	27,669	49	48	54	19	20	3	4
Running away	5,265	60	39	36	26	27	2	9
Truancy	15,454	48	56	58	14	21	4	3
Curfew	920	39	42	56	24	12	2	6
Ungovernability	2,309	47	55	41	43	10	3	3
Liquor	2,408	49	20	74	5	17	3	2

■ Youth younger than age 15 accounted for more than half of all youth referred for a person offense, but their share of violent sexual assaults was even larger.

■ Black youth accounted for the majority of youth referred for robbery and disorderly conduct offenses, while white youth accounted for the majority referred for vandalism, drug, truancy, curfew, and liquor offenses.

*Percent based on a small denominator (fewer than 100 but at least 20 in the denominator).

Notes: Totals include offenses not shown. Race percentages may not sum to 100% because of rounding.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Initial referrals were handled informally for the majority of youth in the cohort

63% of youth first referred for delinquency offenses were handled informally

Of the 133,388 youth referred for a delinquency offense at their first referral, 37% (49,985) were handled formally (i.e., petitioned to juvenile court for case processing). Of these formally handled youth, the juvenile court waived jurisdiction and transferred the matter to criminal court in less than one-half of 1 percent (0.3%).

Formally handled youth processed in juvenile court attend adjudicatory hearings in order for the court to decide if the youth committed the offense for which they were referred. If the court determines the youth has committed the offense, the youth is adjudicated (judged) for either a delinquency or status offense. Of formally handled youth referred for a delinquency offense, 45% were adjudicated delinquent; three-quarters (75%) of these youth were placed on probation,

17% were ordered to out-of-home placement, and 8% were ordered to pay restitution or a fine, to participate in some form of community service, or to enter a treatment or counseling program.

More than half (54%) of formally handled youth were not adjudicated delinquent. Of these youth, 40% were dismissed; however, 47% were placed on some type of informal probation and 14% received other voluntary dispositions.

Of the 83,403 youth referred for delinquency offenses whose cases were handled informally (i.e., not petitioned), 25% were dismissed and 75% received some type of voluntary disposition.

Case processing varied by offense type

Compared with other youth initially referred to juvenile court for a delinquency offense,

those referred for person offenses were most likely to have their case petitioned to court; 46% were handled formally, compared with 35% of youth referred for drug offenses, 34% for property offenses, and 31% for public order offenses.

Once petitioned, youth referred for person (48%), property (46%), and drug (43%) offenses were slightly more likely to be adjudicated delinquent than those referred for public order (41%) offenses. Among youth adjudicated delinquent at first referral, those referred for drug offenses were most likely to be placed on probation (80%), compared with 76% for public order offenses, 74% for property offenses, and 73% for person offenses.

Once adjudicated delinquent, youth referred for person offenses were more likely to be ordered to residential placement outside of their home (21%) than youth referred for property (16%), drug (11%), or public order (14%) offenses.

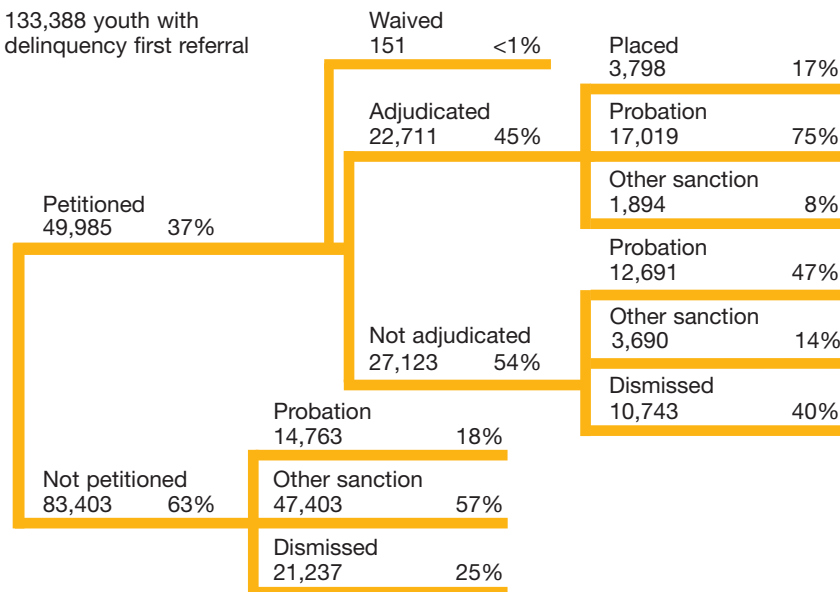
More than half of youth first referred for status offenses were handled informally

Of the 27,669 youth initially referred for a status offense, 56% were handled informally.* Of these, 36% were dismissed but the majority (59%) received some type of voluntary disposition.

The majority of youth whose first referral was a formally handled status offense were not adjudicated (80%). Approximately three-quarters (76%) of these youth were dismissed. Of those adjudicated for status offenses, 90% were placed on probation.

* In four of the states included in the analysis, informally handled status offense cases were not processed in juvenile court and, therefore, are not reflected in these data.

Probation was the most common disposition for youth referred for a delinquency offense at their first referral



Notes: Cases are categorized by their most severe or restrictive sanction. Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Most youth did not return to juvenile court after their first referral

Fewer than 4 in 10 youth were referred to juvenile court more than once

Part of understanding youth offending behavior is examining the patterns of reoffending, i.e., examining youth who were referred to juvenile court for at least one delinquency or status offense subsequent to their first referral. Of the 161,057 youth born in 2000 who had been referred for at least one offense before reaching the upper age of jurisdiction in their state, most did not return to juvenile court: More than 6 in 10 (63%) of the youth in this cohort were “one and done,” that is, their official juvenile court history ended after the first referral. Conversely, 37% (59,318 youth) were subsequently referred to juvenile court.

Characteristic	Profile of youth rereferred
Gender	100%
Male	71
Female	29
Race	100%
White	39
Black	35
Hispanic	22
American Indian	2
Asian	2
Age at first referral	100%
Younger than 10	3
10 to 12	20
13 to 14	39
15	19
16	14
17	5
Older than 17	0
Note: Detail may not total 100% because of rounding.	

The majority of youth with two or more referrals were male (71%). White youth accounted for the largest proportion (39%) of youth referred more than once, followed by Black youth at 35% and Hispanic youth at 22%. Nearly 1 in 4 (24%) youth referred more than

once were younger than age 13 at the time of their first referral, and nearly 4 in 10 (39%) were age 13 or 14.

The rate of rereferral varied by gender and race

Overall, males were more likely to return to juvenile court than their female peers (40% vs. 31%, respectively), and this pattern held for nearly all offenses. [See the table on page 10 for probabilities of a second referral by offense, gender, age at first referral, and race.]

