

DEPARTMENT OF YOUTH SERVICES

ANNUAL REPORT

FISCAL YEAR 2025



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INTRODUCTION FROM COMMISSIONER REARDON

Fiscal Year 2025 marked significant growth, collaboration, and investment in the young people, families, and communities we serve. Throughout the Commonwealth, DYS staff remained committed to providing opportunities for young people to learn, heal, and succeed. Their dedication, compassion, and professionalism drive positive outcomes and strengthen the relationships necessary for lasting change.

This year, DYS expanded access to services that support young people during their involvement with the Department and as they return to their communities. We enhanced community-based diversion programs, advanced health and well-being initiatives, increased educational and career opportunities, and created environments where every young person feels supported and encouraged to reach their full potential.



We further strengthened our agency by investing in the people who make this work possible. From workforce development and professional training to employee wellness initiatives, DYS remains committed to supporting the dedicated staff whose expertise, compassion, and commitment drive our mission every day. At the same time, we advanced our work in race, equity, and inclusion, assuring that our policies, practices, and programs better reflect and respond to the needs of the young people and their families, and the communities we serve.

Partnerships remained central to our work in FY25. Collaborating with families, community providers, state agencies, and juvenile justice partners, we strengthened the continuum of care for young people across Massachusetts. Through initiatives like Reimagining the DYS Continuum, we identified new opportunities to expand community-based supports and improve outcomes for young people and families.

As we reflect on the past year, we remain focused on providing every young person with the support and resources needed for a successful future. We are grateful to our staff, providers, families, and community partners for their commitment. Together, we will continue building a juvenile justice system that promotes hope, opportunity, and positive outcomes for every young person in our care.

In community,

Cecely Reardon

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Cecely Reardon', located below the printed name.

1. WHO WE SERVE

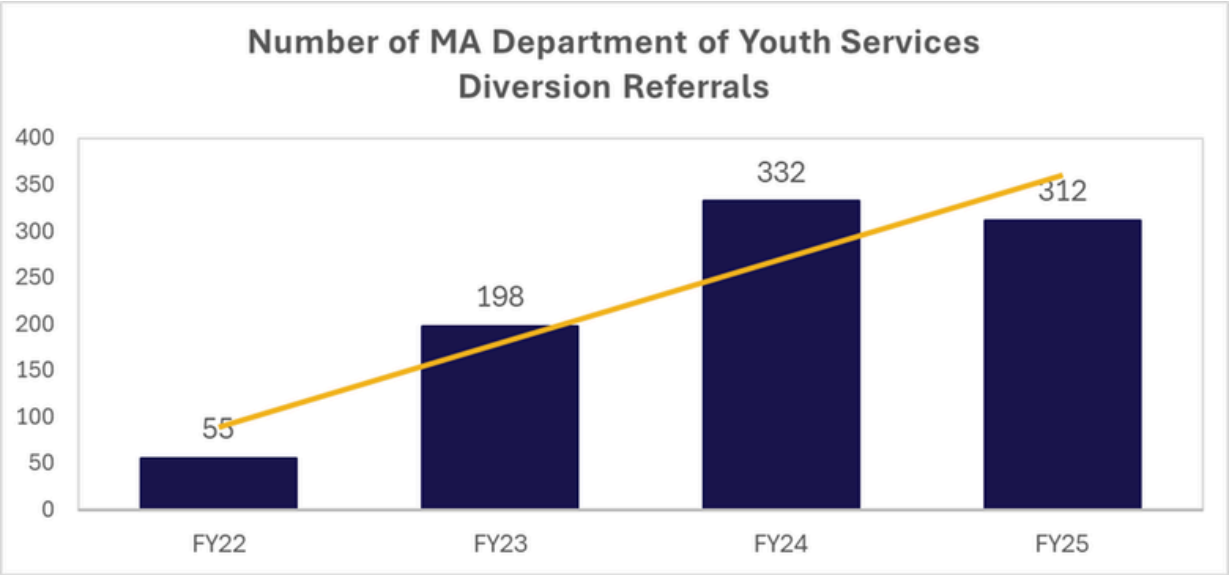
The Department of Services (DYS or ‘the Department’) is the juvenile justice agency for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Its mission is to foster positive outcomes for youth, build safer communities, and collaborate for an equitable and fair justice system. The Department of Youth Services envisions 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

DYS oversees the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP). This state-level initiative offers high-quality, evidence-based programming that can serve as an alternative to arresting or prosecuting youth in juvenile court. The primary goal of the initiative is to promote equitable access to diversion across the state as a strategy for addressing racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system.

In FY25, the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP) saw a 6.0% decrease in referrals, marking the first time that referrals have declined since the program’s inception.² This decrease can be attributed, in part, to staffing transitions in several counties, which required the MYDP to establish new relationships with its justice system partners.



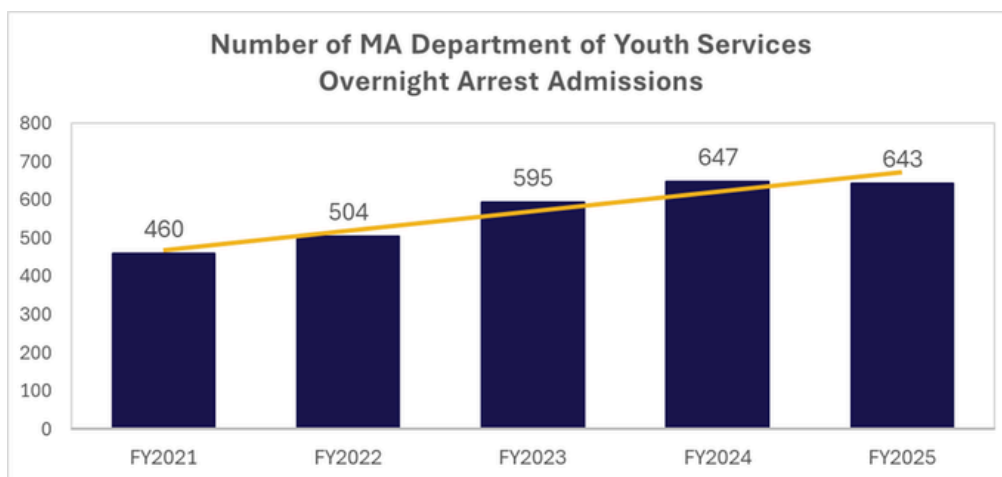
1. The Department of Youth Services is divided into five regions: Central, Metro, Northeast, Southeast, and Western. The Central Region serves Worcester County; the Metro Region serves Suffolk County; the Northeast Region serves Essex and Middlesex counties; the Southeast Region serves Barnstable, Bristol,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

2. In 2025, DYS transitioned the monitoring of MYDP data to the Department’s online case management system for more efficient, accurate data tracking. This transition involved a quality assurance process to ensure accurate referral reporting. Therefore, the referral numbers reported in prior reports may not match the numbers reported in this report.

