

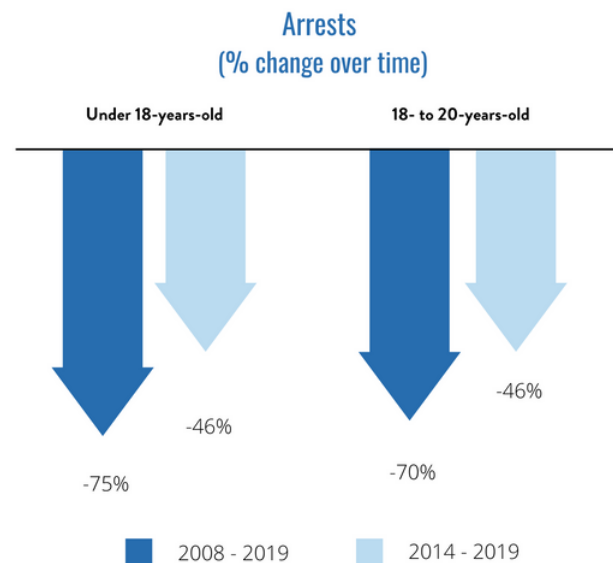
Massachusetts' Youth Justice System: Data Trends and Three Key Indicators

UPDATED November 2020

The Emerging Adult Justice Project at the Columbia University Justice Lab analyzed three key administrative measures and found that the Commonwealth's youth justice system continued to dramatically shrink in 2020: Arrests of youths under age 18, delinquency court caseloads, and the population of youth ordered to the custody of the Department of Youth Services have all dropped by double digits since 2008. The extraordinary decline in youth justice caseloads since 2008 continued even *after* Massachusetts raised the upper age of its juvenile jurisdiction from a youth's 17th to 18th birthday in the fall of 2013 (RtA). The Massachusetts Juvenile Court's concerns that raising the age of jurisdiction would overwhelm the juvenile justice system, as expressed when Massachusetts was considering the past reform, has never materialized. This is welcome news for justice stakeholders as Massachusetts now considers raising the age of its juvenile justice once again to include most youth ages 18-20 as a means to improve youth outcomes, increase public safety and address stark racial disparities.¹

(1) Youth crime in Massachusetts is at a historic low

According to data compiled by the Massachusetts State Police, 4,243 youth under the age of 18 were arrested in 2019 compared to over 17,000 arrests in 2008, amounting to a decline of 75%. In the same time period, **the number of arrests of youth ages 18-20 declined 70%**, from over 21,000 in 2008 to 6,244 in 2019. As such, the number of youths under 18 arrested in 2008 was more than 1.5 times the combined number of youths under 18 *and* ages 18-20 arrested in 2019 (10,487). Over a third of this decline has occurred since 2014, the first full year the RtA reform was implemented.



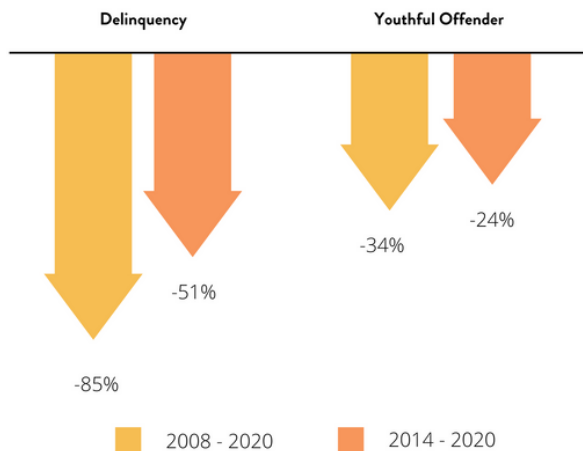
Data Source: Massachusetts State Police CrimeSOLV database, <https://masscrime.chs.state.ma.us/> [Accessed Oct. 17, 2020]

(2) Massachusetts Juvenile Court caseloads continued to decline after RtA

From 2008 until 2013, the year Massachusetts trial courts changed the unit of reporting from number of *charges* to number of *case filings*, juvenile delinquency and youthful offender caseloads had declined steadily. The downward trend continued for both categories of cases after the first full year of RtA's implementation, from a total of 10,050 case filings in FY2014 to 4,938 in FY2019.