Compared with youth of all other races, Black and American Indian youth were most likely to be referred more than once: 43% each of Black youth and American Indian youth compared with 37% of Hispanic youth, 35% of Asian youth, and 33% of white youth.

The likelihood of rereferral varied by age

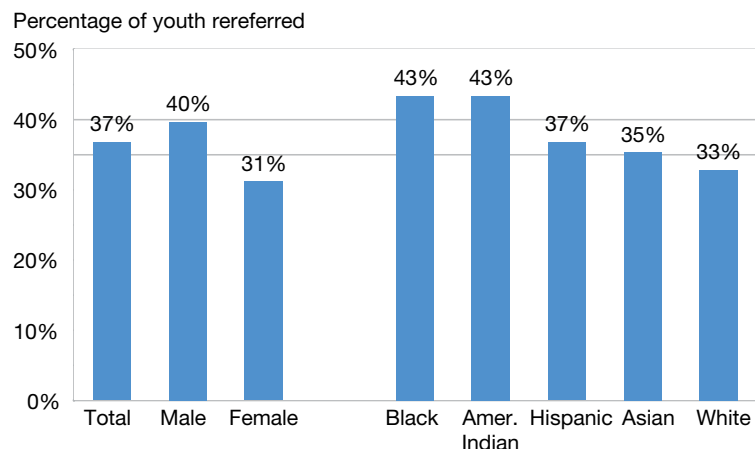
Compared with older youth, the likelihood of rereferral was greater for youth whose official court history began at a younger age. It is

important to keep in mind, however, that the older a youth is when they are referred to juvenile court, the less time they have to reoffend and be returned to juvenile court. In effect, there is an inverse relationship between age at referral and returning to juvenile court; a youth who is 16 at the time of their first referral has much less time to return to juvenile court on a new referral than a youth first referred to juvenile court at age 12. As such, rereferral rates for older youth are naturally attenuated relative to their younger counterparts.

Age at first referral	Percent of youth referred more than once
Younger than 15	49%
15	36
16	26
17	14

Nearly half (49%) of youth age 14 and younger were referred more than once, while the likelihood of rereferral was 36% or less for all other age groups.

Compared with their counterparts, males and Black youth and American Indian youth were most likely to be rereferred to juvenile court



Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Knowing that the likelihood of returning to juvenile court is higher for youth ages 14 and younger at first referral, juvenile justice professionals may be inclined to offer services at a younger age. Focusing on appropriate services for youth whose first or second offense occurs at age 14 or younger may decrease the likelihood that the youth will return to juvenile court.

Less than 20% of youth with subsequent referrals had a status offense as the most serious charge in their first referral

The majority of youth who had subsequent referrals had originally committed a delinquency offense (83%). Among these

youth, property offenses accounted for the largest share of first referral offenses (31%) and drug offenses accounted for the smallest share (11%). The general offense profile of first referrals for youth referred more than once was very similar to the overall offense profile for first referrals.

Offense at first referral	Profile of youth referred more than once
Delinquency	83%
Person	27
Property	31
Drugs	11
Public order	13
Status	17
Note: Detail may not sum to total because of rounding.	

Most youth with subsequent referrals lived in mostly urban areas

Approximately 9 in 10 (89%) youth referred more than once lived in areas classified as mostly urban and nearly 4 in 10 (39%) youth lived in areas marked by persistent poverty.

Indicator	Profile of youth referred more than once
Geography	100%
Mostly urban	89
Mostly rural	10
Completely rural	1
Persistent poverty	100%
Yes	39
No	61

Regardless of age, the likelihood of returning to juvenile court increased with each subsequent referral

Age at referral	Percentage of youth subsequently referred									All referrals
	Number of referrals to juvenile court									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
All ages	37%	57%	65%	70%	74%	75%	76%	78%	78%	70%
Younger than 10	46	61	69	88*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	54
10	53	77	84	95*	97*	NA	NA	NA	NA	63
11	53	79	88	96	94	93*	90*	91*	NA	65
12	52	79	88	93	95	96	98	98	95*	68
13	50	77	88	91	94	95	98	97	98	71
14	45	72	81	87	90	91	94	95	93	74
15	36	61	72	77	83	84	85	87	89	73
16	26	46	58	65	69	73	73	76	76	70
17	14	28	36	42	47	49	53	57	58	67

- Although 37% of youth referred to juvenile court would be referred more than once (see first referral column), 70% of all referrals involved youth who were subsequently rereferred (see All referrals column).
- More than half of youth (57%) with 2 referrals were referred for a subsequent offense; this increased to 65% for youth with 3 referrals and up to 78% for youth with 8 or 9 referrals.
- The overall likelihood of a youth referred at age 14 returning to court for a subsequent offense was 74%. Additionally, a large proportion of youth (72%) whose second referral occurred at age 14 were referred for a subsequent offense; the likelihood of a subsequent referral was lower for youth whose second referral occurred at ages 15 (61%), 16 (46%), or 17 (28%).

*Percent based on a small denominator (fewer than 100 but at least 20 in the denominator).

NA: Too few cases to calculate a reliable percentage.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Offense at first referral and youth demographics combine to influence rereferral to juvenile court

Rereferral was more likely for youth referred for specific offenses in their first case

Overall, youth with a first referral for motor vehicle theft or burglary had the highest likelihood of returning to juvenile court for this cohort (50% and 49%, respectively).

Conversely, youth who were initially referred for murder were least like to return to court (18%). However, this may be in part due to sanctioning of those referred for murder. In other words, these youth may have had less opportunity to reoffend if they were serving time in a residential facility or were waived to criminal court and perhaps incarcerated in an adult prison.

Males initially referred for a delinquency offense were equally likely to return to juvenile court as those initially referred for a status offense (40% each). Comparatively, females referred for a status offense were more likely to return to juvenile court than females referred for a delinquency offense (35% vs. 30%, respectively). For both males and females, those initially referred for

Overall, rereferral rates were higher for males than females, youth younger than 15 than older youth, and Black and American Indian youth than white, Hispanic, or Asian youth

