

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2024



BLANK

INTRODUCTION FROM COMMISSIONER REARDON

Fiscal Year 2024 has been a year of meaningful engagement and commitment to the young people, families, and communities we serve. The extraordinary contributions of our staff across the state and their commitment to creating spaces to listen, learn, and improve, as always, ensured that our young people thrived, our families felt supported, and our communities shared in the fruits of these successes.

Across the Commonwealth, our programs created spaces for young people to simply be young and enjoy themselves while also experiencing developmentally appropriate interventions designed to spur learning, growing, and the attainment of important milestones. From skill-building initiatives to community events, these moments reflect what is possible when young people are supported by caring, dedicated adults who meet them where they are at and create opportunities for them to be seen, heard, and valued.



We continued to focus on advancing equity, increasing knowledge, and expanding opportunities within the juvenile justice system. Through efforts to better understand and address disparities, along with ongoing investments in diversion programming, we are working toward more equitable outcomes for all young people. This work is strengthened by the voices of young people and their families, who remain our most important partners.

We also had the opportunity to develop our strategic goals in alignment with the Executive Office of Health and Human Services' priorities, creating further opportunities for collaboration across youth-serving agencies and strengthening our shared focus on supporting high-need youth and adolescents. On July 18, 2023, I was named Commissioner of the Department of Youth Services after serving in an acting capacity. It has been an honor and a privilege to serve as Acting Commissioner, and I am grateful for the opportunity to continue to serve the Commonwealth in this critically important role and build on the legacies of those who came before me, particularly Commissioner Peter Forbes, who brought me to DYS and made this opportunity possible.

Together, we remain focused on ensuring that every young person in our care and custody has the support and opportunity they need to succeed and that we are partnering effectively with our contracted providers, agency, and community partners for the best possible outcomes. We are grateful for all the large and small ways our partners support this critically important work and look forward to continuing to identify new and build existing partnerships in the year to come.

In Community,
Cecely Reardon

A stylized handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cecely'.

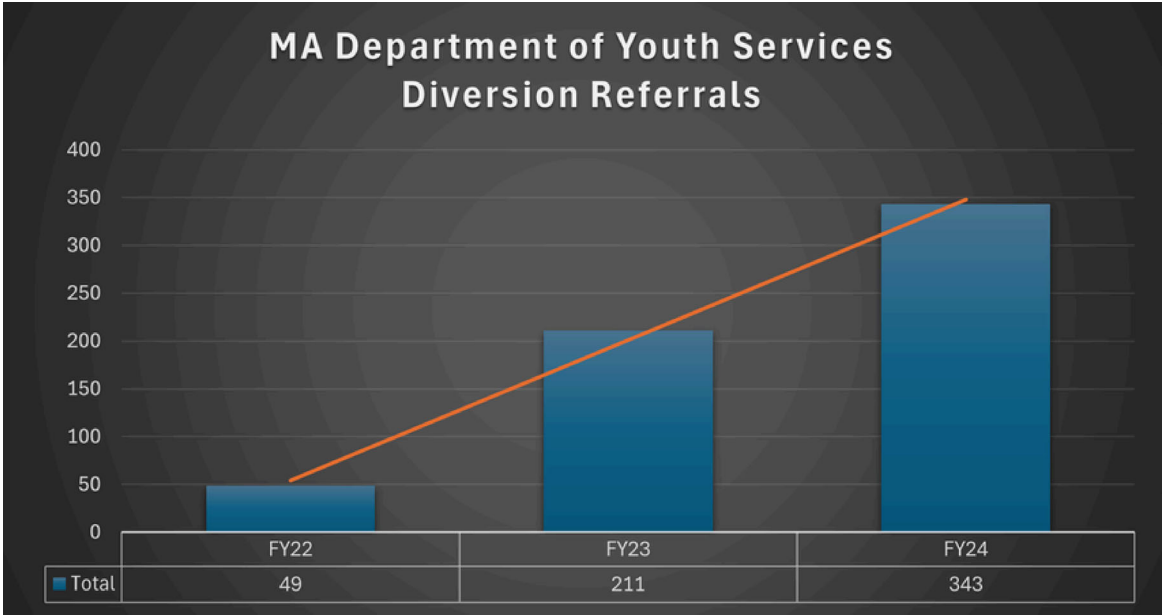
1. WHO WE SERVE

The Department of Youth Services(DYS or ‘the Department’) is the juvenile justice agency for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Its mission is to foster positive outcomes for youth, build safer communities, and collaborate for an equitable and fair justice system. The Department of Youth Services envisions a Commonwealth in which every young person has the skills, supports, and resources necessary to engage safely with their communities and lead productive and fulfilling lives. DYS supports this work through valuing fairness, transparency, racial equity, and integrity.

DYS divides its statewide operations into five geographic regions¹ that serve five primary categories of juvenile justice-involved young people between the ages of 12 and 22: Diversion, Overnight Arrest, Detained Youth, Committed Youth, and Youth Engaged in Services.

Diversion

In FY24, the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP) continued its growth, expanding to two additional counties in the Commonwealth. With the addition of the providers Advocates in Barnstable County and Child & Family Services Inc. in Bristol County, the MYDP saw a 62.6% increase in total referrals from the previous year. Building on the successes of the MYDP since its inception as a learning lab, the goal for the upcoming year is to continue expansion into new counties to offer individualized, evidence-based diversion opportunities to all youth across the Commonwealth.