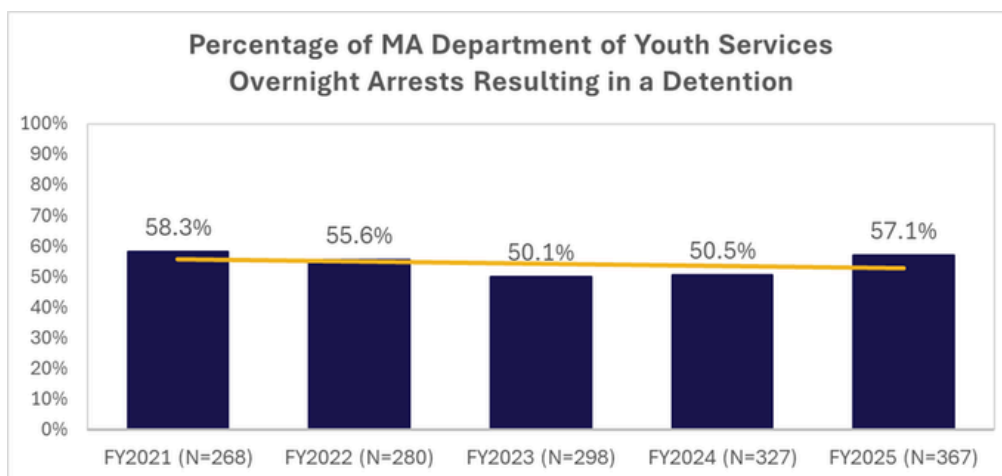
Overnight Arrests

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 the 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.

FY25 showed a less than 1% decrease in overnight arrest admissions from FY24. 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 DHS 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.



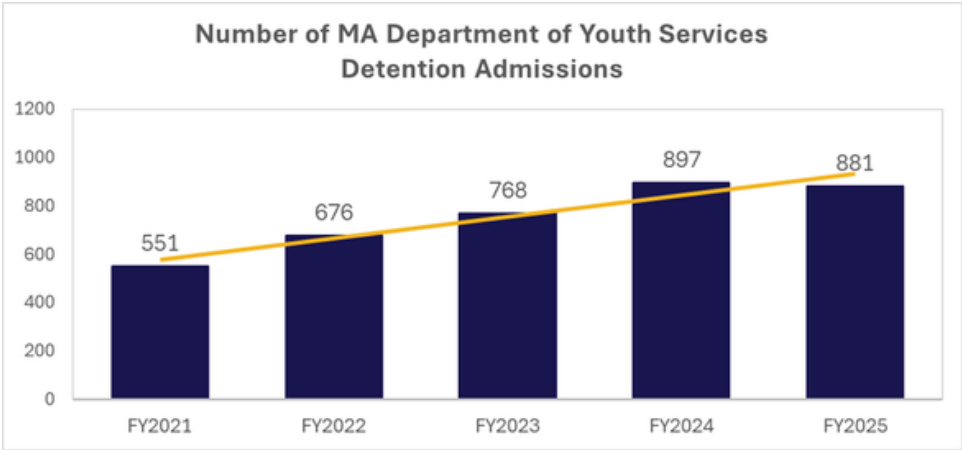
Of the 643 overnight arrest admissions in FY25, 57.1% (367) resulted in admission to detention after the youth's first appearance in court. This percentage was notably higher than the 50.5% of overnight arrests that resulted in detention in FY24. The other nearly 42.9% of FY25 admissions were released after the youth appeared in court.



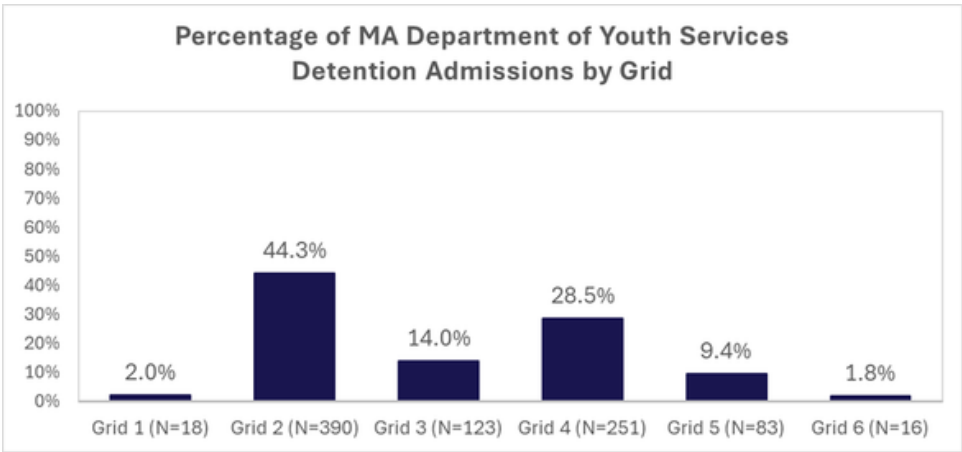
Detained Youth

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.

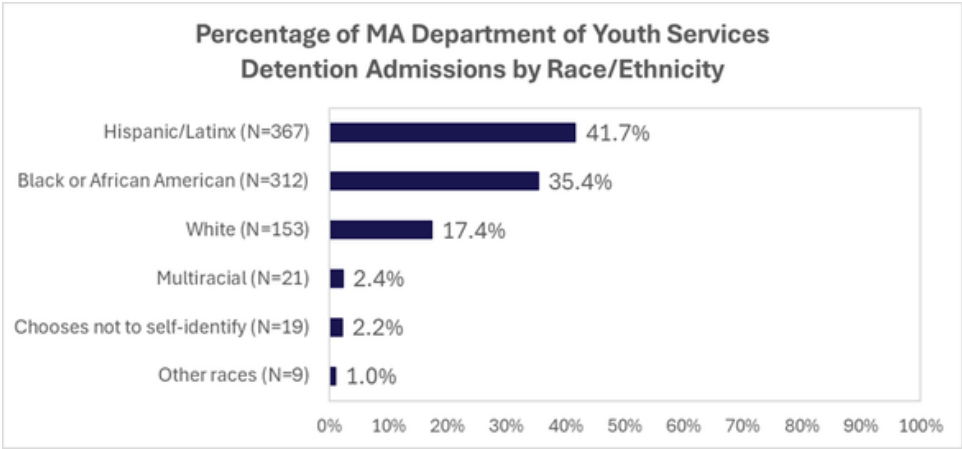
FY25 saw a 1.8% decrease in detention admissions compared to FY24. Of the 881 detention admissions in FY25, 16.7% identified as girls/women, compared to 82.2% who identified as boys/men.³