Percent of youth referred more than once

Most serious offense at first referral	Percent of youth referred more than once												
	Total	Male	Female	Younger than 15				White	Black	Hispanic	Amer. Indian		Asian
				Age 15	Age 16	Age 17							
Total	37%	40%	31%	49%	36%	26%	14%	33%	43%	37%	43%	35%	
Delinquency	37	40	30	49	36	26	15	32	43	37	43	30	
Person	39	41	36	49	36	26	15	35	44	38	43	33	
Violent crime	37	37	35	46	36	27	16	30	43	37	33	39	
Murder	18*	20*	10*	25*	NA	26*	4*	5*	33*	30*	NA	NA	
Violent sexual assault	29	28	30	36	26	17	8	26	34	28	33*	42*	
Robbery	47	48	38	66	49	36	23	34	50	45	NA	56*	
Aggravated assault	40	42	36	52	38	28	19	35	43	42	31*	26*	
Simple assault	40	43	36	51	36	26	15	38	44	39	46	31	
Property	38	44	27	49	37	26	16	33	45	39	49	29	
Property Crime Index	38	45	26	49	37	27	17	33	45	38	48	28	
Burglary	49	51	36	57	49	40	27	42	56	50	59	35*	
Larceny-theft	33	41	24	45	31	21	13	29	40	34	42	27	
Shoplifting	27	35	21	41	25	17	10	23	29	33	36	20	
Other larceny-theft	35	42	26	47	33	23	15	31	43	34	46	29	
Motor vehicle theft	50	53	43	63	57	44	25	45	57	47	63*	NA	
Arson	40	42	31	45	32*	19*	4*	38	43	40	NA	NA	
Vandalism	42	44	31	50	38	28	17	38	49	43	57	35*	
Drugs	30	32	24	46	35	25	14	27	36	32	36	26	
Drug trafficking	32	34	23	44	37	29	18	30	39	31*	36*	26*	
Other drug	30	32	25	46	35	24	14	27	35	32	36	26	
Public order	36	38	31	47	34	24	13	32	41	36	34	31	
Disorderly conduct	41	45	35	52	32	28	15	39	42	40	32	52*	
Weapons	33	36	21	39	32	19	14	29	42	30	33*	17*	
Status	37	40	35	48	38	26	12	35	45	38	41	45	
Running away	46	52	43	61	49	33	22	43	53	44	47*	53	
Truancy	35	37	32	43	32	22	9	35	38	36	38	36	
Curfew	38	42	33	52	43	24	11	35	40	45	NA	61*	
Ungovernability	45	49	41	57	41	26	16	39	54	36	45*	55*	
Liquor	22	24	20	40	33	19	8	21	26	25	33*	25*	

■ On average, males initially referred for a property offense were about 60% more likely to be rereferred than their female peers.

■ Across offenses, rereferral rates for youth who were younger than 15 at the time of their first referral were higher than the rates for their older counterparts.

*Percent based on a small denominator (fewer than 100 but at least 20 in the denominator).

NA: Too few cases to calculate a reliable percentage.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

running away were more likely to be rereferred than those referred for other status offenses (52% for males and 43% for females).

Across offenses, rereferral rates for youth who were younger than 15 at the time of their first referral were higher than the rates of their older counterparts. For example, among those initially referred for aggravated assault, youth younger than 15 were more likely than youth of all other age groups to be rereferred: 52% compared with 38% for 15-year-olds, 28% for 16-year-olds, and 19% for 17-year-olds.

Rereferral rates varied by offense and race, but there were some notable patterns. For example, across race groups, rereferral rates were higher for those initially referred for a status offense compared with those initially referred for a delinquency offense. Additionally, across most offenses, rereferral rates were higher for Black youth than for white or Hispanic youth; the lone exception was for curfew offenses, for which rereferral rates were higher for Hispanic youth than for white or Black youth. Similarly, the two delinquency offenses associated with the highest rereferral rates were the same for all race groups, namely motor vehicle theft and burglary. Conversely, among status offenses,

running away and ungovernability had the highest rereferral rates for white and Black youth; for Hispanic youth and youth of other races, curfew and running away were the two status offenses associated with the highest rereferral rates.

Youth whose initial case outcome was more formal were more likely to return to juvenile court

Youth who were adjudicated for an offense and who received a disposition of placement, probation, or some other sanction were considered to have received a formal outcome, as well as youth who were waived to criminal court for case processing. Outcomes for youth who were not adjudicated are considered informal, as well as any outcomes for youth whose case was handled without the use of a petition. Dismissed youth include youth whose cases were not petitioned and were released or youth whose cases were petitioned to court and the youth was not adjudicated and was subsequently released.

Approximately half (49%) of youth who received a formal sanction for their first referral were referred for a subsequent offense. Of the formal sanctions available in

juvenile court, a disposition of residential placement following adjudication is the most restrictive. Nearly 6 in 10 (59%) youth who were initially ordered to residential placement after adjudication returned to court again. It is unclear if these higher rates were because the court reserved such dispositions for youth with greater risk of subsequent offending or if youth's post-adjudication experience increased their risk of reoffending.

Rereferral rates varied by initial offense and initial case outcome

Nearly half (49%) of all youth initially referred for a delinquency offense that received a formal sanction were subsequently referred to juvenile court, as were 44% of youth initially referred for a status offense that received a formal sanction. Youth whose initial referral involved a property offense that resulted in a formal sanction were more likely to return to court (56%) than their peers who received a formal sanction for a public order offense (49%), person offense (46%), or drug offense (45%).

Youth from urban areas were more likely to be rereferred than youth from rural areas

Rereferral rates varied by where a youth lived. Specifically, youth living in mostly urban areas (37%) were more likely than those living in mostly rural (34%) and completely rural (30%) areas to return to court on subsequent charges. On the other hand, rereferral rates showed less variation when viewed from the perspective of poverty. For example, 38% of youth from counties characterized as persistent poverty returned to court, compared with 36% of youth living in counties less affected by poverty.

Regardless of offense, youth whose first referral received a formal sanction were more likely to be rereferred

Disposition of first referral	Percentage of youth rereferred						Public order	Status
	Total	Delinquency	Person	Property	Drugs			
Dismissed	36%	36%	37%	36%	29%	36%	37%	
Informal	34	33	37	34	27	33	36	
Formal	49	49	46	56	45	49	44	

■ More than 70% of youth whose initial case involved a property offense that resulted in a disposition of placement were rereferred, as were 60% of youth initially referred for a drug offense that resulted in placement.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

The typical referral history involved two juvenile court referrals

Examining referral history is an important tool for understanding reoffending behavior

Referral history is defined as the number of times a youth is referred to juvenile court before reaching the upper age of juvenile jurisdiction in their state. Examining the average number of referrals may reveal patterns that differ by demographic groups or offense types, which in turn may help juvenile courts strategically match their treatment and service resources to specific groups.

Overall, the average referral history for youth in the cohort contained 2.1 referrals. However, we know that the majority (63%) of youth in the cohort were “one and done” and their official juvenile court history ended after the first referral.

The referral histories of youth who were rereferred were long

Removing youth who were “one and done” allows for analysis to focus on the chronicity of youth who return to juvenile court. Nearly two-thirds (63%) of the 59,318 youth who returned to court recorded two or three referrals over the course of their juvenile

court history, yet the average number of referrals for all youth with more than one referral was four referrals. It becomes clear that the average number of referrals of youth referred more than once was influenced by chronically referred youth—those with four or more referrals.

More than one-third (37%) of youth with more than one referral had histories that included four or more juvenile court referrals, and more than one-fourth (26%) had histories involving five or more referrals. All told, the typical history for chronically referred youth involved seven referrals.

