

Impact of Raise the Age Legislation

16th Judicial Circuit Court—Family Court Division

Assessment & Development Services

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Introduction

This report analyzes data and outcomes following the July 2021 implementation of Missouri's Raise the Age legislation, which moved 17-year-olds into the jurisdiction of the juvenile court.

To assess the impact of Missouri's Raise the Age (RTA) legislation, this report compares outcomes for two distinct groups of 17-year-old youth—one before and one after the law's implementation. The *baseline group* includes youth who turned 17 and were referred for offenses between July 2018 and December 2019, prior to RTA. During this period, 17-year-olds were automatically prosecuted as adults, with their cases processed entirely in the adult criminal justice system, regardless of offense severity. In contrast, the *post-RTA group* includes youth referred between July 2021 and December 2022, after the law took effect, when 17-year-olds began to fall under the jurisdiction of the juvenile court system. These youth gained access to developmentally appropriate, rehabilitative interventions—such as diversion, probation supervision, and educational or vocational support services—rather than adult sentencing and incarceration. Comparing these two cohorts provides insight into how RTA implementation has impacted charging decisions, access to services, and early indicators of youth outcomes.

Justification for Raising the Age of Jurisdiction

The juvenile justice system was designed to treat children like children – accounting for youthful behaviors and providing responses that are treatment-focused and stabilize families. Over the last 20 years, in response to advancements in neuroscience, understanding of adolescent development suggests that teenagers often lack the full capacity for impulse control and decision-making that adults possess. Additionally, there has been a growing awareness of the systemic racial injustices inherent in the criminal justice system, prompting many states to re-evaluate their policies, which have historically treated 17-year-olds as adults.

Older youth benefit from juvenile court intervention; however, they face unique needs and circumstances that make standard probation less practical and relevant. These youth are nearing adulthood, when parental supervision and structured classroom settings often become less applicable to their lives. Instead, they need targeted support to address their transition into independence.

These older youth often require assistance in completing or continuing their education, finding stable employment, accessing mental health services, securing safe housing, and developing essential life skills such as budgeting and financial literacy. Being in college, being a young parent, or having disabilities or medical needs may further compound these challenges. Similarly, LGBTQ youth may face additional barriers, such as discrimination or a lack of affirming resources, that necessitate specialized support.

Current Study

This report compares outcomes for two groups of 17-year-old youth involved in the justice system in Jackson County, Missouri—one prior to the implementation of Missouri’s Raise the Age law (Baseline) and one following the law’s enactment (Post-RTA). The Baseline group includes 150 youth whose cases were originally filed in the adult criminal system between July 2018 and December 2019. The Post-RTA group includes 211 youth referred to the juvenile system during the equivalent 18-month period from July 2021 to December 2022. Analyses focus on the level of charges, case dispositions, use of detention and incarceration, and recidivism outcomes for both groups.

Baseline July 2018- December 2019 18 months	Post-RTA July 2021- December 22 18 months
150 youth	211 youth

Referrals

Referrals to the Jackson County Juvenile Officer fell in 2020 during the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic but returned to near pre-pandemic levels by 2022. Youth aged 17 at the time of the allegations in the delinquency referrals received in 2022 accounted for 15% of the referrals for delinquency offenses and 24% of all referrals for delinquency offenses in 2024.