The largest percentage of youth held in detention in FY25 were charged with Grid 2 offenses, followed by Grid 4.⁴

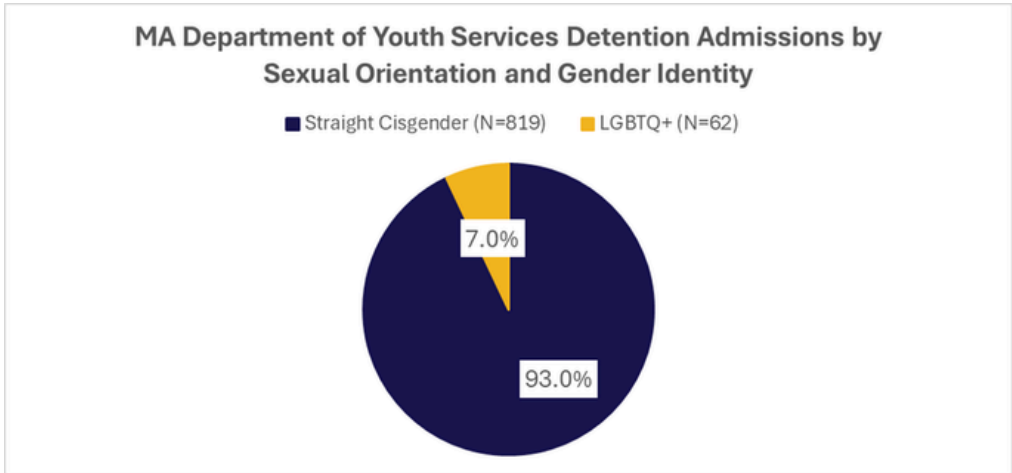


Of the detention admissions in FY25, 80.5% were for youth of color.



3. Self-identified gender identity data were missing for 10 (1.1%) of youth.
 4. 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.

DYS youth who identified as LGBTQ+ represented 7.0% of all detention admissions in FY25.



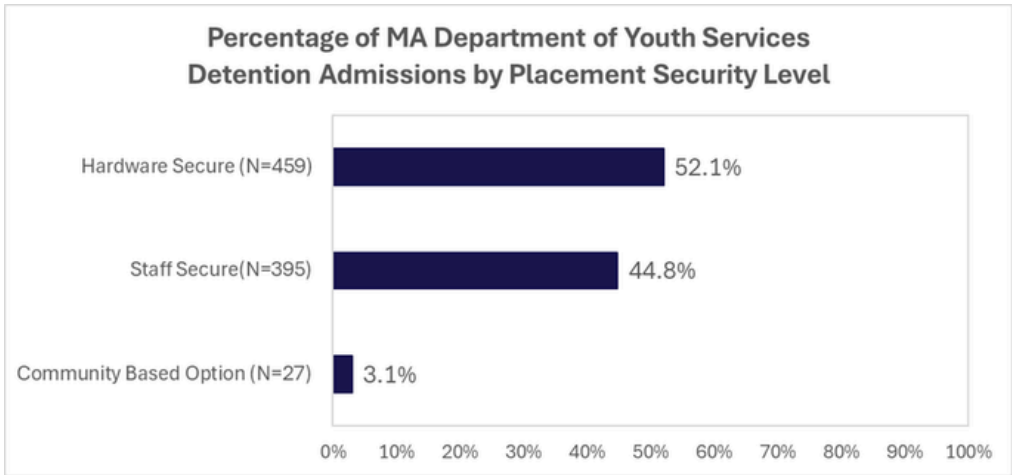
Placement

DYS operates or contracts for residential programming ranging from hardware secure to community-based placements. Youth who are detained by the courts are placed in programs by DYS using an evidence-based tool.

Hardware-secure facilities are DYS- or provider-operated facilities characterized by locked entrances and exits, other physically restrictive features, such as locked bedrooms, and procedures intended to prevent a youth from departing without the Department’s approval. About half of all detention admissions were placed in hardware secure in FY25.

Staff-secure facilities are DYS- or provider-operated facilities generally characterized by unlocked entrances, exits, and bedroom doors, in which staff provide the primary security intended to prevent a youth from departing without the Department’s approval.

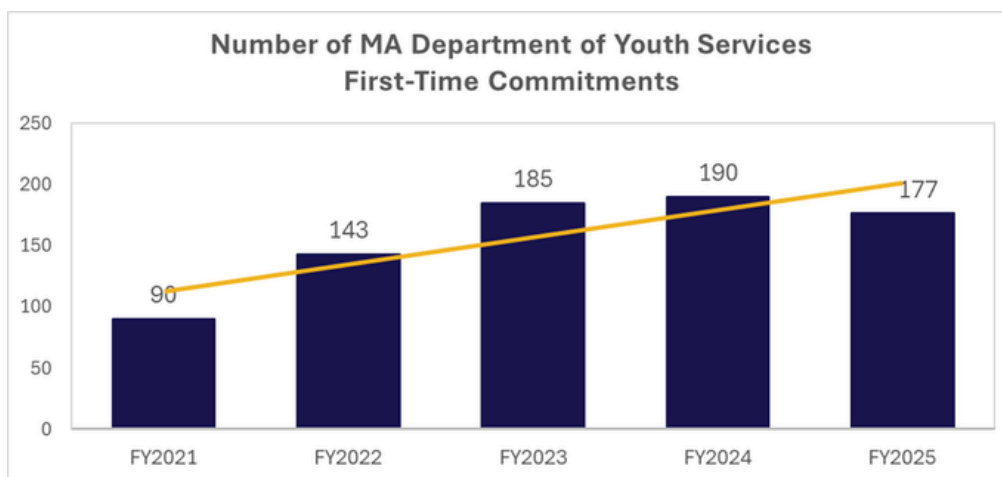
Community-based placements are non-residential programs designed to provide services to youth in various community settings, including, but not limited to, foster care, independent living, job corps, and at home with casework or DRC supervision. In FY25, only Central and Western regions have community-based options available.



Committed Youth

Youth may be committed to the Department's physical custody for treatment after adjudication as delinquent or as a youthful offender. Most youth who are adjudicated delinquent are committed to 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 18th 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 over a youth's treatment and placement.

In FY25, there was a 6.8% decrease in first-time commitments for both delinquency and youthful offender cases.



