



**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

February 1, 2024

**Contact:** Colleen Shaddox, (203) 508-0879, [colleen@qsilver.com](mailto:colleen@qsilver.com)

**Columbia University Justice Lab report:  
Arrests of youths under age 21 down in MA,  
but racial disparities worse**

**NEW YORK, NY** — Arrests of youth under age 21 in Massachusetts dropped sharply in the past decade, but Black and Hispanic/Latinx young people make up an increasing proportion of arrests in the age group, as reported by the Emerging Adult Justice Program (EAJP) at Columbia University’s Justice Lab.

“We are calling this the ‘Good News/Bad News’ study, because the arrest reductions show that crime is decreasing and more young people are thriving in our communities,” said EAJP Director Lael E.H. Chester. “The representation of Black and Hispanic/Latinx youth rose, however, and research suggests that’s not because young people of different races are behaving differently – it’s because our systems treat them differently.”

For example, while Black youth make up less than 10% of the Commonwealth’s under 21 population, they accounted for one third of drug arrests in 2022. National surveys have consistently found that people of different races and ethnicities use illegal drugs at similar rates.

These trends are of particular interest as Massachusetts considers adding 18- through 20-year-olds to its juvenile system for most offenses, through a pending “Raise the Age” bill (H.1710 and S.942). The study analyzed the FBI’s National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) data from 2013 to 2022 and found drops in arrests across all categories of charges. During the same period, arrests of people under 18 (juveniles) decreased at a similar rate. Minor (Group B) offense arrests were down over 70% for both age groups (under 18 and ages 18-20).

“In addition to the developmental and public safety reasons to include people in the juvenile system up to age 21, legislators need to be sure that the juvenile system has the capacity to absorb older youth. Our study shows that the number of people under 18 entering the system dropped significantly since 2013 – and that the number of 18- to 20-year-olds who would be added to the system also dropped,” said Jaclyn Davis, lead author and Postdoctoral Research Scholar at the Columbia Justice Lab. “In fact, NIBRS data show that the number of youths under 21 who were arrested in 2022 was *less than* the number of youths under 18 who were arrested

in 2013, when Massachusetts raised the age to include 17-year-olds in the juvenile justice system.”

“This study also identifies raising the age of juvenile court as a racial justice issue,” explained Davis. “We know that emerging adults are harmed by contact with the adult system. Clearly that harm is disproportionately aimed at young people of color, a disparity that only grew worse over the last decade.”

The findings in the Columbia report are consistent with two other analyses released recently, the Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Data and Policy Board Annual Report and Criminal Justice Reform in Massachusetts: A Five-Year Assessment, completed by Boston Indicators and MassINC. All show fewer young people being arrested and incarcerated in the Commonwealth over the past five to ten years, while also showing that racial and ethnic disparities persist and are particularly striking for emerging adults.

“Massachusetts is fortunate to have so much research focus on its juvenile and adult legal systems,” said Chester. “This gives policymakers the opportunity to make decisions based on facts that enhance public safety and advance justice.”

**LINK TO STUDY [HERE](#)**

###

*[The Justice Lab at Columbia University](#) seeks to foundationally reconceive justice policy through actionable research, community-centered policy development, and the sustained engagement of diverse constituencies. We envision a community-centered future for justice in which healing and resiliency, rather than punishment and surveillance, are used to solve social problems often rooted in racial and economic inequity. Follow us on Twitter [@CUJusticeLab](#)*