Figure 1. Referrals for Delinquent Offenses by Year and Age Category

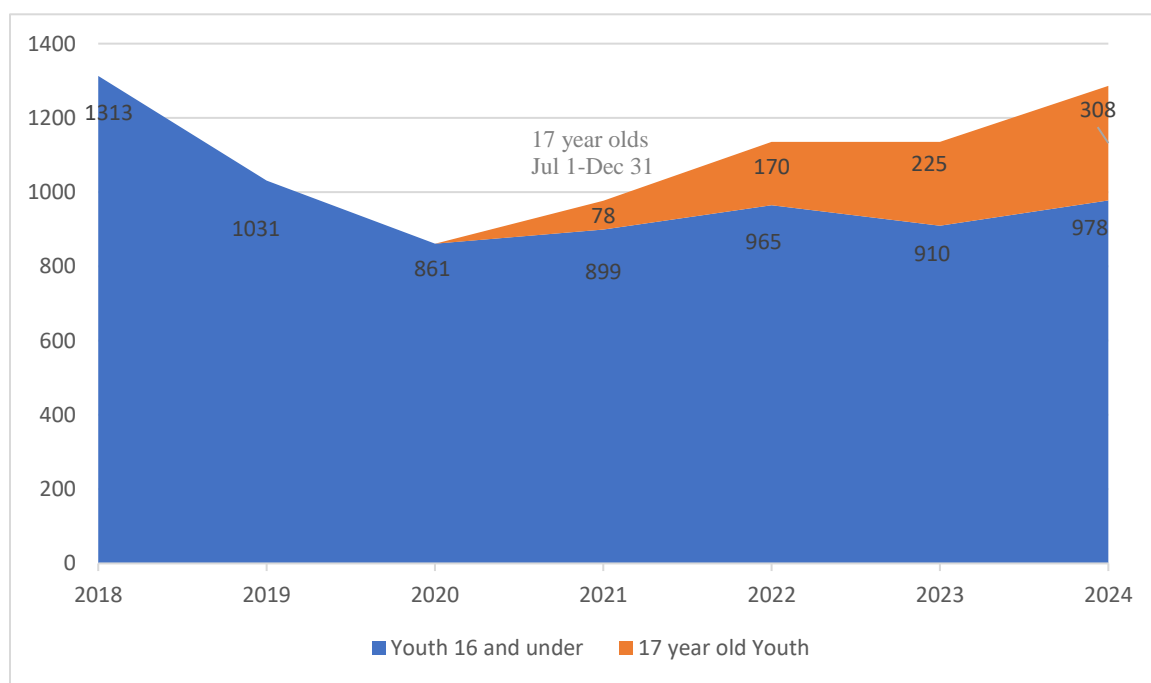


Table 1 provides a comparison of the types of charges brought against 17-year-old youth before and after the implementation of Missouri’s Raise the Age law. During the 18-month post-RTA period, overall referrals increased, with the largest proportional growth seen in misdemeanor allegations. While the number of serious felony charges decreased proportionally, the number of lower-level felony and misdemeanor referrals rose. This shift may reflect changes in law enforcement and court referral practices following the transfer of 17-year-olds from the adult system into the juvenile system.

Table 1. Level of Alleged Offense 17 Year Old Youth – Baseline and Post-RTA

Level of Alleged Offense	Baseline		Post-RTA	
Felony A/B/U	42	28%	39	18%
Felony C/D/E	65	43%	83	39%
Misdemeanor	43	29%	89	42%
Total	150	100%	211	100%

Diversion

Work from the Urban Institute and the Annie E. Casey Foundation highlights the benefits of treatment and prevention models that prioritize diverting the majority of youth away from the formal juvenile justice system while significantly reducing the number of youth placed on probation.¹ These approaches aim to shift the focus from punitive measures to interventions that address the root causes of delinquent behavior, helping youth build better pathways forward.

Table 2. Cases Diverted from Prosecution/Formal Filing

Level	Baseline		Post-RTA	
	Diverted	All	Diverted	All
A/B/U Felonies	2	42	8	40
C/D/E Felonies	9	65	50	83
Misdemeanors	0	43	79	89
Total	11	150	137	212
Overall Percent Diverted	7%		65%	

As we developed the diversion programming, we recognized the need for a tailored approach to effectively handle referrals for older adolescents facing unique challenges during this

¹ Samantha Harvell et al., *Transforming Juvenile Probation: Restructuring Probation Terms to Promote Success* (Urban Institute, April 2021).

transitional stage. To address these needs, we developed the Emerging Adult Justice program, specifically designed to support youth diverted from juvenile court prosecution.

Antonio

Antonio was referred to EAJ for felony allegations involving delivery of a controlled substance. According to the police report, he was apprehended fleeing from a stolen car with four other males in which a semi-automatic handgun with an extended magazine was found. Upon entering the program, he developed a two-year plan focused on furthering his education, improving his English fluency, and obtaining the skills necessary to drive commercial vehicles. EAJ staff reached out to his school counselor to develop a structured academic plan that aligned with his aspirations. Staff connected him with the Mattie Rhodes Center, a community organization that provided him with English language classes. He significantly improved his English skills, gaining confidence in both academic and professional settings. Tony graduated from high school in the top 10% of his class, earning a place on the honor roll. He was accepted into college and secured a scholarship. By the end of his first semester, he had already made the Dean's List. EAJ staff helped keep Tony motivated by providing school supplies for him and his younger siblings and addressing food insecurities through pantry resources and incentive gift cards. As he progressed, Tony set additional goals—finding stable employment to contribute to his family's household expenses and obtaining his driver's license. He took on various jobs along the way but ultimately secured full-time employment, a major milestone in his journey toward financial independence.