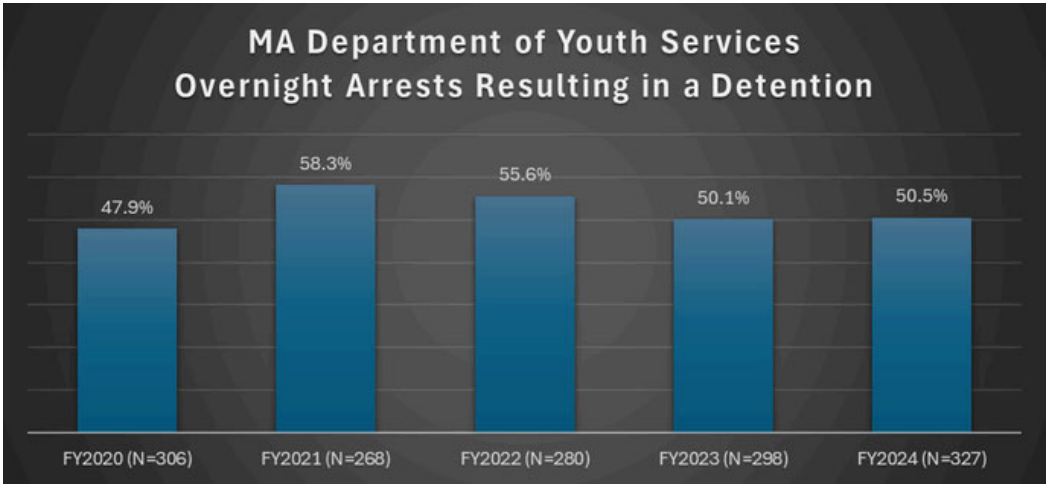
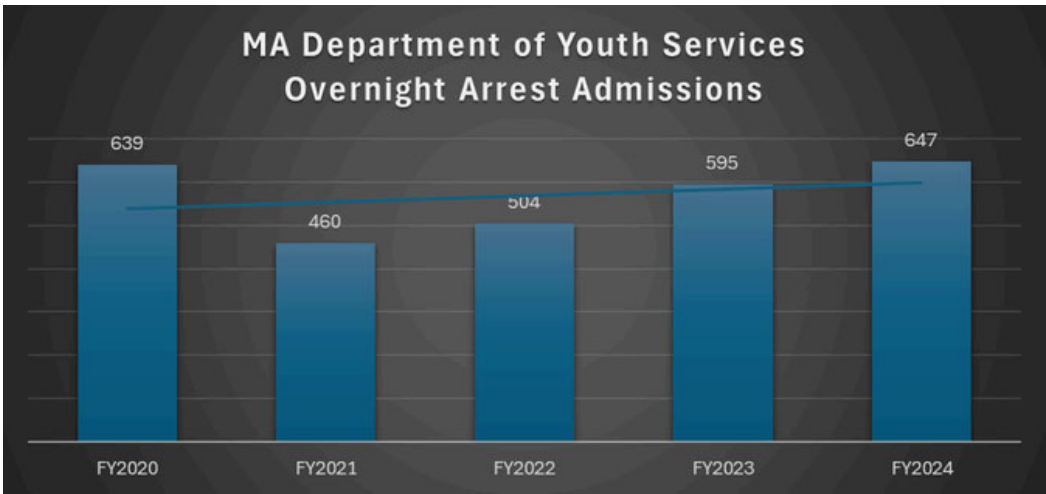


1. The Department of Youth Services is divided into five regions: Central, Metro, Northeast, Southeast, and Western. The Central Region serves Worcester County; the Metro serves Suffolk County; the Northeast Region serves Essex and Middlesex counties; the Southeast Region serves Barnstable, Bristol, Dukes, Norfolk, and Plymouth counties; and the Western Region serves Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden, and Hampshire counties.

Overnight Arrests

DYS operates a network of juvenile overnight arrest (ONA) placements as a resource to local police departments and municipalities. ONA placements provide a safe location for youth arrested when courts are closed, who are either ineligible for or unable to post bail, until court reopens. This network of placements ensures Massachusetts’ compliance with the Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention Act, which prohibits youth from being held in adult jails or police lockups for six or more hours after arrest.

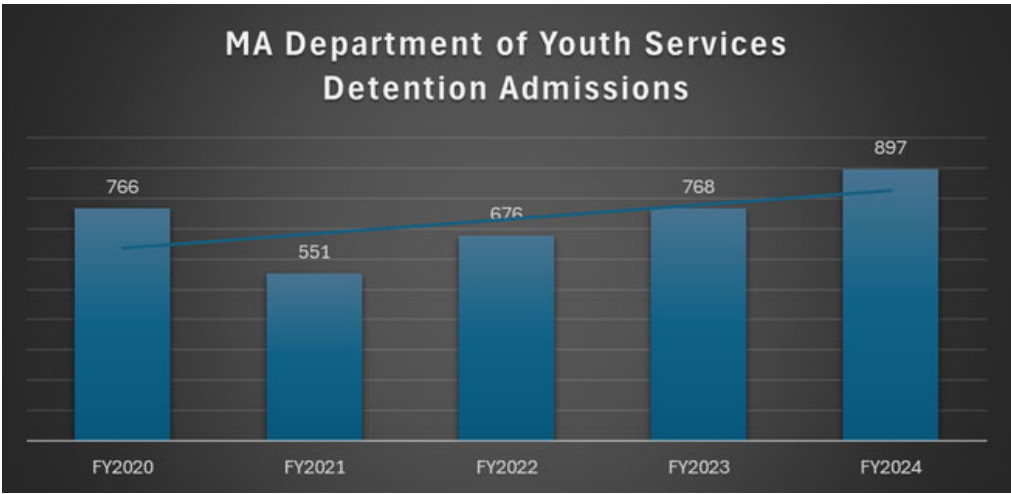
FY24 showed an 8.7% increase in overnight arrest admissions from FY23. In July 2017, the ONA service model expanded from ONA beds in stand-alone sites to include beds in both stand-alone and detention programs. This change allowed DYS to align services with the decline in the number of youth requiring overnight arrest placements while still maintaining geographically diverse settings to support police departments across the state. Of the 647 overnight arrest admissions in FY24, 50.5% (327) resulted in admission to detention. The other nearly 49.5% were released after appearing in court.



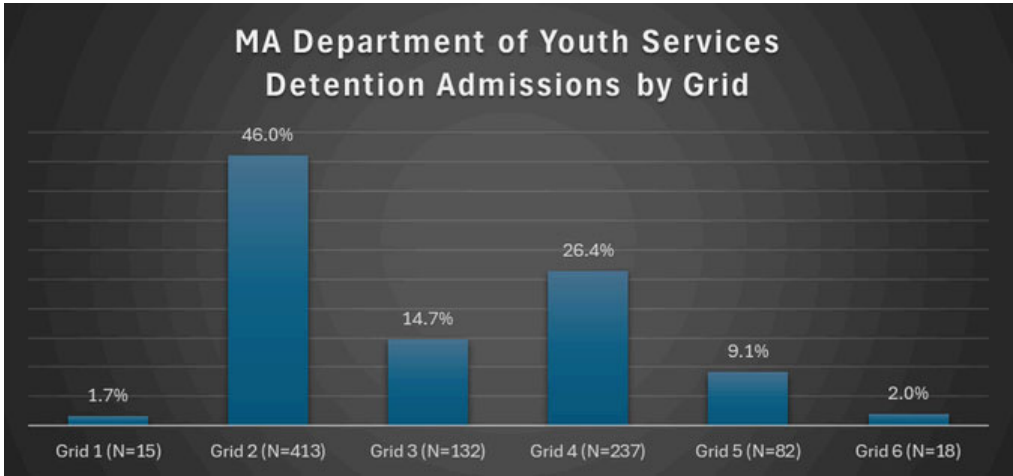
Detained Youth

Detained youth, comprised of youth detained for delinquency and youthful offender offenses, are committed to the care of the Department of Youth Services by the Juvenile Court during the pendency of their juvenile court cases.

