



Children Waived and Incarcerated in New Jersey's Adult Prison System

NJ Youth Justice Initiative | Fact Sheet 2025

We have reviewed comprehensive state data from the New Jersey Department of Corrections (NJ DOC) on 1019 children tried, sentenced, and incarcerated in the adult prison system. The data largely covers the period 2007 – 2024, though some information dates back to 1976. Data was gathered from the NJ DOC (n = 1019), intake forms from incarcerated youth, and surveys conducted with parents and family members (n = 238). Although the passage of S 2003 in 2015 limited the use of solitary confinement and the number of youth under the age of 21 sent to the adult system, sadly there are still overwhelming numbers of waived youth that are sent to solitary confinement, and physical and sexual abuse are rampant. Moreover, we are

still struggling with racial and ethnic disparities, justice by geography, and large numbers of youth waived with mental health disorders.

Our children deserve unwavering support regardless of their skin color or geographical location. Subjecting them to the adult prison system violates their human rights and perpetuates cycles of injustice and trauma.

Prosecuting youth in the criminal legal system and incarcerating them in adult prisons undermines their development and reduces public safety. Research shows that young people transferred to adult court face increased risks of recidivism and negative long-term outcomes compared to those kept in the youth legal system.

KEY STATISTICS: FROM 2007 TO 2024, 1,019 KIDS BETWEEN THE AGES OF 14 AND 17 WERE WAIVED INTO AND INCARCERATED IN THE ADULT PRISON SYSTEM.

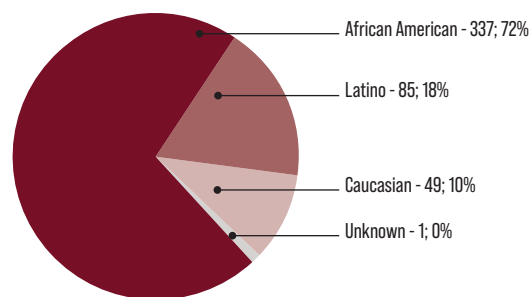
WHY THIS IS A FAILED RESPONSE?

NEW JERSEY MUST DO BETTER

Gross Racial and Ethnic Disparities

83% of kids waived into the adult criminal justice system in NJ are Black and Latine/x, even though they comprise only 35.7% of the population. Black youth alone constitute 67% of those waived to the adult prison system, despite making up only 13% of the total population, highlighting persistent racial and ethnic disparities. This figure represents a change from the 72% of Black youths reported in our earlier report covering 2007-2015¹.

NEW JERSEY YOUTH OF COLOR DISPROPORTIONATELY TRIED, SENTENCED AND INCARCERATED IN THE ADULT PRISON SYSTEM



CREDITS:

Joshua Rovner, *Sentencing Project*
Kathy Wright, *Executive Director*
Duvall Ricks, *YJI Advocate*
Dallas Crosby, *Youth Advocate Leader*
Supreet Minhas, *YJI Advocate*
Bryan W. Smith, *Graphic Design*

(continued on back)



FOLLOWING CONVICTION IN ADULT CRIMINAL COURTS, INCARCERATED YOUTH ENDURE ABUSIVE CONDITIONS. YOUTH OFTEN FACE HIGHER RATES OF VICTIMIZATION, PARTICULARLY VIOLENCE AND SEXUAL ASSAULT, BY ADULT CRIMINALS, THAN YOUTH WHO ARE SENT TO JUVENILE FACILITIES. IN ADULT PRISON FACILITIES, YOUTH ARE ESPECIALLY VULNERABLE TO VICTIMIZATION BECAUSE OF THEIR AGE AND SIZE.

Justice by Geography

Between 2007 and 2024, 34% of NJ youth waived to the adult criminal system were from the following three counties, highlighting a significant concentration compared to 66% from the remaining 18 counties:

13% Camden
12% Essex
9% Middlesex

A Gap in Youth Mental Health Care

- Approximately 175 (74%) waived youth were involved in the children's mental health system prior to their involvement in the adult court.
- Almost half of waived youth (49%) with a diagnosis had two or more mental health diagnoses prior to their incarceration with ADHD affecting 44% of youths waived.

Hidden Traumas: The Impact of Sexual Abuse on Youth

- Approximately 11 (5%) youths in adult prisons have been sexually assaulted during their incarceration, although this number is believed to be an underrepresentation due to under reporting.

Physical Abuse While in Adult Prisons

- Once incarcerated in an adult prison, about one in four youth surveyed reported physical abuse.
- Of those youth who were physically abused, 88% had a mental health diagnosis prior to their incarceration.

Inhumane Treatment

- Solitary confinement is known to be psychologically damaging. Yet, 133 youth (56%) in New Jersey's adult prisons spent a combined total of 32,449 days (equivalent to 89 years) in solitary confinement since 2007.

¹ The Incarceration of Children and Youth in New Jersey's Adult Prison System, New Jersey Parents Caucus, 2015

THE NATIONAL PRISON RAPE ELIMINATION COMMISSION FOUND THAT

“ MORE THAN ANY OTHER GROUP OF INCARCERATED PERSONS, YOUTH INCARCERATED WITH ADULTS ARE PROBABLY AT THE HIGHEST RISK FOR SEXUAL ABUSE. ”