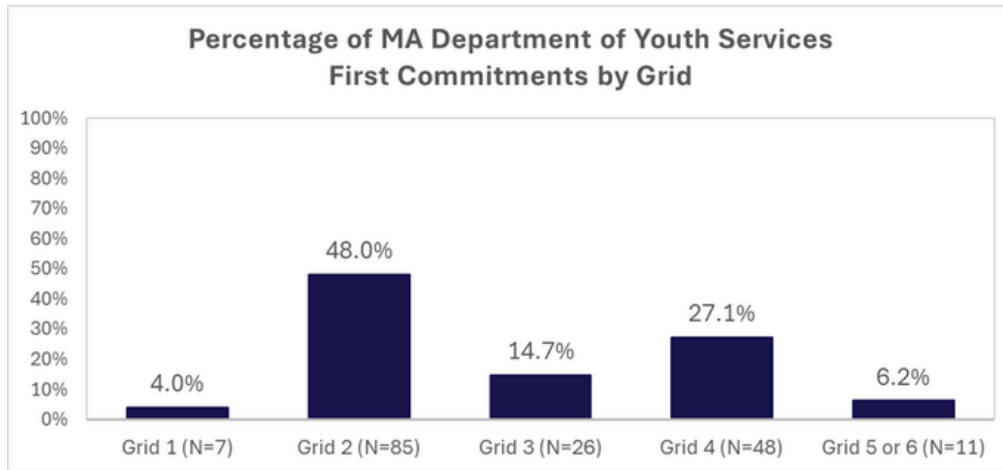
The average age of a first commitment in FY25 was 16.6 years, a slight increase from 16.4 years in FY24. Of the 177 first-time commitments in FY25, 13.0% identified as girls/women, compared to 84.7% who identified as boys/men.⁵

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 several factors, including the youth's Classification Grid Level and Youth Level of Service (YLS) score, 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 and security level for that treatment.

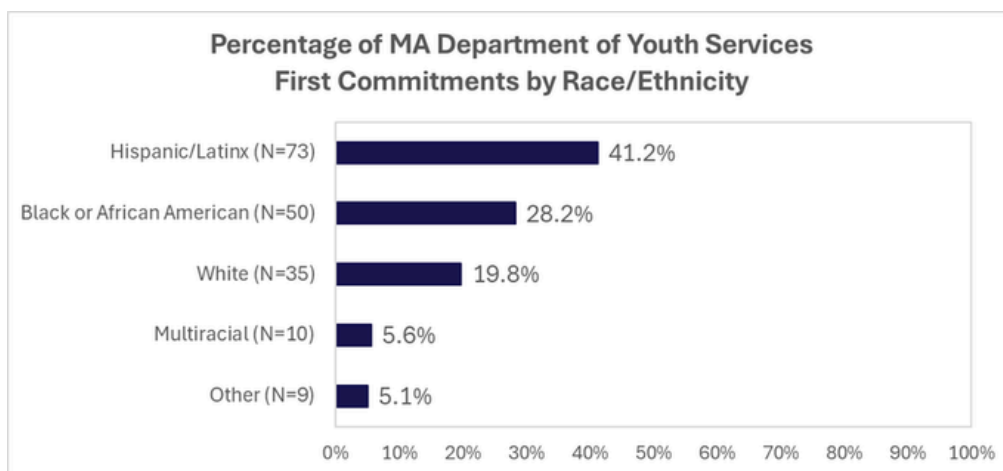
Most youth committed for the first time in FY25 were adjudicated on offenses that fell into Grids 2 and 4.⁶

5. Self-identified gender identity data were missing for 4 (2.3%) of youth.

6. Due to groups containing fewer than five youth, Grids 5 and 6 were combined in the associated chart.



In FY25, youth of color represented 76.3% of youth committed to DYS for the first time. Another 3.4% of youth chose not to self-identify their race.⁷ According to the most recent census in 2023, youth of color represent 36.5% of the total juvenile court-aged population in Massachusetts (youth 12-20). This data demonstrates the over-representation of youth of color in the juvenile justice system, despite research showing that White youth commit offenses at similar rates.⁸



Youthful Offenders

Young people between the ages of 14 and 17 who commit an offense may be indicted and prosecuted as a youthful offender if they are accused of:

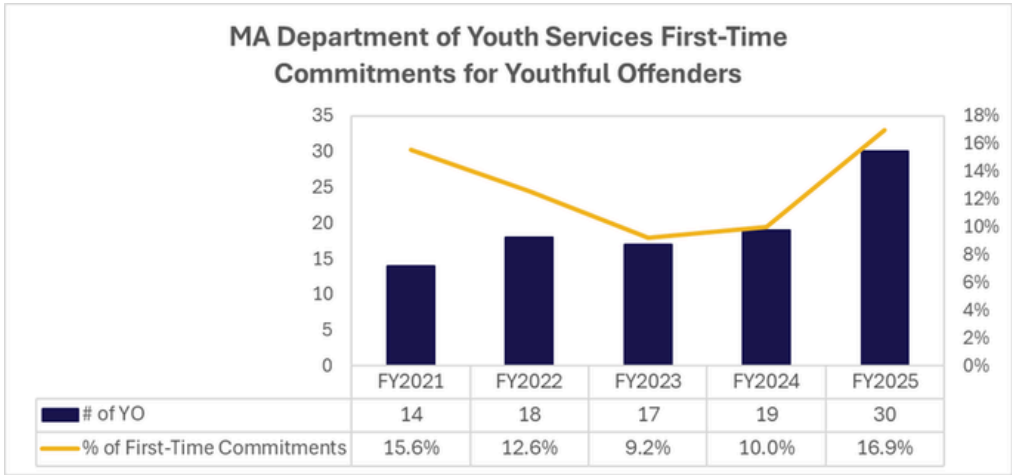
1. Committing a felony under Massachusetts law, and had previously been committed to DYS;
2. Committing an offense that involves the infliction or threat of serious bodily harm in violation of the law;
- or
3. Violating certain MA gun laws.

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.

