

For immediate release: Tuesday, November 10  
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**Columbia Justice Lab Report Shows Massachusetts Youth Crime at Historic Low.  
New crime statistics released as lawmakers consider raising the age of who is considered an adult in the criminal system**

The Columbia University Justice Lab's Emerging Adult Project released an updated [report](https://tinyurl.com/y3vn4khm) (<https://tinyurl.com/y3vn4khm>) today showing that youth crime in Massachusetts continues to decline and is at an historic low.

The analysis showed double digit drops in arrests of people under 18, juvenile court caseloads and commitments of youth to state custody in Massachusetts between 2008 and 2019. This is a significant finding as state lawmakers consider legislation that would raise the age of who is automatically considered an adult in the criminal system to cover young people ages 18-20. The Columbia Justice Lab's research unequivocally demonstrates that the juvenile system has the capacity to handle the addition of 18- 20-year-olds.

Findings in the report include:

- Arrests of youth younger than 18 declined 75% between 2008 and 2019.
- Among 18- to 20-year-olds – those to whom Raise the Age legislation would apply – the decline in arrests was 70%.
- Juvenile court caseload dropped 85% for youthful offender cases between 2008 and 2020. (Youthful Offenders are youth under 18 indicted for more serious offenses).
- The delinquency caseload of juvenile court decreased 34% in the same time period.
- Detentions (pre-adjudicated youth in state custody) dropped 78%.
- Commitments (youth placed in state custody after adjudication, equivalent to a conviction in adult criminal court) decreased 76%.

Emerging adulthood is a period between the ages of 18 and 25 marked by significant brain development, risk-taking, strong peer influence and – most of all – a strong potential to turn things around and change. Legislators are currently considering bills that would bring 18- to 20-year-olds under juvenile jurisdiction. Removing 18- to 20-year-olds from the adult criminal justice system would be a huge step towards equity. An earlier [Harvard study](#) found that emerging adults, especially 18 and 19-year-olds, face the worst racial and ethnic disparities within the adult system.

“These are extraordinary reductions in caseloads,” said **Lael Chester, Director of the Emerging Adult Justice Project at the Columbia Justice Lab.** “The dire predictions about overwhelming the system made before the Commonwealth raised the age of its juvenile court jurisdiction from the 17<sup>th</sup> to the 18<sup>th</sup> birthday back in 2013 never came to pass. In fact, we know

that caseloads have only continued to decline. There can be no lingering concerns about the capacity for further reform.”

“This adds to the already strong case for increasing the juvenile court’s jurisdiction to the 21<sup>st</sup> birthday,” said **Suffolk County District Attorney Rachael Rollins**. “We know that young people who go through the juvenile system are less likely to commit future crimes than their peers who are exposed to the toxic environment of adult carceral facilities. Emerging adults, or individuals in late adolescence, who get sucked into the adult criminal system are disproportionately poor, Black and brown. It is morally imperative that we as a society address the systemic failures, trauma and other factors outside of a young person’s control that often result in their interaction with the criminal legal system. Overwhelmingly, they have had DCF involvement in their lives as children, and some are presently in DYS custody. This proposed legislation will allow us to more effectively use our resources to improve public safety and individual outcomes by providing meaningful intervention, support and rehabilitation. The juvenile system has proven to be the most effective means of ensuring public safety.”

“I saw the caseload in my own courtroom drop year after year,” said the **Hon. Jay Blitzman**, a juvenile court judge who retired recently. “It broke my heart to know that there were young people sent to the adult system – high school age kids – who could have benefitted from the rehabilitative services of the juvenile system. We know that 18- to 20-year-olds are highly amenable to rehabilitation, like younger adolescents. We have the capacity to serve them and we have a duty to serve them.” Blitzman was one of 13 retired jurists [who called on the legislature to Raise the Age](#).

“Anyone who works with this population will tell you that emerging adults are different from the older people in our Houses of Correction and prisons. In my jurisdiction, we’re promoting safety by offering younger folks more rehabilitative services. Expanding juvenile jurisdiction would do that on a statewide basis – and protect emerging adults from acquiring adult records,” said **Suffolk County Sheriff Steven Tompkins**.

“The last thing any district attorney wants is to see people show up in court again and again for repeat crimes,” said **Berkshire County District Attorney Andrea Harrington**. “Emerging adults have the highest recidivism rate of any age cohort in our system. What we’re doing now isn’t working. The Legislature has a chance to change that by passing a raise the age bill before November 12. I hope they prioritize public safety and justice by moving on this legislation immediately.”

“This pandemic adds another level of urgency,” added Chester. “There have already been nine people who have died of COVID in Massachusetts jails and prisons. Raising the age would relieve some pressure on the adult correctional system while tapping into the greater flexibility inherent in the juvenile system.”

See the full report here: <https://tinyurl.com/y3vn4khm>

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*The Justice Lab seeks to foundationally reconceive justice policy through actionable research, community-centered policy development, and the sustained engagement of diverse constituencies. <https://justicelab.columbia.edu>*

*As part of the Columbia Justice Lab, the Emerging Adult Justice Project leads action-research projects focused on 18- to 25-year-olds involved in the justice system. Our mission is to inform and drive developmentally appropriate and effective justice responses that advance successful paths to adulthood. <https://www.eajustice.org>*