Upon referral, participants were paired with a dedicated Youth Navigator who served as their primary resource, mentor, and advocate. These Navigators are pivotal in guiding youth toward self-sufficiency and early adult development. They provide individualized support, tools, and encouragement to help participants navigate the complexities of adulthood, including education, employment, housing, and life skills.

At the heart of this program is a focus on building strong, collaborative relationships that emphasize partnership, accountability, and empowerment. By working alongside the youth, the Navigators aim to foster resilience and confidence, equipping them to successfully transition into independent and productive adults. This approach not only meets the immediate needs of the youth but also sets them on a path to long-term stability and success.

Tanya

Tanya was referred to EAJ after being arrested for stealing.

Navigating adulthood requires essential documents, EAJ staff helped Tanya obtain her birth certificate, Social Security card, and driver's license. She also opened a bank account, a vital step toward financial independence. She was connected with the Full Employment Council, where she began receiving job assistance services.

One of Tanya’s first major achievements was securing stable housing—her very own apartment. EAJ assisted her in furnishing her home, ensuring she had a strong foundation to begin her independent journey.

With stable housing and employment secured, Tanya transitioned into EAJ’s After-Care Services, ensuring continued support as she moves through custody hearings related to her young son. She is also working to pass her HiSet exam. Tanya aspires to obtain her phlebotomy certification – creating a better life for herself and her son.

Referral Disposition

The implementation of Missouri’s Raise the Age law significantly altered how serious felony cases involving youth are handled. Table 3 compares the disposition of referrals for Felony A, B, and Unclassified (ABU) offenses before and after the law took effect. The data show clear shifts in case outcomes, with increased diversion, reduced use of incarceration, and notably fewer days spent in jail while awaiting trial. In total, youth referred for ABU felonies after Raise the Age spent 10,505 fewer days in jail pretrial and were sentenced to 45 fewer years of incarceration. These outcomes suggest a marked move toward less punitive and more rehabilitative responses to serious offenses among emerging adults.

Table 3. Disposition of Referrals – Felony A/B/U Allegations

	Baseline		Post-RTA	
Diverted	2	5%	8	20%
Dismissed	10	24%	6	15%
Filed – Probation	16	38%	14	35%
Filed – Residential	n/a	--	1	3%
Filed - DYS Commitment	n/a	--	4	10%
Certified ² : Incarceration	9 132 years	21%	7 87 years	18%
Certified: Shock Incarceration 120 days	4	10%	0	--
Certified: PreTrial Days in Jail	13,154 days		2,649 days	
Certified: Adult Case Pending	0	--	0	--
Certified: Undisposed – Warrant	1 ³	2%	0	--
Total	42	100%	40 ⁴	100%

After Raise the Age, youth were sentenced to **45 fewer years** of incarceration for ABU Felony Offenses

After Raise the Age, youth referred for ABU felonies spent **10,505 fewer days** in jail pending trial.

² Under certain circumstances and for specific offenses, a juvenile (typically between 12 and 18 years old) can be certified or transferred to the adult criminal justice system. This process involves a hearing and evaluation of factors such as the nature of the offense and the juvenile's history.

³ Warrant issued 10/3/18, active as of release of this report.

⁴ 15 additional referrals were rejected for insufficient evidence.

This table tracks re-arrest rates for youth referred on serious felony charges (A/B/U) across several follow-up periods, comparing baseline outcomes to those after Raise the Age took effect. The findings suggest that recidivism remained stable or declined slightly across the post-RTA group, reinforcing the potential for long-term public safety benefits when youth are treated in the juvenile system rather than the adult system.

Table 4. Youth with Felony A/B/U allegations - Recidivism (after Filing)

	Baseline 42 youth		Post-RTA 38 youth	
New Arrest – 12 months	3	7%	2	5%
New Arrest – 18 months	4	10%	5	13%
New Arrest – 2 years	6	14%	5	13%

Malcom

When Malcom was referred to EAJ, he was navigating a season of transition. Recently reunited with his mother and working to fulfill the requirements of his Johnson County court diversion order, Malcom needed stability, guidance, and a clear path forward. His primary goals were to pass the HiSet and secure employment. The EAJ team enrolled him in Literacy KC and provided incentive gift cards to cover transportation costs to and from Literacy KC, as well as groceries to alleviate food insecurity at home. Malcom passed the HiSet exam and successfully completed his diversion requirements. He secured employment and was accepted into the Kansas City Art Institute. EAJ provided tuition assistance and purchased a computer to help set the stage for success in school.