The impact that chronically referred youth have on the juvenile justice workload cannot be ignored. Examining the characteristics of these youth can help professionals identify patterns in behaviors that could be addressed earlier in a youth’s contact with the court to promote desistance from reoffending.

Referral histories of youth referred more than once varied by demographics

The typical referral history for youth who were referred to court more than once varied by demographic factors, like age at onset, gender, and race/ethnicity. (See appendix

table 1 for a comparison of referral histories for the cohort and those who were referred more than once.) For example, the average referral history of Black youth referred more than once included 4.5 referrals, compared to 4.0 referrals for Hispanic youth and 3.6 referrals for white youth. Among youth referred more than once, males experienced slightly longer court histories than females, averaging 4.2 referrals compared with 3.6 referrals for females. Not surprisingly, youth with more than one referral who began their court history at an early age had more referrals than their peers who started later. For example, among youth referred more than once, those who were younger than age 15 at the time of their first referral averaged 4.6 referrals over the course of their referral history—one referral more than those whose first referral was at age 15, and nearly two referrals more than those whose first referral was at age 16.

Referral histories were similar across offense types

Referral histories of youth referred more than once varied little by the type of offense charged in the initial referral. For example, among those referred more than once, the referral histories of youth initially referred for either a drug (3.6) or status (3.8) offense

A small proportion of youth generate a substantial number of cases

Narrowing the lens to not only focus on the proportion of youth who reoffend but to also consider the caseloads these youth generate gives valuable insight into the impact they have on the workload of juvenile justice professionals.

For most youth, their official referral history ended after the first referral: Of the 161,057 youth in the cohort, 101,739, or 63%, had no subsequent contact with juvenile court.

Another 37,251 youth (23%) had histories that involved 2 or 3 referrals. Combined, the overwhelming majority (86%) of youth in the cohort had histories of fewer than four referrals. The remaining 14% (22,067 youth) were classified as chronically referred youth, those with 4 or more referrals. Though these youth accounted for a relatively small proportion of the cohort, their impact on the workload of juvenile justice professionals was substantial. These chronically referred

youth generated 153,977 juvenile court cases over the course of their referral histories, or 45% of all cases generated by the cohort.

Referrals	Youth		Cases generated	
	Number	Pct	Number	Pct
Total	161,057	100%	341,923	100%
1	101,739	63	101,739	30
2–3	37,251	23	86,207	25
4 or more	22,067	14	153,977	45

included less than 4 referrals, and the histories of those referred for a property (4.3), person (4.1), or public order (4.0) offense included 4 or more referrals.

Youth with more than one referral who were referred for various person, property, or public order offenses exhibited histories averaging between 4.2 and 4.6 referrals; however, youth whose initial referral involved running away (a status offense) had the longest histories, with an average of 5 referrals over the course of their involvement with the juvenile court. (See appendix table 2 for a comparison of referral histories by age at first referral.)

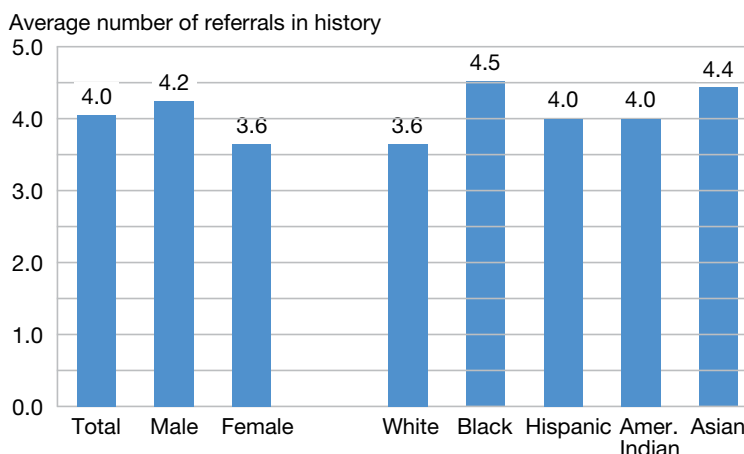
Age at onset in combination with gender or offense influence referral histories

Knowing that nearly half of youth who were younger than 15 at first referral had a subsequent referral and that by virtue of their age, they had more opportunity than their older counterparts to return to juvenile court for a subsequent offense, it is important to examine whether age at onset intersects with other factors to impact referral histories. (See appendix table 2 for comparisons of referral histories by sex, race, and offense by age at onset.)

For example, males with more than one referral who began their referral history before age 15 generated 4.9 referrals, compared with 4.0 referrals for their female counterparts. Similarly, among youth with multiple referrals, the typical referral history for Asian youth first referred before age 15 was 5.5 referrals, compared with 5.2 referrals for Black youth, 4.6 referrals for Hispanic youth, 4.5 referrals for American Indian youth, and 4.2 referrals for white youth. However, this gap narrows as the age at first referral increases.

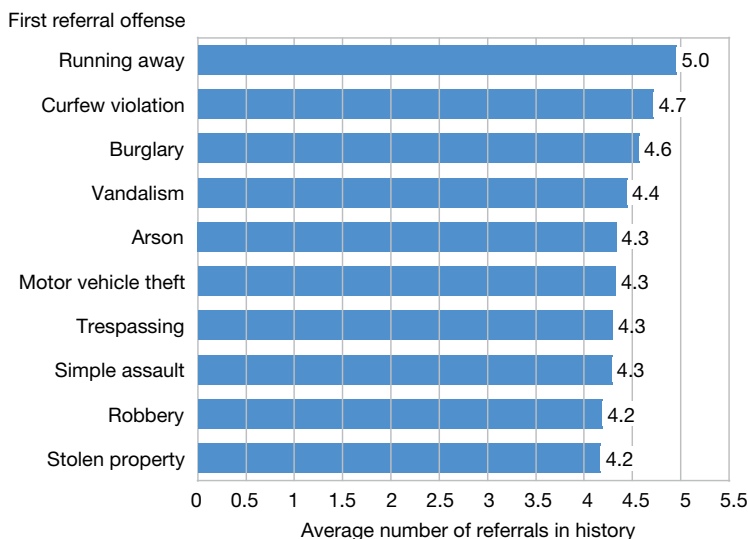
While examining age at onset in relation to offense at first referral, we see that for certain offenses, youth with more than one

Among youth referred more than once, males and Black youth and Asian youth had the most referrals on average



Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Youth with more than one referral who began their referral history with a runaway offense had the most number of referrals on average



Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

referral whose first referral occurred before age 15 went on to have long referral histories. The typical referral history for such youth for initial offenses such as robbery, burglary, and motor vehicle theft was about 5 referrals. The referral histories of youth who

were first referred for a status offense before age 15 resulted in more referrals in their history: If the initial referral was for a curfew violation, the typical history was 5.7 referrals, and if the initial referral was for running away, the average history was 6.2 referrals.