1 Siringil Perker, S. and Chester, L. (June 2017). ["Emerging Adults: A Distinct Population That Calls for an Age-Appropriate Approach by the Justice System."](#) Program in Criminal Justice Policy and Management, Harvard Kennedy School.

MA Juvenile Court Caseloads (% change over time)



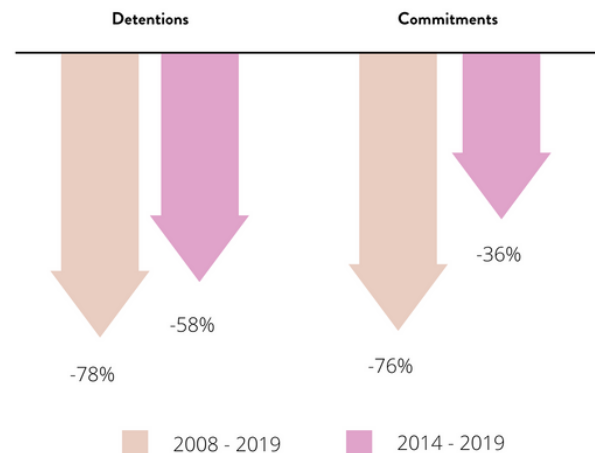
A 24% decline in delinquency and 51% reduction in youthful offender case filings occurred between 2014 - 2020 even though Massachusetts Juvenile Court started serving a larger pool of youth with the inclusion of 17-year-olds in its jurisdiction. Between Fiscal Years 2018 and 2020 alone, the delinquency caseload dropped by 3,041 filings. In fact, **the total case filings of Massachusetts Juvenile Court, which includes all the child welfare cases, dropped by 39%**, from 37,157 in FY2014 to 22,668 in FY2020.

Data Source: Trial Court Statistical Reports and Dashboards, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/trial-court-statistical-reports-and-dashboards> [Accessed Oct. 17, 2020]

(3) The number of youths in the custody of Department of Youth Services has plummeted

The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS), the Commonwealth’s youth correctional agency, serves detained youth pending trial (detention) as well as adjudicated delinquent youths and youthful offenders (commitments). The number of youths in all of the categories of DYS custody has shrunk significantly since 2008. The **number of detained youths has declined 78%**, from 4,052 in 2008 to 910 in 2019, and more than half of this total decline occurred *after* the RtA was implemented. Similarly, the **number of committed youths as of January 1 declined 76%**, from 1,895 in 2008 to 452 in 2020. The average age of the DYS committed population was 17.9 as of September 2019. Thus, older youths, ages 18-21 (with 22-year-olds served on a voluntary basis) already constitute a significant part of the DYS caseload.

MA DYS (Juvenile Corrections) Caseloads (% change over time)



Data Sources: DYS Annual Report 2017; Massachusetts FFY2015 Three Year Plan; DYS Annual Report 2019; and email correspondence with DYS Director of Research and Internal Review Board Chair, October 7, 2020.

Massachusetts is not alone in experiencing significant declines in youth justice caseloads, even after raising the age of jurisdiction.² For example, the Justice Lab reported that the number of youths sentenced to juvenile confinement in Connecticut dropped by 54% from 2005-2015 despite the fact that the state raised the age of its juvenile jurisdiction by two years from youths’ 16th to their 18th birthday during this time period. In New York City, arrests of 16- and 17-year-olds have decreased over the time since rolling out a two-phase Raise-the-Age policy. Notably, much of the decline in arrests occurred during the first phase of the New York policy in 2018-19, before the COVID-19 pandemic.³

² See, Justice Policy Institute (2017). *“Raising the Age: Shifting to a Safer and More Effective Juvenile Justice System.”* Available at <http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/11239>.

³ Data Source: New York City Mayor's Office. *“Raise the Age in New York City.”* and DCJS *“Quarterly Update of Juvenile Offender/Adolescent Offender Arrests and Youth Part Court Activity.”* Accessed October 7, 2020.