Table 5 provides a comparative analysis of case outcomes for youth charged with Class C, D, or E felonies before and after the implementation of Raise the Age. Key indicators—such as diversion, certification to adult court, and sentencing outcomes—show dramatic improvement. Youth diverted post-RTA rose from 14% to 60%, and certification to adult court dropped sharply. In addition, youth were sentenced to 37 fewer years in prison and spent 6,571 fewer days in jail while awaiting trial. These shifts reflect a systemic movement away from punitive sanctions and toward rehabilitative intervention.

Table 5. Disposition of Charges and Referrals – Felony C/D/E Allegations

	Baseline		Post-RTA		
Diverted	9	14%	50	60%	In the first 12 month after referral (of the 50 youth diverted), one youth was rearrested on a juvenile charge. No youth were arrested and prosecuted for adult charges.
Dismissed	20	31%	16	19%	
Probation	22	34%	11	13%	
Residential	n/a	--	1	1%	
DYS Commitment	n/a	--	3	4%	
Certified: Shock Incarceration – 120-150 days	3	5%	1	1%	
Certified: Felony Conviction	27	42%	2	2%	After Raise the Age, youth were sentenced to 37 fewer years of incarceration for CDE Felony Offenses
Certified: Incarceration	6 37 years	9%	0	--	
Certified: Days in Jail	7,052 days		431 days		After Raise the Age, youth referred for CDE felonies spent 6,571 fewer days in jail pending trial.
Certified: Undisposed – Warrant	4	6%	0	--	
Total	65	100%	83 ⁵	100%	

The data in Table 6 examine new convictions among youth charged with C/D/E felonies, comparing outcomes for youth processed before and after Raise the Age. Recidivism rates declined at each time interval for the post-RTA group, with only 4% convicted of a new offense within the first year, compared to 15% in the baseline. These improvements point to the success of age-appropriate interventions in reducing reoffending among emerging adults.

Table 6. Youth with Felony C/D/E allegations - Recidivism (after Filing)

New Convictions ⁶	Baseline 65 youth		Post-RTA 83 youth	
12 months	10	15%	3 ⁷ (1 juvenile only charges)	4%
18 months	14	22%	8 ⁸	10%
2 years	21	32%	14	17%
3 years	24	37%	-- ⁹	--

⁵ 22 referrals were rejected for insufficient evidence and excluded from this table for consistency with presentation of baseline data.

⁶ Excludes cases that were dismissed by the prosecutor.

⁷ Disposition of original RTA charges: 3 EAJ, 1 DYS and 1 Dismissed.

⁸ 1 arrest was a juvenile charge.

⁹ 3 year recidivism will be available after January 1, 2026.

Expanding on Table 6, this table breaks down recidivism by severity and sentencing outcomes. Youth in the post-RTA group were significantly less likely to receive new felony convictions or be sentenced to jail or prison. Across the two-year follow-up, the baseline group accumulated 7,267 days in jail and 87 years of prison time, while the post-RTA group totaled just 824 jail days and 20 years in prison. These stark contrasts emphasize the broader systemic impacts of treating youth in juvenile rather than adult court.

Table 7. Youth with Felony C/D/E allegations - Recidivism Details (after Filing)

New Convictions ¹⁰	Baseline 65 youth		Post-RTA 83 youth	
1 Year Post-Arrest	12	18%	3¹¹ (1 juvenile only charges)	4%
New Felony convictions	2		1	
Sentenced – Jail Days	73		0	
Sentenced – Prison Years	18		0	
1 ½ Years Post-Arrest	17	26%	8	10%
New Felony convictions	7		2	
Sentenced – Jail Days	192		273	
Sentenced – Prison Years	31		15	
2 Years Post-Arrest	17	26%	14¹²	17%
New Felony convictions	0		1	
Sentenced – Jail Days	0		120	
Sentenced – Prison Years	1		5	

Combining the original charge and the following two years, youth in the Baseline Group spent 7,267 days in jail compared to 824 days for the RTA Group. Combining the sentences from the original charge and the following two years, the Baseline Group was ordered to 87 years in prison compared to 20 years for the RTA Group. Finally, combining these periods, 63 youth in the Baseline Group had a felony conviction compared to 14 youth in the RTA Group.