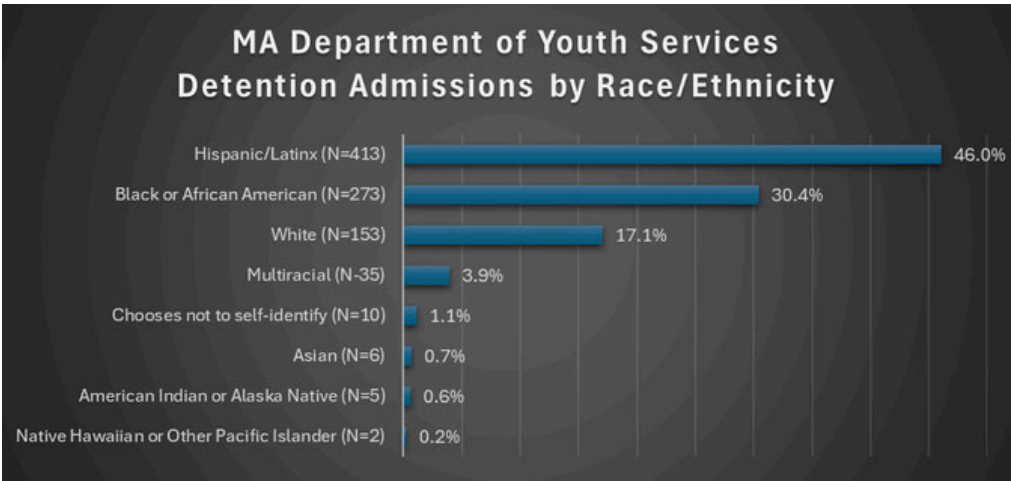
FY24 showed a 16.8% increase in detention admissions from FY23. Of the 897 detention admissions in FY24, 17.6% identify as female compared to 82.4% who identify as male.



The largest percentage of youth held in detention in FY24 were charged with Grid 2 offenses² followed by Grid 4.



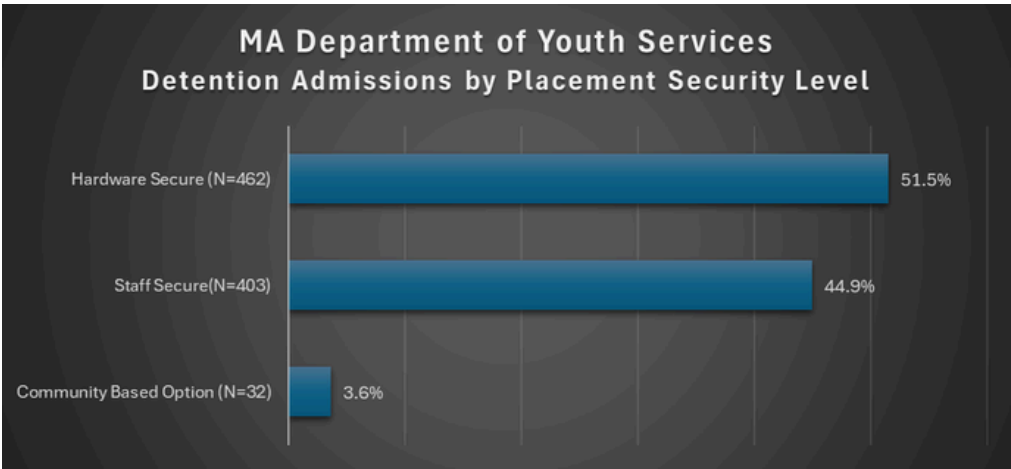
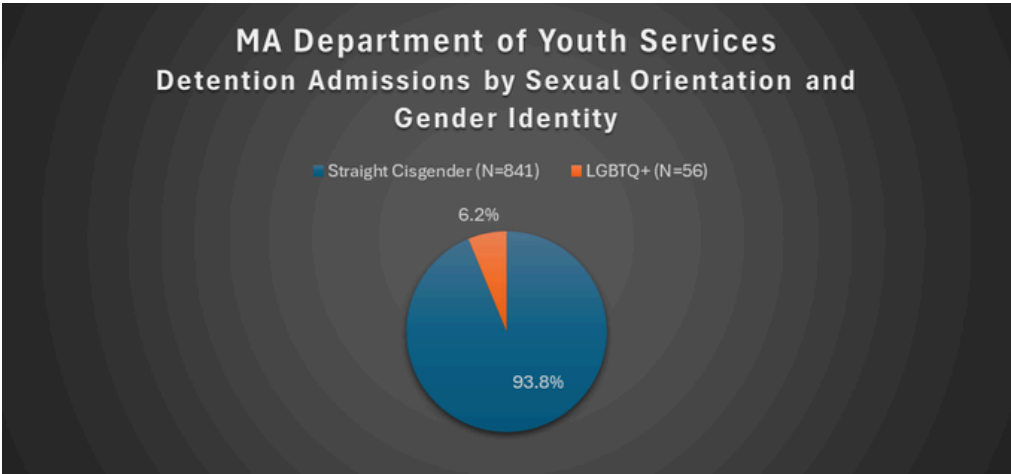
82.9% of the detention admissions in FY24 were youth of color.



2. DYS uses a grid system that categorizes the severity of offenses to determine initial time assignments for placement. Offenses are categorized into one of these six levels. Grid level 2 offenses include possession of drugs and assault and battery. Grid level 4 offenses include armed robbery and carjacking.

04 | WHO WE SERVE

DYS youth who identified as LGBTQ+ represented 6.2% of all detention admissions in FY24.