A small proportion of youth had serious, violent, and chronic referral histories

Most youth referred to juvenile court were nonviolent

In prior decades, the notion that offending by youth was violent and habitual elevated concerns about public safety and about juvenile crime in general. Understanding chronicity as it relates to the seriousness of the offense a youth commits is one step toward addressing this concern.

In broad terms, the continuum of offense seriousness ranges from violent crimes (the most serious) to status offenses (the least serious). For the purpose of discussing the composition of juvenile court referral histories, serious offenses include the violent crimes of murder, violent sexual assault, robbery, and aggravated assault, as well as the following nonviolent crimes: burglary, larceny-theft (excluding shoplifting), motor vehicle theft, arson, drug trafficking, and weapons. Nonserious crimes include a broad range of delinquent acts, such as simple assault, shoplifting, other drug offenses (not trafficking), disorderly conduct, stolen

property offenses, and vandalism, as well as status offenses (running away, curfew violations, ungovernability, liquor law violations, and truancy). An individual referral history may have many attributes. For example, a youth may have one or more violent offense referrals in the course of their history while also having one or more referrals for a serious nonviolent offense as well as four or more total referrals in their history (chronic). A youth may have a chronic referral history, however, without ever being referred for a violent or serious nonviolent offense, or they may be referred for one or more serious nonviolent offenses but never for a violent offense. Here we look at the intersection of these attributes to quantify how many youth in the cohort had serious, violent, and chronic referral histories.

The intersection of seriousness and chronicity

More than 6 in 10 youth in the cohort had no violent or other serious offenses in their referral history (61%). In fact, the most common referral history for the cohort was

not chronic and involved no serious offenses (58%). These histories did not involve any referrals for violence nor did they include any referrals for serious nonviolent offenses, and the history contained fewer than four referrals. About 1 in 5 youth (21%) had nonchronic referral histories that included at least one referral for a serious nonviolent offense and no referrals for violence. Additionally, 6% of youth in the cohort had four or more referrals and at least one referral that included a serious nonviolent offense and no referrals for violence. This was the most common referral pattern for youth with four or more referrals. Taken together, youth with serious but no violent offenses accounted for 27% of youth in the cohort.

About 1 in 8 (12%) youth in the cohort had referral histories that included at least one referral for a violent offense, but only 4% of youth in the cohort had chronic referral histories—four or more referrals—with at least one referral for a violent offense. The proportion of youth who were chronically violent—youth with four or more referrals for violent offenses—was very small, accounting for 0.1% of youth in the cohort

Differences emerge when focusing on demographics

The intersection of offense seriousness and chronicity varies for demographic subgroups, and often the differences follow expected patterns. For example, males were more likely than females to have chronic referral histories (16% vs. 10%), and more likely to have histories that involved at least one referral for a violent offense and at least one referral for a serious nonviolent offense (4.9% vs. 1.1%). In fact, males were four times more likely than females to have referral histories defined as chronic, serious, and violent.

Most referral histories were nonchronic and did not include any serious offenses

Referral history type	Number of youth	Percent
Total	161,057	100%
Nonchronic (less than 4 referrals)	138,990	86
No serious offense (violent or nonviolent)	93,259	58
No violent offense and at least 1 serious nonviolent offense	33,338	21
At least 1 violent offense	12,393	8
Chronic (4 or more referrals)	22,067	14
No serious offense (violent or nonviolent)	5,590	3
No violent offense and at least 1 serious nonviolent offense	9,963	6
At least 1 violent offense	6,514	4

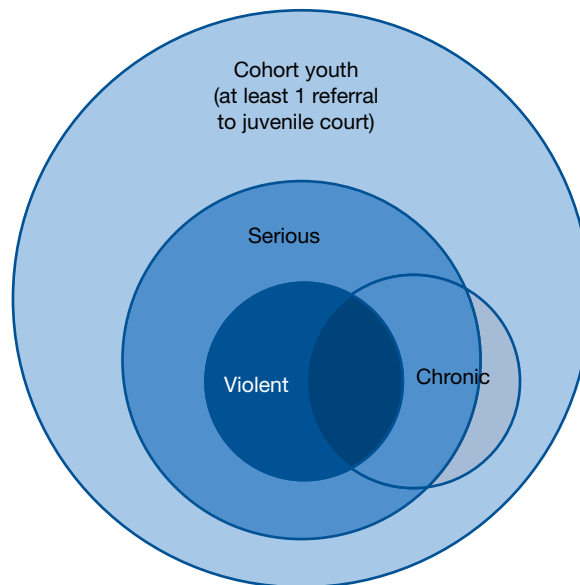
Note: Detail may not add to totals because of rounding.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

The composition of official referral histories also varied by race/ethnicity. Across race groups, most histories did not include a serious offense. For example, the referral histories of 66% of white youth, 63% of Hispanic youth, and 52% of Black youth included only nonserious offenses. Similarly, the overwhelming majority of the referral histories of white (90%), Hispanic (86%), and Black (81%) youth contained fewer than four referrals. Comparatively, a relatively small proportion of referral histories were characterized as chronic and included both serious nonviolent and violent offenses: white (1%), Hispanic (2%), and Black (5%).

As noted earlier, youth first referred to juvenile court prior to age 15 were more likely to have four or more referrals than their peers who started later. But the history composition of chronically referred youth did vary across age groups. For example, among youth with chronic referral histories who were first referred prior to age 15, 21% had histories that included violent and serious nonviolent offenses, compared with 15% of youth first referred at age 15 and 14% of those referred at age 16.

A small proportion of youth had referral histories that were both chronic and violent



Violent includes those referred for the offenses of murder, robbery, violent sexual assault, and aggravated assault.

Serious includes those referred for violent offenses as well as the following nonviolent offenses: burglary, larceny-theft (excluding shoplifting), motor vehicle theft, arson, drug trafficking, and weapons offenses.

Chronic includes those with four or more referrals to juvenile court.

The outer circle represents all officially recognized juvenile court referral histories. The portion of the large circle not covered by the chronic, serious, and violent circles represents histories with fewer than four referrals and no referrals for a serious offense. Overlaps represent histories with multiple attributes. The circles and their overlaps are drawn proportional to the number of referral histories with those attributes.

Of a typical 1,000 youth in the cohort:

- 579 had nonchronic and nonserious referral histories; these youth had fewer than four referrals in their history, and none of their referrals involved a serious offense.
- 137 had chronic referral histories.
- 386 were referred at least once for a serious offense.
- 269 were referred at least once for a serious, nonviolent offense.
- 117 had at least one referral that included a violent offense.
- 40 were chronic and violent.
- 1 was chronically violent (four or more referrals for violent offenses).