Vance

Vance was referred to EAJ for Burglary 2nd Degree. He initially expressed an interest in joining the military, staff noticed his dedication to studying for the ASVAB test. With only three credits left to graduate high school, EAJ arranged tutoring sessions, ensuring Vance was prepared for his next challenge.

He did not achieve his desired score on the ASVAB test the first time and decided to retake the test while exploring other career options. His interests shifted toward law enforcement, staff reached out to the East Patrol to set up a mentorship opportunity for Vance. This solidified his desire to become a first responder and he completed applications for both the police academy and firefighter program wanting to make a difference in his community.

¹⁰ Excludes cases that were dismissed by the prosecutor.

¹¹ Disposition of original RTA charges: 3 EAJ, 1 DYS and 1 Dismissed.

¹² Eight of these cases were pending at the time of this report, the felony conviction, jail and prison time data is potentially incomplete.

Vance's successfully completed an internship with a local police department. He enjoyed the work and began saving for his future, including securing his own place to live. Vance is thriving. EAJ recently celebrated his achievements and are preparing to release him from the program.

Table 8 outlines how misdemeanor referrals were handled before and after the implementation of Raise the Age. Following the law's passage, nearly 90% of youth were diverted, compared to none in the baseline group. Incarceration and court fines were effectively eliminated, and youth spent significantly less time detained pretrial. These changes reflect a strong commitment to proportional responses for low-level offenses and a focus on early intervention over punishment.

Table 8. Disposition of Referrals – Misdemeanors¹³

	Baseline Jul 2018- Dec 19 18 months		Post-RTA Jul 2021- Dec 22 18 months	
Diverted	0	--	79	89%
Fine Only	9	21 %	0	--
Dismissed	11	26%	5	6%
Probation	6	14%	3	3%
Residential	n/a	--	2	2%
DYS Commitment	n/a	--	0	--
Shock Incarceration – 120-150 days	0	--	0	--
Felony Conviction	0	--	0	--
Incarceration	0	--	0	--
Days in Jail	169		0	--
Undisposed – Adult Case Pending	1	2%	0	--
Undisposed – Warrant	16	37%	0	--
Total	43	100%	89	100%

Of the 79 youth diverted, 5 youth were arrested in the first 12 months, 4 of the 5 were juvenile referrals, 1 adult arrest occurred and the case was dismissed.

This table examines conviction rates following misdemeanor charges, comparing outcomes across a range of follow-up periods. While some recidivism persisted in both groups, post-RTA youth were less likely to be reconvicted in the first year and over time. The reduction in jail days and prison sentences for misdemeanors further supports the benefits of treating these cases within a rehabilitative framework.

¹³ Excluding traffic offenses.

Table 9. Youth with Misdemeanor Allegations – Recidivism (after Filing)

New Convictions ¹⁴	Baseline Youth N=43 ¹⁵		Post-RTA Youth N=89	
12 months	4 ¹⁶	17%	7 ¹⁷	8%
18 months	4 ¹⁶	17%	11 ¹⁸	12%
2 years	4 ¹⁶	17%	12 ¹⁹	13%
3 years	6 ¹⁶	24%	-- ²⁰	-- ²⁰

Table 10 disaggregates the nature of reoffending, sentencing outcomes, and felony escalation. While the RTA group showed similar or lower recidivism rates, they were less likely to receive carceral sentences and reduced system involvement overall. These data reinforce the value of early, non-punitive intervention in curbing the progression from minor to serious offenses.

Table 10. Youth with Misdemeanor Allegations - Recidivism Details (after Filing)

New Convictions ²¹	Baseline youth ²²		Post-RTA youth	
1 Year Post-Arrest	4	17%	7	8%
New Felony convictions	2		2	
Sentenced – Jail Days	120		0	
Sentenced – Prison Years	10		18	
1 ½ Years Post-Arrest	4	17%	11	12%
New Felony convictions	0		2	
Sentenced – Jail Days	0		0	
Sentenced – Prison Years	0		0	
2 Years Post-Arrest	4	17%	12	13%
New Felony convictions	0		0	
Sentenced – Jail Days	0		0	
Sentenced – Prison Years	0		0	
3 Years Post-Arrest	6	24%	--²⁰	--²⁰
New Felony convictions	1			
Sentenced – Jail Days	0			
Sentenced – Prison Years	10			

¹⁴ Excludes cases that were dismissed by the prosecutor.