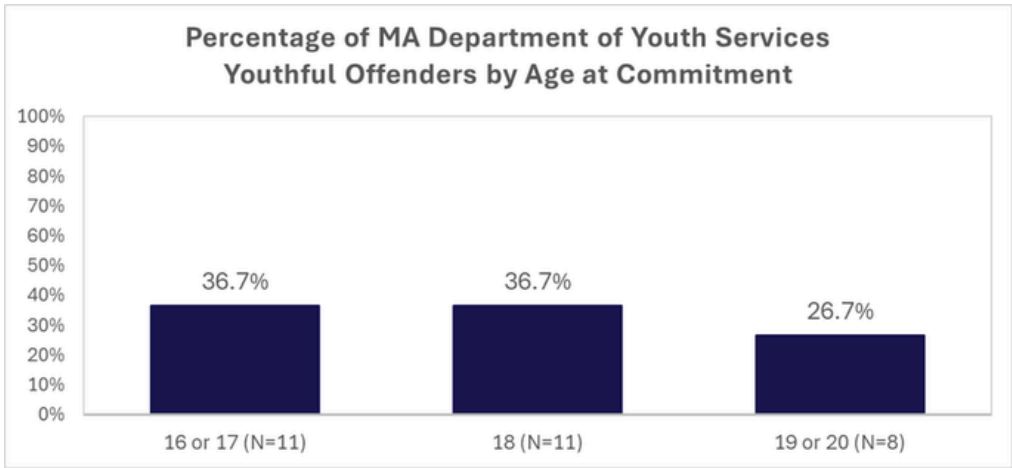
7. Due to groups containing fewer than five youth, young people who identified as American Indian or Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, chose not to self-identify, or whose race was unknown, were combined into an “Other races” group in the associated chart.

8. Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A. and Kang, W. (2025). “Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2023.” Online. Available: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>

Of the 177 first-time commitments in FY25, 30 (16.9%) were adjudicated as youthful offenders. This represents an increase in the proportion of youthful offenders committed to DYS compared to prior years.



In FY25, the average age of youthful offenders at first commitment was 17.9 years, slightly older than in FY24, when it was 17.5 years.⁹



Of youthful offenders committed to DYS for the first time in FY25, 76.7% were youth of color. Another 10.0% chose not to self-identify their race, or their race was unknown. Once again, youth of color were overrepresented in this category compared to the percentage of the overall Massachusetts youth population.

Over half of all youthful offenders committed to DYS for the first time in FY25 (56.7%) were adjudicated for Grid 4 level offenses. This was slightly higher than the 52.6% in FY24.

9. Due to groups containing fewer than five young people, ages 16 and 17, and 19 and 20, were combined in the associated chart.

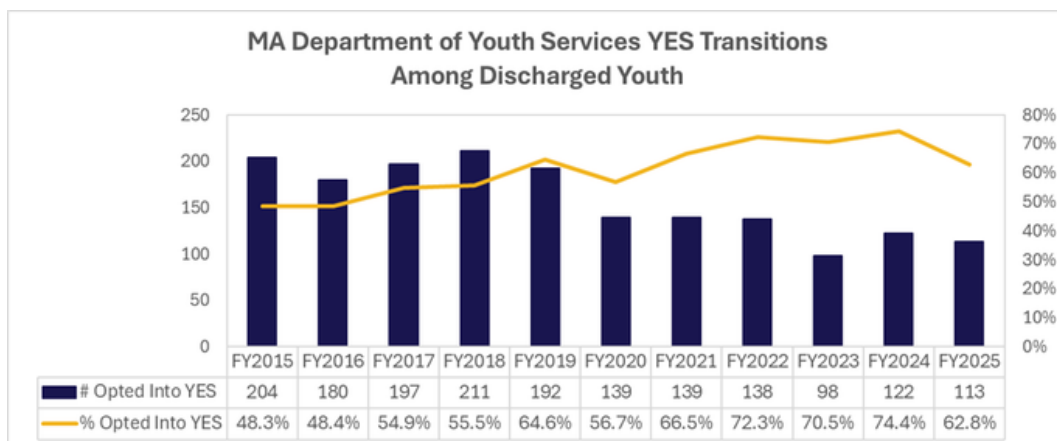
Youth Engaged in Services

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 at the highest risk of recidivism within the first six months after discharge.

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

A youth's progress toward 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.

In FY25, 62.8% of discharged youth opted into YES, which was a decrease from prior years.



2. INVESTING IN DYS

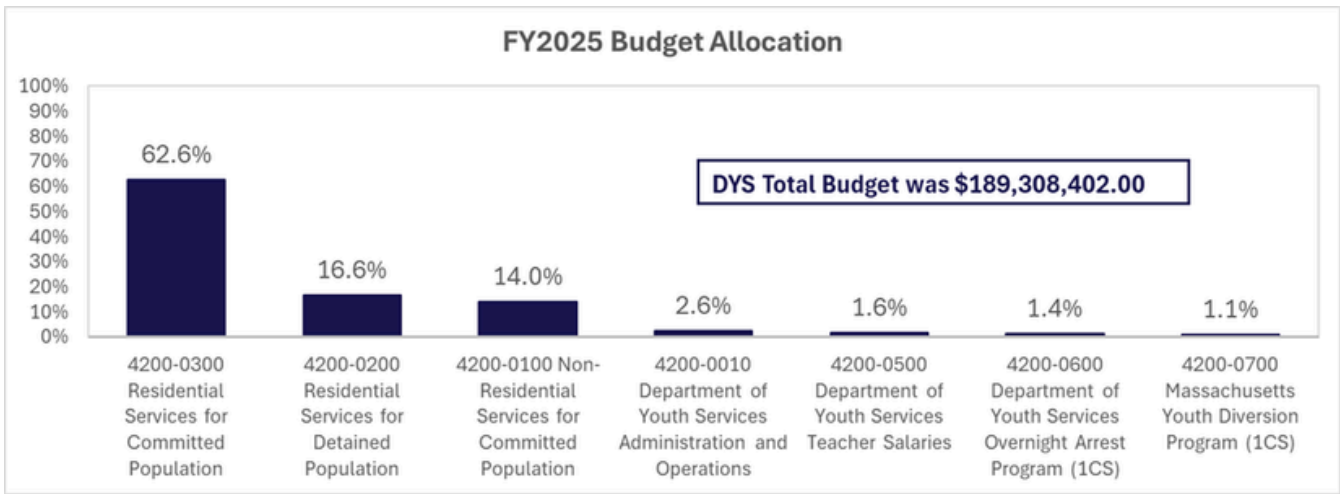
In FY25, DYS enhanced its ability to serve youth and families by strategically investing in operations and workforce development. The FY25 budget funded essential programs and services statewide and continued investments in recruitment, retention, professional development, and employee well-being ensured the Department had the necessary resources and support to fulfill the Department’s mission.