Placement

DYS operates or contracts for a range of residential programming and placements, including hardware secure and staff secure facilities, as well as community-based placements.

Hardware Secure Facility: a DYS or provider-operated facility characterized by locked entrances and exits and other physically restrictive construction that typically include locked bedrooms as well as procedures that are intended to prevent a youth from departing without the approval of the Department.

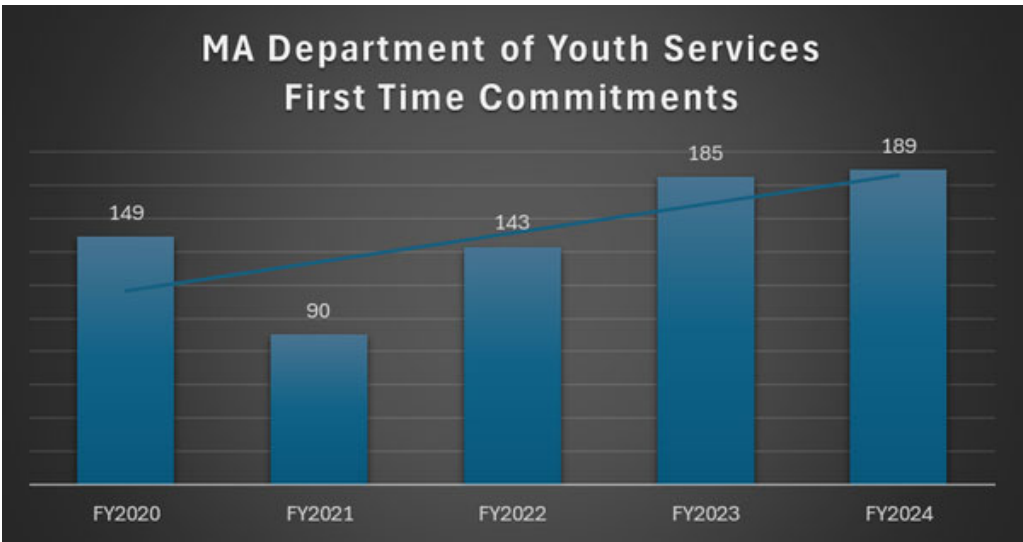
Staff Secure Facility or Residential Placement: a DYS or provider-operated facility generally characterized by unlocked entrances and exits and bedroom doors, wherein staff provide the primary security intended to prevent a youth from departing without the approval of the Department.

Community-Based Placement: a non-residential program designed to provide services to youth in different types of community settings, including but not limited to foster care, independent living, job corps, and at home with casework or DRC supervision.

Committed Youth

Youth may be committed to the Department’s custody for treatment after adjudication as delinquent or as a youthful offender. Most youth who are adjudicated delinquent are committed to physical custody of the Department of Youth Services until the age of 18. Some youth may be committed to age 19 or 20 if their cases are not resolved in juvenile court until after their eighteenth birthday for offenses that occurred before they turned 18. In the case of a youth adjudicated as a youthful offender, the youth may be committed to age 21. A youth who is adjudicated for new offenses following their original commitment may be committed to DYS custody more than once. Once committed, DYS has sole discretion regarding the treatment and placement of a youth.

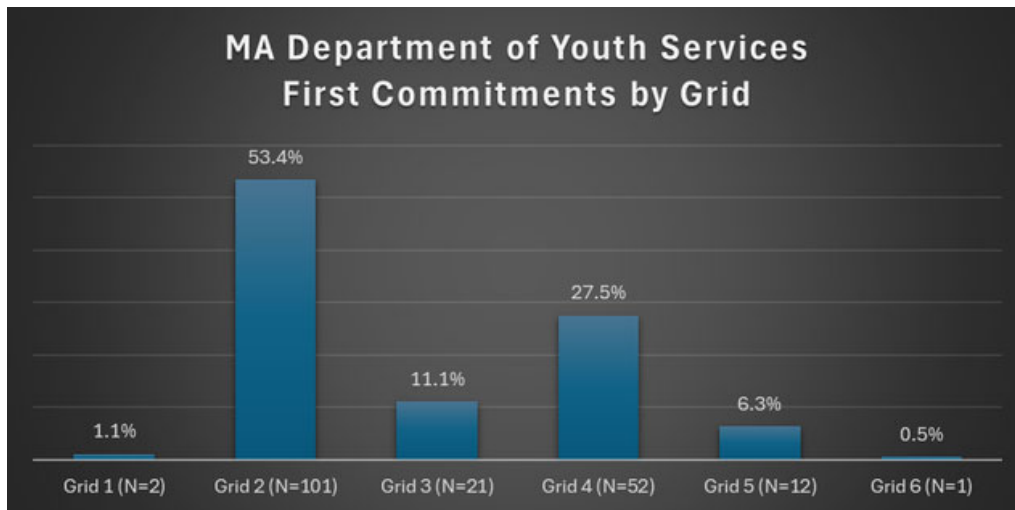
In FY24, there was a 2.7% increase in first-time commitments from FY23 for both delinquency and youthful offender cases. Of the 189 first-time commitments in FY24, 11.6% were female, compared to 88.4% who were male.



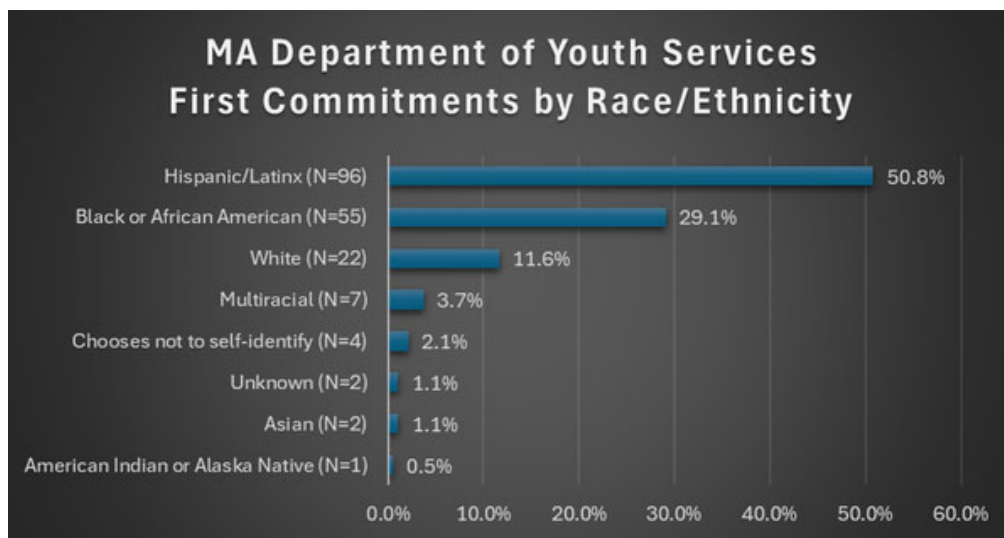
The average age of a first commitment in FY24 was 16.4 years, a slight decrease from 16.5 years in FY23.