¹⁵ 18 cases are on hold due to warrants for failure to appear as of the writing of this report. Percentages are calculated on the 25 available youth.

¹⁶ One additional case was undisposed at the time of this report.

¹⁷ One additional case was undisposed at the time of this report.

¹⁸ One additional case was undisposed at the time of this report.

¹⁹ Three additional cases were undisposed at the time of this report.

²⁰ 3 year recidivism will be available after January 1, 2026.

²¹ Excludes cases that were dismissed by the prosecutor.

²² 18 cases are on hold due to warrants for failure to appear as of the writing of this report. Percentages are calculated on the 25 available youth.

Table 11 presents a cumulative look at felony convictions, including both the original charge and any new offenses over a two-year period. Again, the Raise the Age group shows dramatically lower system penetration: 17% compared to 63% in the baseline. This pattern affirms the long-term protective effect of juvenile processing and developmentally appropriate court responses.

Table 11. Felony Conviction of the Felony Allegations in the Initial Petition

	Baseline (N=107) 17 Year Old Youth Charged in the Adult System Felony Allegations	Post-RTA (N=122) Youth Referred for Felony Allegations
Felony Conviction	54 youth 50% of disposed cases	10 youth 8%
Undisposed	7 youth ²³ 7% of the full set	0 --

Table 12. Felony Convictions by Group (Initial Petition and 2 Year Follow Up Period)

	Baseline 107 Youth Referred for Felony Allegations	Post-RTA 122 Youth Referred for Felony Allegations
Felony Conviction	63 63% of disposed cases	21 17%
Undisposed	7 youth 7% of the full set	0 --

²³ At the time of this report, one case was undisposed with a jury trial set for 2/6/25, the other six youth have cases on hold with an active warrant.

Estimated Cost Savings

Criminal convictions carry not only a substantial financial burden for the State but also impose significant social costs. Missouri's *Raise the Age* (RTA) law, enacted in 2021, presents a promising policy solution by requiring that 17-year-olds accused of crimes be processed in the juvenile justice system rather than the adult criminal system, as was previously the case. This shift recognizes critical developmental differences between youth and adults, reducing the long-term consequences of early justice system involvement.

While the potential financial savings to the State are considerable, the broader societal benefits are even more profound. These include minimizing the stigma associated with a criminal record, improving future earning potential, and fostering stronger, more resilient communities.

According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, it costs Missouri approximately \$32,595 per year to incarcerate a single inmate²⁴. However, the economic consequences of incarceration extend far beyond the State's correctional budget. A recent study by the Brennan Center for Justice found that individuals who have been incarcerated earn, on average, 52% less than their peers—a loss that translates to an estimated \$55.2 billion in aggregate earnings. These earnings disparities disproportionately affect communities of color, with Latinos experiencing the greatest loss, followed closely by Black individuals. Even those with felony convictions who did not serve time earn about 22% less, and misdemeanor convictions are associated with a 16% reduction in annual earnings.

These diminished earnings reverberate throughout local economies. Reduced spending power undermines small business revenue, weakens housing markets, and decreases tax revenue that could otherwise support public services such as education and infrastructure. Moreover, extensive research shows that higher poverty rates are strongly correlated with increased crime, perpetuating cycles of disadvantage.

Missouri's *Raise the Age* law offers a meaningful intervention in this cycle. Data from the 16th Judicial Circuit's Family Court Division reveal a promising trend. Comparing 17-year-olds referred to the juvenile system before RTA (2018–2019) to those referred after its implementation, we observed an aggregate reduction of 82 years in prison sentences—a savings of approximately \$3.3 million for the State.

Equally significant, the post-RTA group received 49 fewer felony convictions than the pre-RTA cohort. Given the lasting impact of felony records on employment, education, and housing opportunities, this reduction has profound implications. By avoiding lifelong criminal records for 17-year-olds, we bolster family stability, enhance community well-being, and interrupt the generational transmission of poverty and criminal justice involvement.

²⁴ Source: Bureau of Justice Statistics <https://usafacts.org/articles/how-much-do-states-spend-on-prisons/>

Darren

When Darren walked into EAJ on October 18, 2022, he was at a crossroads. Expelled from high school after a fight, he and his mother were searching for a way forward—one that would put him back on track toward graduation and a bright future.