FY25 Budget

The Commonwealth’s Fiscal Year 2025 budget funded DYS’ continued investment in quality education, career readiness, and employment opportunities for the young people we serve to successfully navigate the challenges of reintegration into the community. The budget also funded 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 2025, the Department of Youth Services Budget was \$189,308,402.00. This was broken down into:

- 62.6% for Residential Services for Committed Youth (\$118.6M)
- 16.6% for Residential Services for Detained Youth (\$31.5M)
- 14.0% for Community-Based Services for Committed Youth (\$26.5M)
- 2.6% for Administration and Operations (\$5.0M)
- 1.6% for Teacher Salaries (\$3.1M)
- 1.4% for Overnight Arrest (\$2.7M)
- 1.1% for the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (\$2.0M)

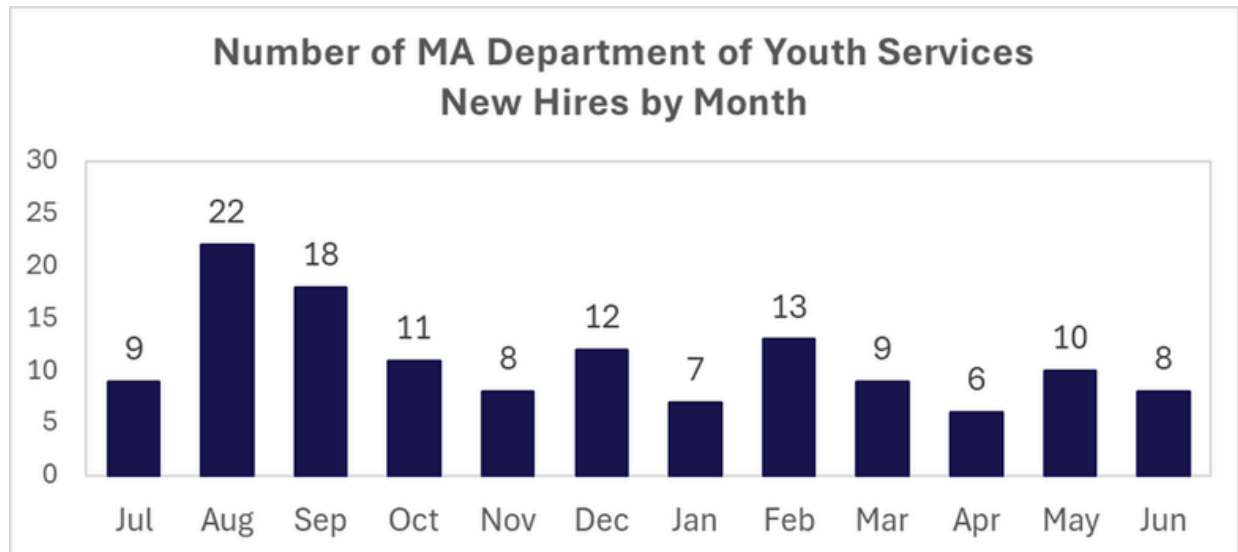


The FY25 budget funded DYS’ strategic investments in evidence-based interventions and service models geared toward reducing recidivism of youth in DYS’ care and custody.

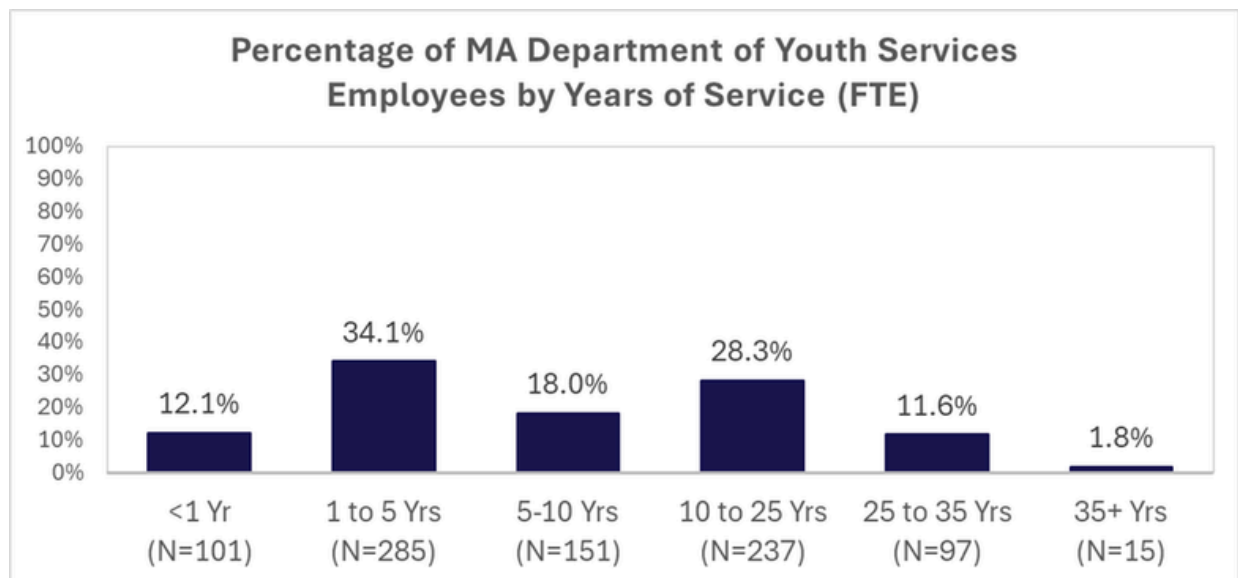
Investing in the Workforce

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 FY25, DYS hired 133 new staff into vacant positions, including 110 direct care workers, expanding the Department's capacity to deliver consistent, high-quality services to youth.



The average length of service for full-time employees was 10.7 years, slightly shorter than the 11.2 years in FY24. Still, this average length reflects long-term commitment and deep institutional knowledge.



3. KEY UPDATES AND INITIATIVES

Advancing Race, Equity and Inclusion

DYS has continued to advance equity-focused initiatives throughout FY25, supporting its commitment to fairness, transparency, and racial equity. Staff across the Department participated in learning, engagement, and collaboration opportunities while strengthening practices that support youth, families, communities, and one another. The following highlights reflect ongoing efforts to foster a more equitable and inclusive organization.

Seeing RED: Changing the Narrative Premiere

In partnership with the Massachusetts Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), DYS supported the premiere of Seeing RED: Changing the Narrative, a follow-up to the 2016 Seeing RED documentary. The new film revisits issues of racial and ethnic disparities and systemic bias through the lens of youth, families, and communities impacted by the juvenile justice system. Their stories, critiques, and recommendations serve as a direct challenge to the system to confront inequities and promote lasting change.



Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Leadership Panel included Commissioner of Probation Pamerson O. Ifill, DYS Commissioner Cecely Reardon, First Justice of the Essex Juvenile Court Kerry Ahern, then Acting Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Russell Johnston, Parent Professional Advocacy League Associate Director Meri Viano, and Department of Children and Families Commissioner Staverne Miller.