Upon commitment to DYS’ custody, youth are assigned a caseworker who will remain assigned to them throughout the pendency of their commitment and during any period of voluntary services post-discharge. All newly committed youth undergo a comprehensive biopsychosocial assessment. At the conclusion of the assessment period, a “Staffing” meeting is held for each youth, during which their Treatment Team discusses the assessment findings regarding the youth’s strengths, assets, risks, and needs and develops treatment recommendations. The youth, their family, their attorney, and other relevant adults in the youth’s life are active participants in the Staffing. The Treatment Team’s recommendations are then considered in conjunction with a number of factors, including the youth’s Classification Grid Level, by a team of regional managers known as the Regional Review Team (RRT). The RRT determines the anticipated amount of time in treatment a youth may need to successfully return to the community and identifies the best location for that treatment.

A majority of youth in FY24 were adjudicated on offenses that fell in Grids 2 and 4.



In FY24, youth of color represented 88.4% of youth committed to DYS for the first time. According to the most recent census in 2022, youth (ages 12-20) of color represent 35.7% of the total juvenile court-aged population in Massachusetts, clearly demonstrating their over-representation in the juvenile justice system despite research that shows that White youth and youth of color commit offenses at the same rates.



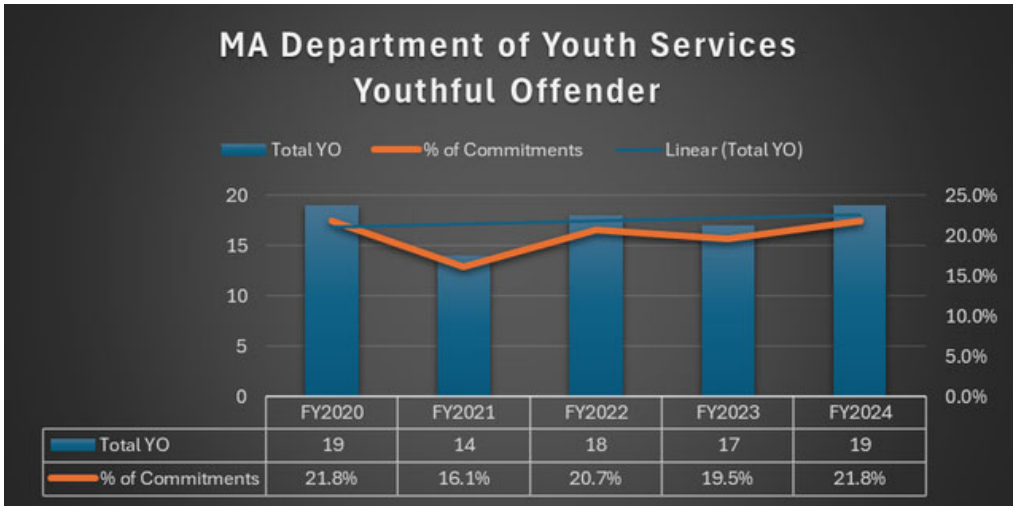
Youthful Offenders

A youth between the ages of 14 and 17 who commits an offense may be indicted and prosecuted as a youthful offender if the youth:

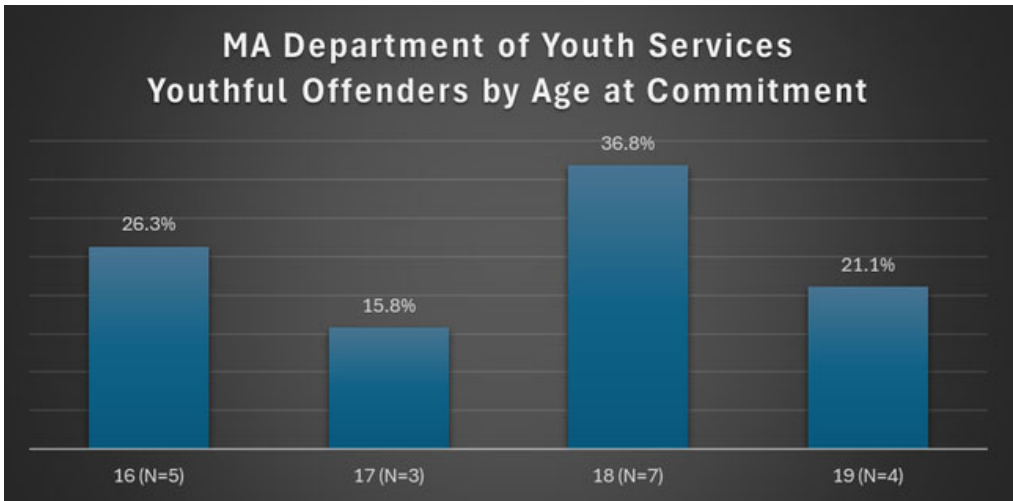
1. is accused of committing a felony under Massachusetts law and has previously been committed to DYS; or
2. is accused of committing an offense that involves the infliction or threat of serious bodily harm in violation of the law; or
3. is accused of violations of certain MA gun laws.

A youth adjudicated as a youthful offender may be committed to DYS until age 21, sentenced to the same penalty as an adult facing the same charges, or receive a disposition that combines a commitment to DYS with a suspended adult sentence.