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Nearly two-thirds of youth who were adjudicated at first referral were not subsequently adjudicated

Reoffending rates depend on the measure used

The primary focus of this bulletin is to examine the characteristics of juvenile court histories, and thus far it has relied on referral to juvenile court as the metric for summarizing these histories. Naturally, this leads to broader questions about defining and measuring juvenile reoffending/recidivism. Rereferral is a useful metric to understand how many youth come back into contact with the juvenile court, and to understand the characteristics of their histories. However, rereferral represents only one of many possible measures of juvenile reoffending. Prior research has shown that reoffending rates are largely influenced by the measure used. For example, reoffending rates based on rearrest tend to be higher than rates based on rereferral, and rereferral rates are higher than rates based on readjudication.⁴ In short, reoffending measures that rely on

deeper penetration into the system tend to be lower than rates based on decision points earlier in the juvenile justice system. In addition to examining rereferral rates as a measure of reoffending, the data used for this bulletin also support analyses of readjudication as an alternative measure of reoffending, i.e., what proportion of youth who were adjudicated for a delinquency or status offense on their first referral were adjudicated at least once more?

About 4 in 10 youth formally handled on their first referral were adjudicated

Of the nearly 63,000 youth whose first referral was formally handled (i.e., a petition was filed and the youth was scheduled for a waiver or an adjudicatory hearing), 41% (24,944) were adjudicated. The majority (54%) of these adjudicated youth were age

15 or older at the time of their first referral, and three-fourths were males. White youth accounted for 41% of youth who were adjudicated on their first referral, 32% were Black youth, and 22% were Hispanic youth.

Youth whose first referral involved a person offense accounted for more than one-third (36%) of youth adjudicated, and 29% of youth adjudicated were initially referred for a property offense. Smaller proportions of adjudicated youth were initially referred for drug (13%), public order (11%), and status (10%) offenses. Thus, the offense profile at adjudication had a greater share of person offenses and a smaller share of status offenses than the offense profile at referral.

Fewer than 4 in 10 adjudicated youth were adjudicated more than once

Of the 24,944 youth adjudicated on their first referral, most (65%) had no subsequent juvenile court adjudications; the remaining 35% were subsequently adjudicated in juvenile court at least once more following their initial adjudication. Comparing this readjudication rate with the previously mentioned rereferral rate (37%) highlights the differences in reoffending rates that result from examining various contact points within the juvenile justice system.

The overwhelming majority of youth who were readjudicated were male (78%) and were younger than age 15 at the time of their first referral (62%). Among youth who were readjudicated, 37% were Black, 35% were white, and 23% were Hispanic.

Across most demographic subgroups, youth were slightly more likely to be referred more than once than adjudicated more than once

Demographic characteristic	Percent of referred youth referred more than once	Percent of adjudicated youth adjudicated more than once
Total	37%	35%
Male	40	36
Female	31	31
Younger than 15 at first referral	49	47
Age 15 at first referral	36	33
Age 16 at first referral	26	22
Age 17 at first referral	14	14
White	33	30
Black	43	40
Hispanic	37	36
American Indian	43	39
Asian	35	29

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

⁴Harris, P.W., Lockwood, B., Mengers, L., and Stoodley, B.H. 2011. "Measuring Recidivism in Juvenile Corrections." *Journal of Juvenile Justice* 1 no. 1: 1–16. Available at <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles/236317.pdf>.

The likelihood of readjudication varied by youth demographics

Similar to what was found for rereferral rates, males were more likely to be readjudicated than their female peers (36% vs. 31%, respectively), and this pattern held for nearly all offenses.

Compared with youth of all other races, Black youth were most likely to be readjudicated: 40% of Black youth had a subsequent adjudication, compared with 39% of American Indian youth, 36% of Hispanic youth, 30% of white youth, and 29% of Asian youth.

Compared with older youth, the likelihood of readjudication was greater for youth who

began their official juvenile court history at a younger age. Nearly half (47%) of youth age 14 and younger were adjudicated more than once, while the likelihood of readjudication was 33% or less for all other age groups. As noted earlier, however, it is important to keep in mind that the older a youth is when they began their referral history, the less time they have to return to juvenile court and risk readjudication.

Overall, readjudication rates were higher for males than females, youth younger than 15 than older youth, and Black youth and American Indian youth than youth of any other racial category

Percent of youth adjudicated more than once

Most serious offense at first referral	Percent of youth adjudicated more than once											
	Total	Male	Female	Younger than 15	Age 15	Age 16	Age 17	White	Black	Hispanic	Amer. Indian	Asian
Total	35%	36%	31%	47%	33%	22%	14%	30%	40%	36%	39%	29%
Delinquency	35	36	31	48	33	23	15	30	41	36	39	28
Person	32	32	33	44	28	19	12	28	37	33	28	24*
Violent crime	27	27	27	37	25	16	10	21	33	29	19*	24*
Murder	4*	3*	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA	0*	NA	NA	NA	NA
Violent sexual assault	20	20	30*	27	17	9	6	20	24	21	10*	17*
Robbery	35	36	26	57	34	23	13	27	38	32	NA	NA
Aggravated assault	32	34	27	47	28	16	11	26	35	36	27*	NA
Simple assault	39	41	36	51	31	21	16	35	43	39	37*	20*
Property	41	43	32	53	40	27	17	36	46	42	50	28*
Property Crime Index	41	44	32	53	39	26	20	37	45	43	48	31*
Burglary	40	41	30	51	37	27	19	33	45	45	47*	22*
Larceny-theft	42	46	31	58	41	23	21	40	44	41	50*	41*
Shoplifting	37	48	25	55	38*	18*	12*	32	37	48*	NA	NA
Other larceny-theft	43	46	34	59	42	24	23	42	46	40	53*	48*
Motor vehicle theft	45	47	39	60	45	39	20*	43	49	42	NA	NA
Arson	35	36	28*	40	29*	14*	NA	31	38*	40*	NA	NA
Vandalism	40	41	32	48	37	30	13*	34	52	41	57*	NA
Drugs	31	34	24	48	33	24	17	28	39	33	33*	26*
Drug trafficking	35	29	14	36	27	29	16	23	36	25	NA	NA
Other drug	31	35	26	51	35	23	18	30	40	35	36*	28*
Public order	35	35	34	47	31	21	11	29	41	35	43*	37*
Disorderly conduct	44	44	43	55	34	31*	25*	41	46	41*	NA	NA
Weapons	32	34	21*	44	29	17	9*	27	37	30	NA	NA
Status	31	35	27	40	28	19	8	31	33	32	36*	NA
Running away	39	48*	35	63*	28*	25*	NA	31*	46*	32*	NA	39*
Truancy	28	31	24	35	24	16	7	28	22	29	37*	NA
Curfew	47*	50*	NA	58*	NA	NA	NA	52*	48*	NA	NA	41*
Ungovernability	40	47	32	54	38*	19*	6*	36	44	52*	NA	NA
Liquor	28	30*	27*	36*	35*	26*	16*	28*	NA	NA	NA	NA

■ On average, males initially referred for a property offense were about 34% more likely to be readjudicated than their female peers.