Nearly 100 guests attended the premiere, which included a Juvenile Justice and Child Welfare Leadership Panel, pictured above. Panelists included First Justice of the Essex Juvenile Court Kerry Ahern, Parent Professional Advocacy League Associate Director Meri Viano, DYS Commissioner Cecely Reardon, Commissioner of Probation Pamerson O. Ifill, Department of Children and Families Commissioner Staverne Miller, and then Acting Commissioner of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Russell Johnston. Panelists emphasized the importance of amplifying youth and family voices and shared agency-level initiatives to reduce disparities and advance equity across systems.

Addressing Racial Trauma

DYS hosted its 6th Annual Racial Trauma Conference, bringing together hundreds of staff from DYS, the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES), and Justice Resource Institute (JRI). The conference theme, Moving from Intention to Action: Healing Trauma through Connection and Community, focused on building meaningful connections, strengthening support systems, and identifying practical strategies to address racial trauma.

Youth Promote Inclusion Through Pride Initiative

During FY25, DYS continued to strengthen its commitment to creating inclusive environments for LGBTQ+ youth through its ongoing partnership with the Massachusetts Commission on LGBTQ Youth and the work of the DYS LGBTQ Task Force. The Department continued efforts to expand LGBTQ+-inclusive educational curriculum, display affirming signage across DYS programs, and strengthen policies and resources that promote belonging and ensure youth feel safe, respected, and supported.

In recognition of Pride Month, youth participating in DYS' Skill Up Career, Vocational, and Employment Services Program created Pride-themed items that promoted inclusion, equity, and belonging. Youth designed and produced tote bags, keychains, and bracelets that were shared with state leaders and partner agencies as a symbol of support for the LGBTQ+ community. As part of this initiative, participating youth met with Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll to discuss their work and the importance of creating welcoming and inclusive communities. The project provided an opportunity for youth to express their creativity, develop workforce skills, and contribute to a message of acceptance and belonging across the Commonwealth.



Lieutenant Governor Kim Driscoll and DYS youth playing ping pong after discussing LGBTQ+ related initiatives at DYS.

Advancing Racial Equity and Trauma Responsiveness Through TREE Academy

DYS advanced racial equity and trauma responsiveness by partnering with the Center on Child Wellbeing and Trauma at the Office of the Child Advocate to administer JDAI's Trauma and Racial Equity Empowerment (TREE) Academy.

TREE Academy offers training to youth-serving state employees across the Commonwealth, including trauma-responsive strategies for working with children, youth, and families. Participants also learn how racial trauma and racism affect individuals and systems, and develop internal capacity to sustain trauma-responsive practices and promote racial equity within their agencies.

More than 20 staff members from 12 state agencies and school districts participated in the spring TREE Academy cadre, sharing their knowledge through several internal TREE Academy sessions. In the fall, nearly 40 employees who work directly with young people and their families were trained in a specialized TREE Academy.



DYS Employees who work directly with young people attended the TREE Academy.

Supporting Youth Health and Well-Being

The Department of Youth Services provides comprehensive health and support services to meet the diverse needs of young people in its care. During FY25, DYS strengthened services that promote physical health, wellness, nutrition, and positive youth development. These efforts reflect the Department's commitment to providing individualized, high-quality care that supports the safety, growth, and well-being of every young person served.

Bridge Clinic Expansion

IHealth Services, in partnership with the UMass Chan Medical School Psychiatry Department, launched a pilot bridging clinic to support youth transitioning from DYS residential programs to the community in the Central Region. The pilot Bridge Clinic provides virtual follow up psychiatric care and medication management until the youth is transitioned to a psychiatrist in the community.

Between August 2024 and March 2025, 13 youth were referred to and enrolled in the Bridge Clinic. A total of 37 appointments were scheduled, with each youth attending an average of three visits. The average time from referral to transition to a community provider was 60 days.

To improve the program's reach and impact, the Bridge Clinic is considering expansion into additional regions. This would allow more youth to access and benefit from these services.

Comprehensive Sleep Recommendations

At the end of FY25, Health Services received funding from the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) to support sleep hygiene initiatives in DYS programs. The funds were used to purchase sleep-related items such as weighted blankets, sound machines, eye pillows, essential oils, bean bag chairs, and therapeutic coloring books. These resources are intended to reduce insomnia and anxiety and may also support mindfulness activities. DYS is in the process of drafting a Sleep Policy, detailing best practices to assist young people in its care and custody to have a restful night's sleep while in residential placement. The policy is expected to be finalized in FY26.

Supporting Youth Wellness Through Sports Nutrition

DYS launched a youth wellness pilot program focused on sports nutrition. The nutrition, food services, and recreation departments collaborated to promote healthy eating habits among youth by integrating recreation and wellness. The program uses the WAVE Sport Nutrition curriculum from Oregon State University to offer weekly workshops on hydration, pre-exercise nutrition, and recovery nutrition. Each 30 to 45-minute session includes hands-on activities, presentations, and self-assessment tools.

41 participants from all five regions joined the pilot. Afterward, 22 completed a survey. All respondents were satisfied with the program, and most would recommend it to others. Participants highlighted the "hands-on nutrition foods and drinks," which motivated them to "learn a lot about nutrition" and helped keep them "out of trouble" and away from negative thoughts.

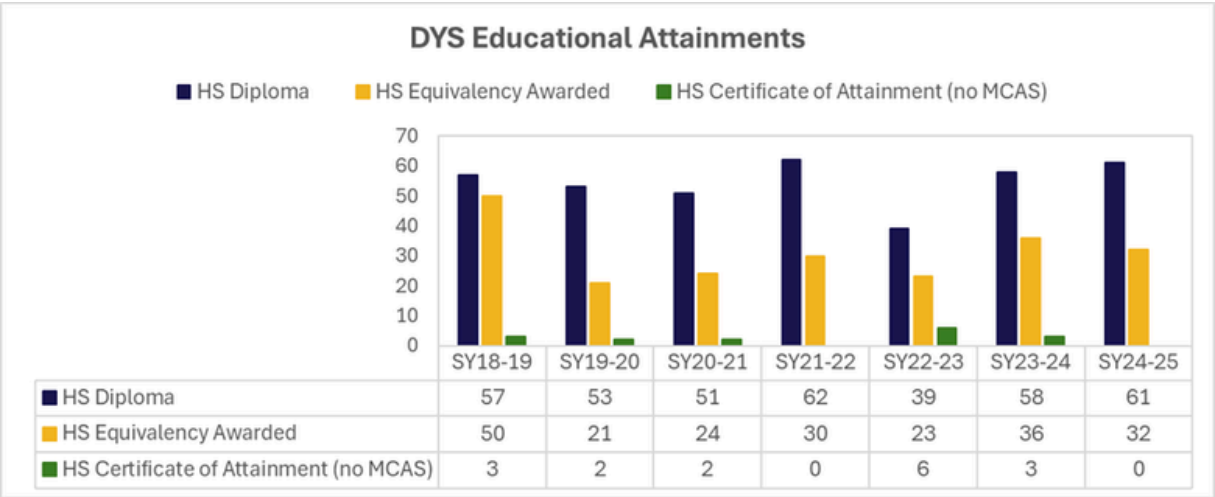
Expanding Educational and Career Opportunities

The Department of Youth Services is dedicated to offering young people educational and workforce development opportunities that prepare them for success after DYS. In FY25, the Department enhanced programs in education, career exploration, technical training, and employment readiness to help youth gain new skills, achieve academically, and build pathways to employment and independence.