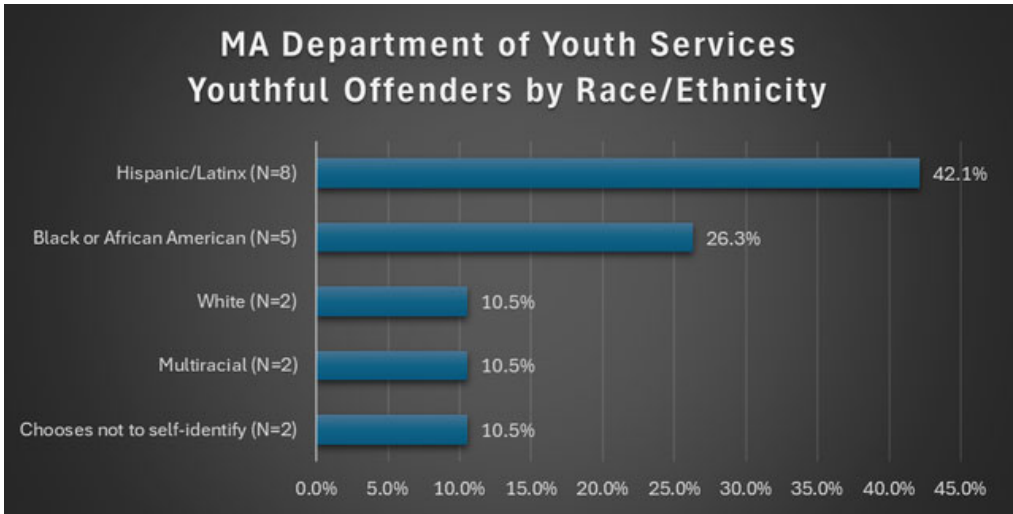
Of the 189 first-time commitments in FY24, 19 (10%) were youthful offenders.



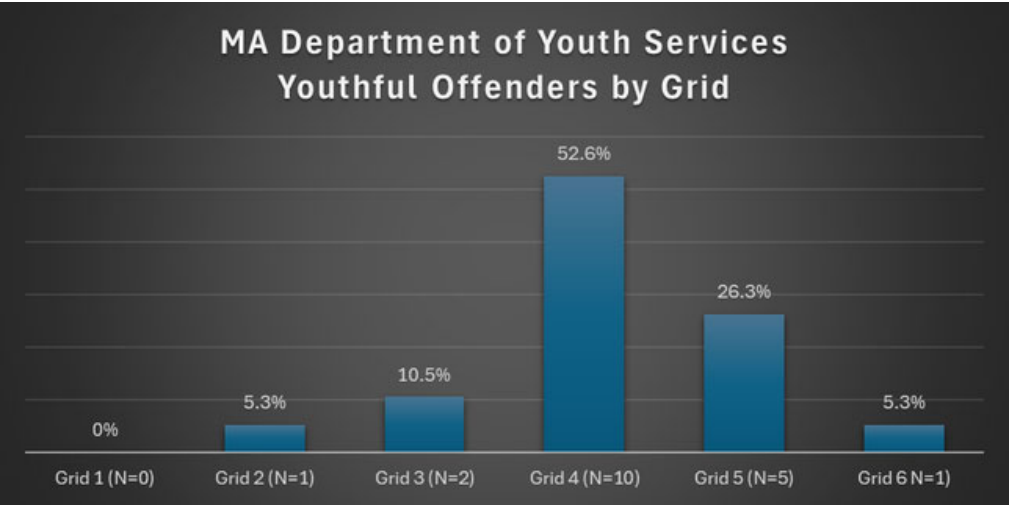
In FY24, the average age of youthful offenders at first commitment was 17.5 years.



About 80% of youthful offenders committed to DYS for the first time in FY24 were youth of color. Youth of color are overrepresented in this category compared to the percentage of the overall Massachusetts youth population.



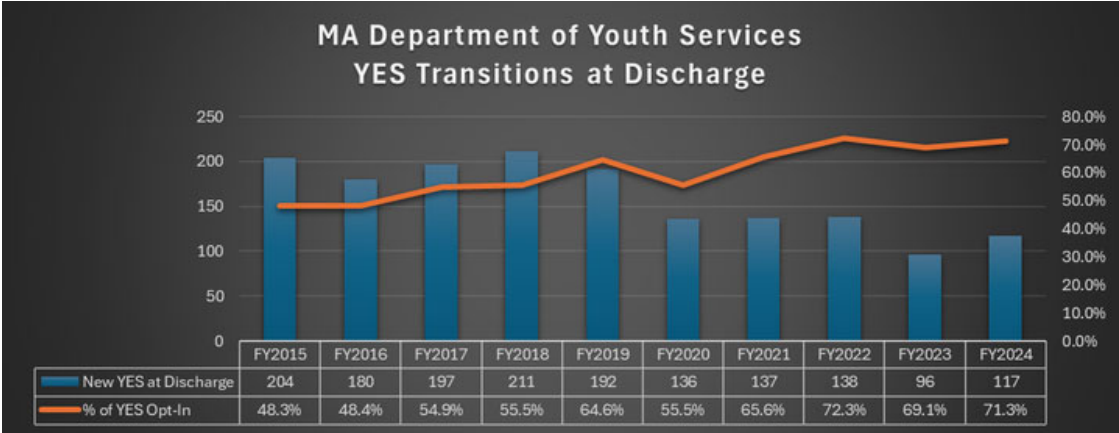
52.6% of the youthful offenders committed to DYS for the first time in FY24 were adjudicated for Grid 4 level offenses.



Youth Engaged in Services

DYS offers voluntary, post-discharge services to all committed youth until age 22. This initiative, known as Youth Engaged in Services (YES), provides transitional support and services to youth who are at the highest risk of recidivism within the first six months after discharge.

In FY24, nearly 71% of discharged youth opted into YES.



Through YES, youth work with the same Caseworker and team that they did while committed, r and enter into a voluntary agreement for transitional services to meet agreed-upon goals, such as receiving a High School diploma or a Hi-Set attainment, taking college courses, obtaining housing, or getting a paying job.

A youth’s progress in meeting their YES goals is reviewed every three months. All youth approaching the age of mandatory discharge from DYS are offered YES as part of the discharge planning process. Youth who do not enroll in YES immediately upon discharge can enroll at a later date, and youth who voluntarily leave the program may choose to reenroll at any point prior to turning 22.

