

# Executive Summary: Impact of Raise the Age Legislation on Youth in Jackson County, Missouri

## Background

In July 2021, Missouri implemented Raise the Age (RTA) legislation, transferring 17-year-olds from the adult criminal justice system to the jurisdiction of the juvenile courts. This reform was based on developmental science and growing evidence that rehabilitative, age-appropriate interventions lead to better outcomes for older youth. Jackson County's Family Court launched the Emerging Adult Justice (EAJ) Program in response, offering intensive, individualized diversion services to support youth through this critical transition.

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## Key Outcomes

Data from the 16th Judicial Circuit Family Court reveal that RTA legislation, combined with diversion programming, led to striking improvements in youth outcomes:

- **Felony Convictions Decreased 66%**  
Youth convicted of felonies (within two years of referral) dropped from **63 (pre-RTA)** to **21 (post-RTA)**.
- **Prison Sentences Reduced by 67 Years**  
Youth were sentenced to **87 years of prison pre-RTA**, versus **only 20 years post-RTA**.
- **Jail Time Slashed by Over 6,400 Days**  
Youth in the RTA group spent **824 total jail days**, down from **7,267 days pre-RTA**.
- **Estimated Cost Savings: \$3.32 Million**  
Reductions in incarceration alone saved the State over \$3.3 million. Additional long-term savings include increased earnings and reduced poverty cycles.

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## Programmatic Approach: Emerging Adult Justice (EAJ)

EAJ combines restorative, trauma-informed, and developmentally responsive practices. Key features include:

- Dedicated Youth Navigators serving as mentors and advocates
- Individualized "Investment Plans" aligned with five pillars: education, employment, housing, wellness, and community engagement
- Partnerships with community providers offering job training, counseling, tutoring, legal aid, and basic needs
- Voluntary aftercare services to support continued progress

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## Conclusion

Missouri's Raise the Age law and Jackson County's EAJ program demonstrate that diversion and developmentally appropriate interventions work. These reforms reduce system involvement, improve public safety, and invest in the potential of young people.