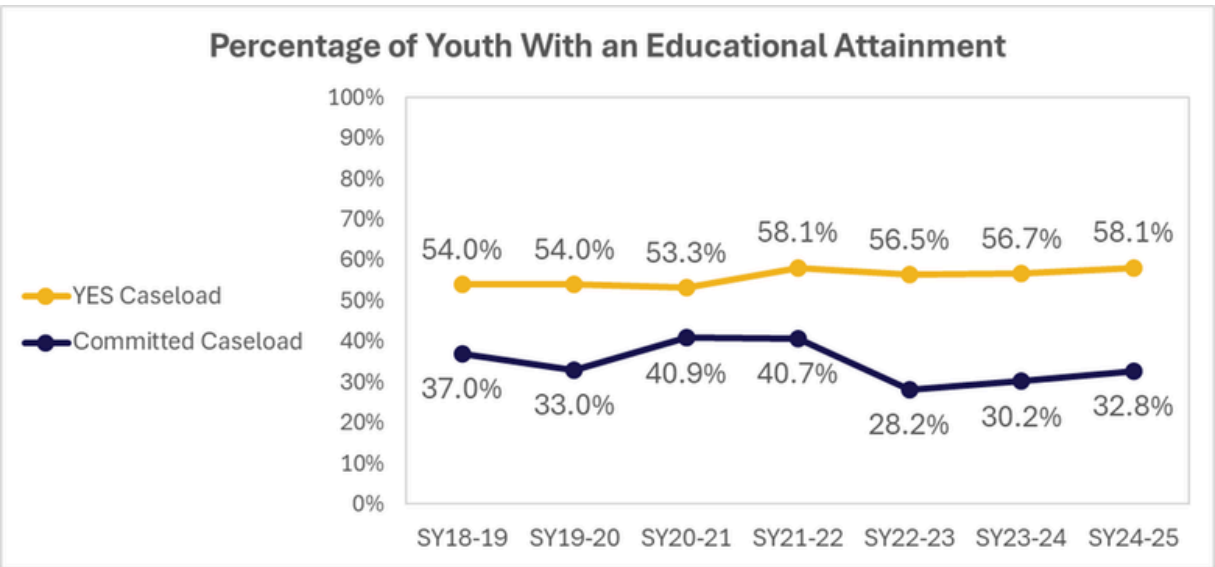
Education

DYS offers educational programming that empowers young people to achieve their maximum potential. DYS provides general educational services to youth in state- and provider-operated residential programs through a contract with the Collaborative for Educational Services (CES). Additionally, 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 2024-2025 School Year, 93 DYS youth received high school attainments (diploma, Certificate of Attainment, or equivalency).



The percentage of youth served by DYS with an educational attainment increased in the 2024-2025 School Year: 58.1% of youth who opted into YES and 32.8% of committed youth had earned an educational attainment.



Career, Vocational, and Employment Services

The DYS Skill Up Career, Technical, and Workforce Training and Employment Services Program (Skill Up) provides workforce training opportunities for youth up to 22 years of age in both residential and community-based settings.

In FY25, Skill Up contracted with 17 providers, who operated 23 programs statewide. The program established 14 volunteer provider partnerships, expanding access to workforce training for DYS youth. Career Navigators supported about 488 youth, connecting them with career exploration, training, and employment resources.

DYS created a statewide Skill Up Program Directory to enhance coordination and resource sharing among regional programs, improving service access and outcomes for youth. During the year, 194 youth participated in hands-on employment training in fields such as culinary arts, carpentry, bicycle repair, barbershop immersion, silk screening, horticulture, and maintenance.

Strengthening Partnerships and Systems

Collaboration remains central to the Department of Youth Services' mission to support young people, families, and communities across the Commonwealth. In FY25, DYS strengthened partnerships with families, community providers, state agencies, and juvenile justice stakeholders. The Department advanced initiatives to improve services, expand community-based opportunities, and enhance operations. These efforts reinforced the continuum of care and DYS' commitment to providing responsive, equitable, and effective services for the youth and families we serve.

Reimagining the Continuum

In FY25, the Department of Youth Services advanced its strategic plan through the Reimagining the DYS Continuum initiative. DYS partnered with Strategy Matters to convene approximately 50 representatives from juvenile justice and youth-serving organizations statewide, along with internal leadership, to establish a shared purpose, assess system challenges, identify collaborative strategies to improve services and outcomes for youth while reducing reliance on residential placements and increasing community programming.

These discussions produced consensus-driven goals and strategies that will guide future efforts to strengthen the continuum of care for youth and families across the Commonwealth.

Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program Expansion

In FY25, the Massachusetts Youth Diversion Program (MYDP) expanded access to individualized, evidence-based diversion opportunities for youth statewide. The program launched in Suffolk County with services from RFK Community Alliance, in Norfolk County with Bay State Community Services, and in Berkshire County with the Brien Center. As MYDP grows, it will prioritize strengthening partnerships and increasing engagement with courts and law enforcement in these counties to support ongoing implementation and access to diversion services.

CONTINUING THE WORK

In Fiscal Year 2025, the Department of Youth Services reinforced its commitment to the safety, growth, and well-being of young people, families, and communities across the Commonwealth. By investing in its workforce, expanding community-based opportunities, enhancing education and wellness initiatives, and advancing equity, DYS worked to ensure every young person has access to the resources and support needed to succeed.

The accomplishments highlighted in this report reflect the collective efforts of DYS staff, contracted providers, state agency partners, community organizations, and families, all of whom remain essential partners. Their commitment to collaboration, innovation, and positive youth development continues to improve outcomes for DYS young people.

Looking ahead, DYS remains committed to advancing a juvenile justice system that provides every young person with the support, opportunities, and resources needed for success, while continuing to strengthen the communities we serve.