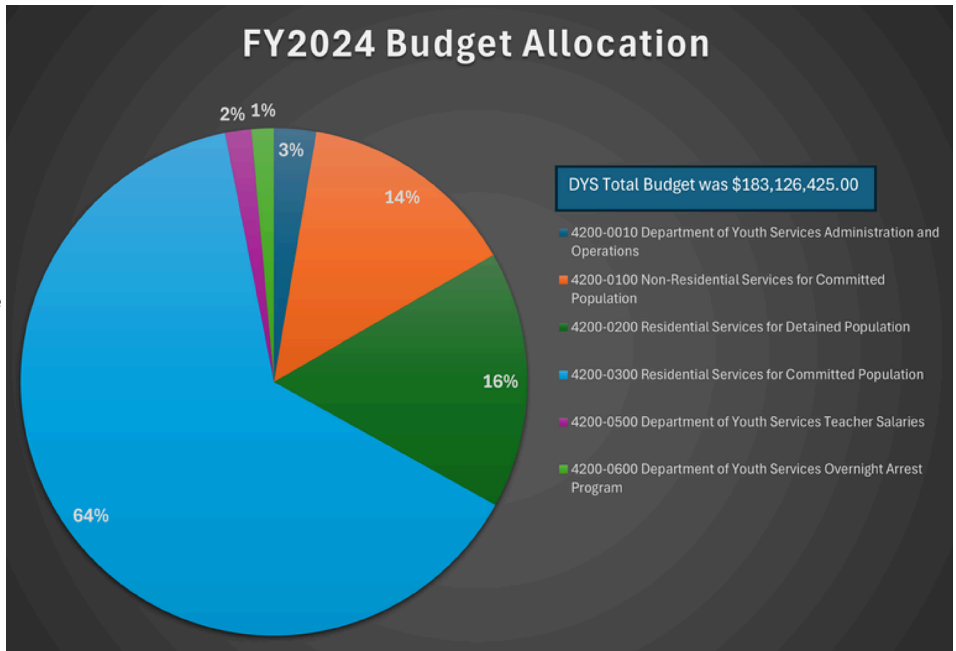
2. KEY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

FY24 Budget

The Commonwealth's Fiscal Year 2024 budget allowed DYS to continue to invest in quality education, career readiness, and employment opportunities for the young people we serve to successfully navigate the challenges of reintegrating into the community. The budget also supported DYS's Strategic Plan by funding innovative new recruitment and retention strategies for highly qualified staff necessary to operate a service continuum that supports and engages youth, families, and communities in strategies that promote positive youth development.

In Fiscal Year 2024 the Department of Youth Services Budget was \$183,126,425.00. This was broken down into:

- 63.29% for Residential Services for Committed Youth (\$116.9M)
- 16.76% for Residential Services for Detained Youth (\$29.9M)
- 14.2% for Community-based Services for Committed Youth (\$25.6M)
- 2.5% for Administration and Operations (\$4.9M)
- 1.7% for Teacher Salaries (\$3.0M)
- 1.5% for Overnight Arrest (\$2.6M)



This budget has allowed DYS to make strategic investments in evidence-based interventions and service models geared toward reducing recidivism of youth in DYS' care and custody.

Closing of the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan

DYS concluded the 2022-2024 Strategic Plan with significant progress in supporting justice-involved youth, improving community safety, and collaborating with partners to strengthen the juvenile justice system. Key efforts included providing personalized support for every young person in DYS care, fostering a resilient and effective organization, and coordinating with partners to promote equity and fairness. Throughout the plan's implementation, initiatives improved program safety, increased engagement with youth and families, and improved collaboration with contracted providers and system partners.

1. Goal: Ensure that every youth committed to DYS has the personalized support they need to successfully and safely live, learn, and work in their communities.

To support this goal, DYS introduced a new initiative in FY24 and continued to expand a key workforce development program.

Family Partners Initiative

In FY24, DYS launched the Family Partners role to improve family engagement and support. Family Partners are individuals with lived experience who provide mentorship, advocacy, and guidance throughout the commitment process. Community Clinical Coordinators oversee the Family Partners as they assist families from commitment through reintegration and connect them to resources. Family Partners also lead regional Family Advisory Councils and coordinate with community-based services to keep families informed, supported, and involved during their child’s time in DYS.

Skill Up Workforce Training Program

Throughout FY24, DYS provided workforce training through the Skill Up program for youth in both residential and community settings. This program offers job-readiness skills and career pathways tailored to each youth’s strengths and interests. In FY24, 24 statewide providers delivered 36 Skill Up programs across DYS’ five regions. By providing workforce training, DYS supports youth in preparing for and maintaining employment after their commitment.

These initiatives demonstrate DYS’s ongoing commitment to empowering youth and their families by providing the relationships, skills, and support necessary for long-term success and stability in their communities.

2. Goal: Invest in and Sustain a Healthy, Agile, and Excellent Organization

In FY24, DYS continued to invest in its staff and grow its workforce through targeted recruitment efforts and wellness initiatives that promote a culture of care, connection, and sustainability.

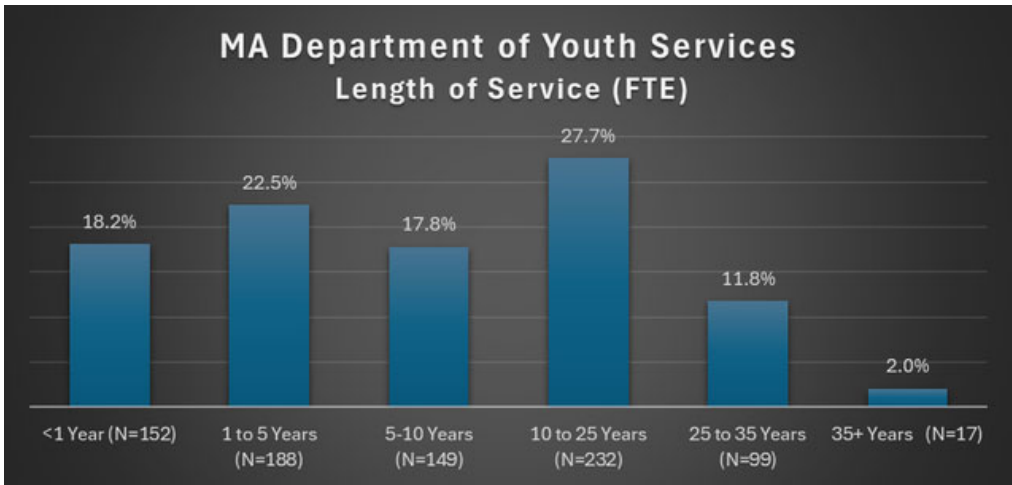
Investing in the DYS Workforce

DYS continues to invest in its workforce to support positive change. Staff use their dedication and expertise to help youth succeed in education, vocational training, and life skills development.