■ Across offenses, readjudication rates for youth who were younger than 15 at the time of their first referral were higher than the rates of their older counterparts.

*Percent based on a small denominator (fewer than 100 but at least 20 in the denominator).

NA: Too few cases to calculate a reliable percentage.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

Court referral history analyses provide unique information about reoffending patterns and desistance from offending

A birth cohort analysis is one way to measure reoffending behavior

An implied goal of the juvenile justice system is to improve public safety by minimizing youth reoffending. Analysis of court referral histories is one of many tools that can help identify youth most at risk for returning to juvenile court. In particular, such analyses can help distinguish youth who desist from further court involvement from those most likely to return to juvenile court. Improving our ability to make such distinctions will allow for better matching of youth to services, which, in turn, should attenuate the likelihood of youth returning to juvenile court.

Examining system and youth success is as important as examining failure

Reoffending tends to serve as an indicator of the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system, and this is often expressed in terms of failure, i.e., how many youth reoffended in a given time period rather than how many youth have not returned. Equal emphasis should also be placed on youth and system success, e.g., understanding which services worked well for which youth. Ultimately, a focus on positive outcomes is equally, if not more, important to assessing the effectiveness of the juvenile justice system as is an understanding of how the youth or system has failed.

Early identification of reoffending behavior is crucial

Most youth who are referred to juvenile court are only referred once before aging out of the juvenile justice system. Thus, the notion that youth who become involved with the justice

system inevitably become repeat or chronically referred is unfounded. However, those who do become chronically referred generate a substantial workload for juvenile justice professionals—those with four or more referrals accounted for 14% of the cohort but 45% of all cases. Therefore, the early identification of youth who are at risk for reoffending or becoming chronically referred matters. Determining the optimal time to introduce appropriate intervention would not only provide youth with the opportunity to receive proven rehabilitative services but would also reduce the burden on the juvenile justice system.

Unique youth identifiers should exist in all juvenile justice case management systems

Crucial to identifying youth with multiple referrals or those who are at risk for reoffending is the inclusion of a unique youth identifier in the case management systems of both probation and corrections agencies as well as the juvenile court. In fact, since not all youth are removed from the home and placed in a residential facility, system reoffending measures should not solely focus on youth released from juvenile corrections agencies, but should also include youth handled in juvenile court who received other sanctions or who were diverted.

Further analysis should examine the impact of sanction at first referral upon the likelihood of reoffending

The majority of youth do not commit serious or violent crimes. The referral histories of youth with multiple referrals are not typically more violent than those with shorter histories. Conclusions cannot yet be drawn from the

finding that those who received more formal sanctions were more likely to reoffend. It may be an indication that the system is doing a good job of assessing youth's risk to reoffend and reserving the harshest sanctions for the group most likely to reoffend. However, it may be that system intervention actually increased youth's risk of reoffending—perhaps indicating a disconnect between the rehabilitative needs of the youth and the type of service or sanction administered. That will require additional analyses.

Timing and accessibility to services are instrumental in promoting desistance

Juvenile justice professionals should not wait for youth to have multiple referrals before providing them with appropriate services. Mental health or behavioral health services can be made available to youth without requiring adjudication. Investing in community-based organizations outside the justice system may be key to reducing system disparities. Efforts to reduce disparities in access to effective services in the community may decrease the likelihood of rereferral more effectively than limiting services to a narrow group of youth.

Given the age of youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system and the potential for rehabilitation, system professionals and policymakers should adhere to the notion that it is never too early to provide appropriate services to youth who come into contact with the juvenile court and that informal or voluntary responses may be enough to deter a youth from reoffending. Although we find that chronically referred youth are likely to continue to be rereferred/readjudicated, that should not be interpreted to mean they cannot be rehabilitated; rather, chronically referred youth may be in greater need of intensive services and early intervention efforts.

Criteria used to select the study cohort from the National Juvenile Court Data Archive data files

Each year, the National Juvenile Court Data Archive (Archive) receives detailed data submissions from state and county agencies responsible for collecting and/or disseminating information on the processing of youth in juvenile courts. The Archive generates national estimates by using compatible information from all courts that are able to provide data. (For more information on the Archive and the methods used to produce national estimates, please visit the Archive website—www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/njcda—and the methods chapter of the latest *Juvenile Court Statistics* report.)

Fundamental to the inclusion in the national estimates is the ability for a jurisdiction to report on key elements for each youth at the time of their referral, for each case disposed in a calendar year: demographics (age, sex, race), source of referral, referral reason (i.e., offense), if the youth was securely detained prior to an adjudicatory hearing, manner of handling (petitioned vs. nonpetitioned), adjudication, and disposition (case outcome).

Examining each data submission revealed that 17 jurisdictions met criteria needed to conduct a birth cohort analysis. These jurisdictions each had unique youth identifiers that linked youth records between data years and file formats, and each jurisdiction had less than 25% missing information for key case processing characteristics. Data in these jurisdictions were consistent across all years between 2000 and 2018 and included petitioned and

nonpetitioned delinquency cases and all status offense cases handled in juvenile court by the participating jurisdiction.

It is important to note that the handling of status offenses varies by jurisdiction/state. In some jurisdictions/states, these behaviors are handled outside of juvenile court; therefore, information on such matters typically exists in the data systems of the agencies that handle the youth, such as child welfare agencies. In a few states, some status offense behaviors are handled in juvenile court as a dependency matter and are not included in the Archive's data. In other states, some cases involving status offenses are handled formally (i.e., petitioned) in juvenile court, while some are handled informally (i.e., nonpetitioned) by another agency. In other states, both nonpetitioned and petitioned status offense cases are handled in juvenile court.

Among participating jurisdictions, the juvenile courts in 15 jurisdictions had responsibility over status offenses: 11 jurisdictions process both nonpetitioned and petitioned status offenses in juvenile court and 4 jurisdictions process only petitioned status offenses in juvenile court. For the remaining 2 jurisdictions, status offenses are handled as dependency matters and, therefore, were not a part of their juvenile court data submission.

Each jurisdiction granted permission for their data to be used in this bulletin. The resulting file included the official court history of 161,280 youth born in 2000 who

were referred to juvenile court at least once before aging out of juvenile court jurisdiction in their state.

For a small number of youth (223), age at first referral and/or the most serious offense at first referral were missing. Given the importance of these variables, these youth were excluded from the final sample.