EAJ stepped in to advocate for Darren's re-entry into school. With the help of dedicated tutoring services, he caught up on his missed assignments, proving his commitment to his education. His school recognized his effort and granted him the opportunity to return for his senior year. Recognizing that Darren would need ongoing support to stay on course, EAJ provided wraparound services that extended beyond academics. The team was there for him and his family through moments of crisis, helping him secure part-time employment, and guiding him in essential life skills such as opening a bank account.

Darren also took advantage of EAJ's enrichment programs, which helped shape his personal and professional development. He participated in Mock Interviews, gained valuable insights through the AdHoc Group Against Crime Pathway Forward initiative, and explored the creative world of video and film through the RLENTLSS Deflection and Diversion Program.

Services for 17 Year Old Youth Referred to Family Court

Emerging Adult Justice - Diversion

The Emerging Adult Justice (EAJ) Program supports youth aged 17 years at the time of the referral allegation. By diverting young individuals from potential involvement with the criminal justice system, the program focuses on helping them discover and harness their unique skills, talents, and passions. EAJ fosters empowerment and personal growth through tailored support, addressing the challenges and barriers that many youth and families face.

Cheyenne

Cheyenne was referred to EAJ for assault on school property. Cheyenne was expelled from school and with the support of her Navigator, she was able to advocate for herself getting her expulsion reversed and completing online schooling. While participating in diversion she gained employment at Hy-Vee and participated in the Arts Tech employment program. Her EAJ Youth Navigator provided counseling services and support for anxiety and grief when she lost her father.

Cheyenne also expressed a strong interest in learning more about budgeting, an area she knew would help her in managing her future. Her determination was evident when she attended the Drip & Slay project, where she discussed her plans for job hunting and briefly learned about interview skills and job applications. When she learned about a new credit recovery program, the staff assisted her in researching the Star program and encouraged her to contact her counselor for support. Working together, they explored the option of a high school diploma rather than a GED, and Cheyenne set a goal to graduate with her class.

Participants are paired with a Youth Navigator who serve as their primary resource and mentor. The Navigators guide youth on a path toward self-sufficiency and early adult development, providing the tools and encouragement needed for their journey into adulthood. This relationship emphasizes partnership, accountability, and empowerment.

Youth and their Navigators collaboratively develop personalized ‘Investment Plans,’ reflecting EAJ’s philosophy that success stems from individuals investing in their own futures. Goals align with the program’s Five Pillars of Success:

1. Education
 - Attaining a high school diploma or equivalent
 - Enrolling in college or trade programs
2. Career/Job Readiness
 - Securing career-focused employment or internships
 - Participating in job training and career exposure opportunities
3. Housing and Independent Living Skills
 - Addressing housing insecurity and homelessness
 - Transitioning to independent housing
 - Learning financial literacy and budgeting skills
4. Health & Wellness
 - Improving mental health counseling and support
 - Developing problem-solving abilities
 - Addressing substance use and abuse
5. Community Engagement
 - Participating in community service and engagement initiatives

To achieve these goals, EAJ collaborates with community partners who provide essential resources, training, and opportunities. Many partners offer customized programming tailored to accommodate the school and work schedules of program participants. These collaborations are vital in creating a supportive ecosystem for youth to thrive.

Referrals to EAJ are received from law enforcement and departments within the Jackson County Family Court, including:

- Attorney for the Juvenile Officer
- Case Assessment Unit
- Probation Unit; and
- the Juvenile Assessment Center

The program duration is six months, with the option to extend support at the request based on individual needs. Youth successfully completing the program leave with the confidence and skills necessary to continue their development independently. EAJ staff remain available as a resource for alumni seeking additional guidance.

About two-thirds (63%) of the 17 year old youth examined in this report referred to the Juvenile Officer were diverted to the Emerging Adult Justice Program.

Devin

Devin was referred to the Juvenile Officer for possession of drugs. EAJ supported Devin as he graduated from high school, obtained his driver's license, starting pharmacy tech school, and gained employment at Olive Garden. He has now been promoted to a manager. At the time of his successful release from EAJ he was still engaged in pharmacy school.