In FY24, DYS hired 189 new staff, including 157 direct care workers, expanding the Department's capacity to deliver consistent, high-quality services to youth.



In FY24, the average length of service for full-time employees was 11.2 years, reflecting long-term commitment and deep institutional knowledge.



Trauma Response Specialists Team: A Year of Supporting Staff

In its first full year, the DYS Trauma Response Specialist (TRS) team supported staff statewide and provided trauma-informed care, wellness education, and referrals to professional resources. Staff used these services to manage the demands of their roles.

The TRS team provided the following direct and ongoing support to DYS and provider staff throughout the year:

- Connected with 159 staff following program or community-based incidents
- Equipped 144 staff with self-care strategies to strengthen personal well-being
- Facilitated 18 referrals to the Mass4You EAP for additional professional support
- Provided non-incident-related check-ins and resources to reinforce a culture of holistic care

Together, these efforts demonstrated DYS’s commitment to nurturing a workforce that is not only well-equipped but also well-supported, an essential foundation for effective youth engagement and successful outcomes.

3. Goal: Collaborate with partners on behalf of a more equitable, fair, and supportive Juvenile Justice System

In FY24, DYS worked with state and community partners to promote equity and inclusion across the juvenile justice system. The department engaged youth and families, addressed disparities, and created safe and supportive environments for all youth.

Improving Outcomes for DYS Youth: Education, Recidivism, and Equity Insights

In October 2024, Northeastern University, in partnership with DYS and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), completed a large-scale study examining secondary and postsecondary educational outcomes and recidivism among youth involved with DYS. The study analyzed DYS and DESE data from 2012 and 2022, with a focus on identifying areas of inequity and racial disparities to inform future action. Key findings included:

- Caseworkers with whom youth were working during commitment matter for youth outcomes after DYS discharge.
- Among youth who had not received a high school attainment (a traditional diploma or passing a GED/HiSet exam), YES participation was significantly correlated with higher rates of both diploma and GED/HiSet attainment after discharge.
- From the 2015 to 2019 discharge year there was a:
 - statistically significant decreasing trend in recidivism.
 - statistically significant increasing trend in high school graduation after DYS discharge.
 - slight but statistically significant decreasing trend in HS Equivalency attainment after DYS discharge.
 - statistically significant decreasing trend in initial post-secondary enrollment after DYS discharge.
- Educational outcomes and recidivism differed based on youth birth sex, ELL status, SPED status, home region, youthful offender status, and race/ethnicity.

Promoting LGBTQ+ Inclusion

In FY24, DYS partnered with the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES) to advance equity and inclusion for LGBTQ+ youth. This initiative aligned with the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ+ Youth FY24 recommendations and focused on fostering inclusive environments that affirm LGBTQ+ identities across all DYS regions. As part of this effort, a series of Pride Posters highlighting LGBTQ+ identities and allyship were designed.

The posters, available in English, Spanish, Portuguese, Cape Verdean Creole, and Haitian Creole, were distributed and displayed across all five DYS regions. By promoting visibility, inclusion, and cultural responsiveness, this initiative contributes to the creation of welcoming spaces for youth, staff, and visitors.

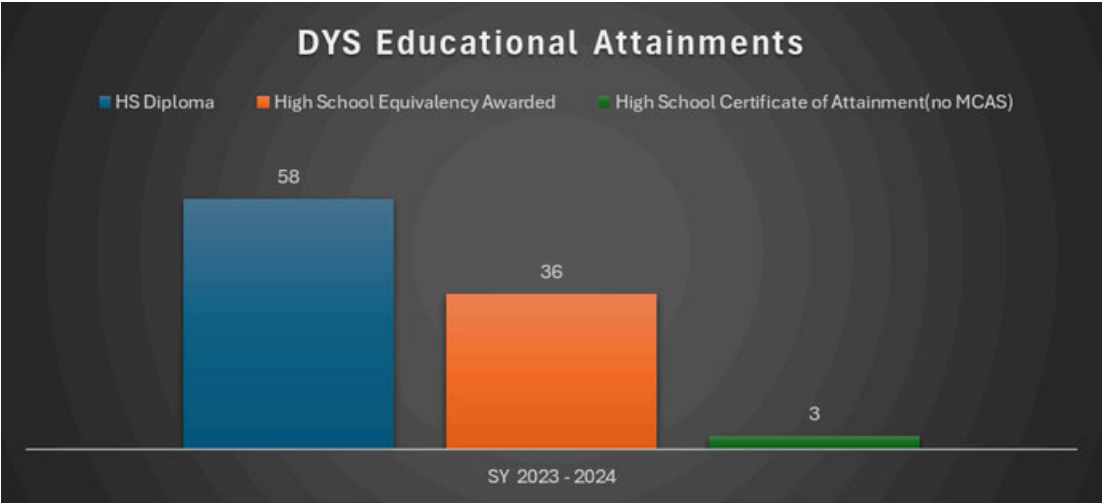
Through these efforts, DYS reinforces its commitment to building a more equitable and inclusive juvenile justice system that prioritizes the needs and voices of all youth and families.



Education

DYS offers educational programming that empowers young people to achieve their maximum potential. DYS provides general educational services to youth in DYS state and provider-operated residential programs through a contract with the Collaborative for Educational Services (“CES”). The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (“DESE”) and its Special Educational Services in Institutional Settings (“SEIS”) provide special educational services through a contract with CES.

During the 2023-2024 School Year, a total of 97 DYS youth received high school attainments (diploma, Certificate of Attainment, or equivalency).



CONTINUING THE WORK

In Fiscal Year 2024, the Department of Youth Services continued to focus on the safety, growth, and well-being of young people and their families across the Commonwealth. Through its programming and partnerships, the Department provided opportunities for skill building, connection, and positive youth development. The Department also worked to expand diversion, reduce disparities, and strengthen community-based supports as part of its ongoing efforts to improve the juvenile justice system.

The progress in this report is the result of collaboration among the Department’s staff, contracted providers, state agency partners, and community providers. Together, we are working to achieve better outcomes for the young people we serve and their families across the Commonwealth.

The Department will continue this work in the coming years, staying true to its mission to support the safety, growth, and well-being of the youth and communities we serve.