Of the 161,057 youth in the sample, there were 1,300 youth (0.8%) whose age at first referral was beyond the upper age of jurisdiction in their state, e.g., a youth from a state with an upper age of 16 but who was age 17 at the time of their first referral, or a youth from a state with an upper age of 17 but who was older than age 17 at the time of their first referral. It was decided to keep these youth in the sample. Not only would removing these youth eliminate less than 1% of the overall sample population but because these youth appear within the jurisdiction's data contribution to the Archive project, we know the case was appropriately handled in juvenile court. In other words, if a youth was out of scope for a particular jurisdiction, their case would not have been included in the data submission.

This bulletin is based on the officially recognized referral histories of youth involved in the juvenile justice system. However, not all eligible behaviors come to the attention of the justice system. As a result, the prevalence, rereferral, and readjudication rates reported for this cohort exclude those youth whose behavior did not result in an official referral to juvenile court.

Appendix tables

Table 1: Average number of referrals

Youth characteristic	All youth	Youth with more than one referral
Total	2.1	4.0
Age at first referral		
Under age 15	2.8	4.6
Age 15	1.9	3.4
Age 16	1.5	2.9
Age 17	1.2	2.5
Gender		
Male	2.3	4.2
Female	1.8	3.6
Race/ethnicity		
White	1.9	3.6
Black	2.5	4.5
Hispanic	2.1	4.0
American Indian	2.3	4.0
Asian	2.2	4.4
Offense at first referral		
Delinquency	2.1	4.1
Person	2.2	4.1
Violent crime	2.0	3.9
Criminal homicide	1.2*	NA
Violent sexual assault	1.7	3.3
Robbery	2.5	4.2
Aggravated assault	2.2	4.0
Simple assault	2.3	4.3
Property	2.3	4.3
Index Property	2.3	4.3
Burglary	2.8	4.6
Larceny-theft	2.1	4.1
Shoplifting	1.8	3.9
Other larceny-theft	2.1	4.2
Motor vehicle theft	2.7	4.3
Arson	2.3	4.3
Vandalism	2.4	4.4
Trespassing	2.2	4.3
Stolen property	2.2	4.2
Drugs	1.8	3.6
Drug trafficking	1.8	3.6
Other drug	1.8	3.5
Public order	2.1	4.0
Disorderly conduct	2.3	4.1
Weapons	2.0	3.9
Status	2.1	3.8
Running away	2.8	5.0
Truancy	1.8	3.2
Curfew violation	2.4	4.7
Ungovernability	2.4	4.0
Liquor status	1.5	3.3

Table 2: Average number of referrals for youth with more than one referral

Youth characteristic	Age at first referral				
	All ages	Younger than 15	15	16	17
Total	4	4.6	3.4	2.9	2.5
Gender					
Male	4.2	4.9	3.6	2.9	2.5
Female	3.6	4.0	3.1	2.6	2.4
Race/ethnicity					
White	3.6	4.2	3.3	2.8	2.4
Black	4.5	5.2	3.7	3.1	2.6
Hispanic	4.0	4.6	3.4	2.8	2.5
American Indian	4.0	4.5	3.2	2.7	2.7*
Asian	4.4	5.5	3.8	2.9	2.4*
Offense at first referral					
Delinquency	4.1	4.7	3.5	2.9	2.5
Person	4.1	4.7	3.4	2.8	2.4
Violent crime	3.9	4.4	3.3	2.8	2.4
Criminal homicide	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Violent sexual assault	3.3	3.6	2.7	2.4*	2.3*
Robbery	4.2	5.4	3.6	2.9	2.5*
Aggravated assault	4.0	4.6	3.4	2.9	2.4
Simple assault	4.3	4.8	3.4	2.8	2.4
Property	4.3	4.9	3.6	3.0	2.6
Property Crime Index	4.3	4.9	3.7	3.1	2.6
Burglary	4.6	5.3	4.0	3.3	2.8
Larceny-theft	4.1	4.8	3.3	2.9	2.4
Shoplifting	3.9	4.6	3.1	2.6	2.2*
Other larceny-theft	4.2	4.8	3.4	2.9	2.5
Motor vehicle theft	4.3	5.3	4.4	3.4	3.0*
Arson	4.3	4.5	3.5*	NA	NA
Vandalism	4.4	5.0	3.5	2.7	2.7
Trespassing	4.3	5.1	3.6	3.1	2.4*
Stolen property	4.2	4.7	4.0*	3.2*	2.8*
Drugs	3.6	4.4	3.3	2.7	2.4
Drug trafficking	3.6	4.6	3.2	2.8	2.6
Other drug	3.5	4.4	3.3	2.7	2.3
Public order	4.0	4.6	3.3	2.9	2.3
Disorderly conduct	4.1	4.6	3.3	2.8	2.2*
Weapons	3.9	4.1	3.4	2.7*	2.2*
Status	3.8	4.3	3.4	2.8	2.4
Running away	5.0	6.2	4.0	3.4	2.7
Truancy	3.2	3.4	2.9	2.4	2.2
Curfew violation	4.7	5.7	3.8*	2.9*	NA
Ungovernability	4.0	4.4	3.3	2.9	2.6*
Liquor status	3.3	4.1	3.4	2.7	2.2*

*Average is based on a small denominator (fewer than 100 but at least 20 in the denominator).

NA: Too few youth to calculate a reliable average.

Data source: Authors' analysis of *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file].

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Office of Justice Programs
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention
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National Report Series Bulletin

NCJ 304627

Resources

OJJDP's online Statistical Briefing Book (SBB) offers access to a wealth of information about youth crime and victimization and about youth involved in the juvenile justice system. Visit the Juveniles in Court section of the SBB at ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/court/faqs.asp for the latest statistical information on trends in the volume of cases handled by the nation's juvenile courts and the court's response to these cases. The SBB also has two interactive data analysis tools that allow users to analyze juvenile court data. *Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics* gives users access to national estimates on more than 47 million delinquency cases processed by the nation's juvenile courts between 1985 and 2018. *Easy Access to State and County Juvenile Court Case Counts* gives users access to multiple years of state and county juvenile court case counts for delinquency, status offense, and dependency cases.

Data source

National Center for Juvenile Justice. *Juvenile Court Statistics 2000 Birth Cohort* [machine-readable data file]. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice.

Acknowledgments

This bulletin was written by Charles Puzzanchera, Senior Research Associate, and Sarah Hockenberry, Research Associate, with assistance from Anthony Sladky, Senior Computer Programmer, at the National Center for Juvenile Justice, the research division of the National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges, with funds provided by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention to support the National Juvenile Court Data Archive.

This bulletin was prepared under grant number 2018–JX–FX–0002, funded by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and managed by the National Institute of Justice, U.S. Department of Justice.

The opinions, findings, and conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the Department of Justice.

The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention is a component of the Office of Justice Programs, which also includes the Bureau of Justice Assistance; the Bureau of Justice Statistics; the National Institute of Justice; the Office for Victims of Crime; and the Office of Sex Offender Sentencing, Monitoring, Apprehending, Registering, and Tracking.