Probation and Intensive Supervision Services

The Family Court's probation program helps youth take responsibility for past behavior, while focusing on personal growth, community safety, and the development of pro-social skills and support networks. Staff develop relationships with and supervise youth in the community, creating individualized success plans intended to reduce youths' delinquency risk factors and enhance their protective factors to reduce the likelihood of future delinquent behavior. Youth participate in Family Court Programming and outside services to develop cognitive and social skills, such as victim empathy and pro-social thinking.

Everett

Everett was placed on probation for charges of Resisting Arrest and Tampering, 1st degree. During his time on probation, he made significant progress in his personal and professional development. He successfully completed his HiSET, demonstrating his commitment to education and self-improvement. Additionally, he secured employment at a drug store as a Pharmacy Technician, gaining valuable work experience in the healthcare field. Through the support of family court, Everett had access to substance abuse counseling, pro-social skill-building classes, and structured activities that encouraged positive engagement with his peers and community.

Everett also expressed a strong interest in entrepreneurship and shared his goal of owning his own business in the future. To support this ambition, he participated in the Pro-X Summer Internship program offered through family court. As part of the entrepreneurial group, Everett developed a business proposal and created a logo for his potential business, showcasing both his creativity and initiative. At the conclusion of the six-week program, he received a \$1,250 stipend in recognition of his participation and efforts. This experience not only helped him gain practical skills but also gave him a foundation to build on as he works toward his long-term goals.

Youth who pose a somewhat higher risk to the community may be ordered to Intensive Supervision Services (ISS). ISS probation officers are in more frequent contact with the youth

than standard probation officers. They work closely with home detention staff, who can monitor youths' whereabouts in real time.

Monica

Monica was placed on probation for Arson, Third Degree. Monica graduated high school on May 21, 2025 with a 4.05 GPA. She also completed the Allied Health Program at Summit Technology Academy during her senior year. While in school, Monica held two jobs, one in parks and the other in a senior living center. Monica maintained excellent academic performance while attending work and completing probation requirements, demonstrating an exceptional level of work ethic and time management. Monica intends to obtain her associates degree in surgical technology and through Family Court Services, she earned a full ride scholarship to Metropolitan Community College.

Hilltop Residential Center

Hilltop Residential Center, located in suburban Jackson County, is a residential facility operated by the Family Court for youth with a more serious delinquent history than youth on probation. The facility provides a rehabilitative environment where youth can concentrate on developing their strategies for living successfully in the community. Hilltop focuses on creating lasting behavioral change through cognitive interventions. Youth learn to positively relate to others and to think in socially constructive ways, and they practice self-monitoring. Youth learn the negative consequences of substance abuse. Staff hold youth accountable for their behaviors on campus and during brief visits home, where they practice abiding by their probation contracts. Youth attend school, administered by the local school district at the Hilltop campus. Commitment to Hilltop Residential Center often lasts three to four months, followed by a period of supervision in the community.

Commitment to the Missouri Division of Youth Services

If a judge or commissioner determines that the Family Court's treatment options are insufficient for a youth, given the seriousness of their offense and high risk for chronic delinquent behavior, the youth may be committed to the Division of Youth Services (DYS) for treatment in a state-run facility. DYS facilities provide a structured setting for youth to receive individualized and group treatment, life skills training, education services and opportunities to participate in family therapy. Youth are placed in DYS facilities for about a year and receive aftercare services as they transition back to the community.

Conclusion

The implementation of Missouri's Raise the Age (RTA) legislation has had a significant impact on youth in Jackson County, demonstrating promising outcomes in reducing incarceration rates, minimizing recidivism, and promoting rehabilitation over punishment. Data from the 16th Judicial Court's Family Court division highlights a substantial decline in felony convictions, jail time, and overall involvement in the adult criminal justice system for 17-year-olds. This shift has not only saved the state millions in incarceration costs but has also strengthened communities by providing youth with opportunities to build stable and productive futures.

Programs such as EAJ and probation services have played a crucial role in supporting youth by focusing on education, employment, housing, and mental health resources. These initiatives emphasize personal development, accountability, and community engagement, ensuring that young people receive the guidance they need to transition into adulthood successfully.

By prioritizing diversion over incarceration, Missouri's RTA law aligns with modern research on adolescent development and the long-term benefits of rehabilitative approaches. The success of these policies underscores the importance of continued investment in youth-focused interventions, which not only benefit individuals but also contribute to a more equitable and effective justice system. Moving forward, sustained commitment to these principles will be essential in fostering positive outcomes for justice-involved youth in Jackson County and beyond.