



Equity in Focus

MASSACHUSETTS JUVENILE JUSTICE DATA BRIEF

County Level Breakdowns Fiscal Year 2025

*A Three-Part Series from the
Office of the Child Advocate*

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mass.gov/oca/jjbriefts

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About the Office of the Child Advocate

The [Office of the Child Advocate](#) (OCA) is an independent executive branch agency with oversight and ombudsperson responsibilities, established by the Massachusetts Legislature in 2008. The OCA’s mission is to ensure that children receive appropriate, timely and quality state services, with a particular focus on ensuring that the Commonwealth’s most vulnerable and at-risk children have the opportunity to thrive. Through collaboration with public and private stakeholders, the OCA identifies gaps in state services and recommends improvements in policy, practice, regulation, and/or law. The OCA also serves as a resource for families who are receiving, or are eligible to receive, services from the Commonwealth.

Background

This brief is one in a three-part series from the Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) that explores disparities in Massachusetts' juvenile justice system, including those related to geography, race, and gender.

This brief analyzes Massachusetts juvenile justice system data from fiscal year 2025 (July 1, 2024 – June 30, 2025) at the court county level.¹ The data, which is presented by key decision points² and adjusted for population rates for youth (12-17) and case volume at preceding process points,³ **highlights how similarly situated youth may experience the juvenile justice system differently depending on where they live.**

The data findings in this report raise important questions about equity and consistency in how Massachusetts youth experience the juvenile justice system. Disparities across counties may stem from:

1. Differences in youth offending behavior;
2. Uneven access to community-based diversion programs;
3. Variations in policy and use of discretion across the state's 300+ police departments and 11 district attorney's offices; and/or
4. Individual or institutional decision-making by police, clerks, assistant district attorneys, and judges.

Stakeholders should use this data, and [the corresponding data summary infographics](#), as a **starting point for continued inquiry**—to identify what drives system involvement and ensure that responses to youth are **fair, consistent, and community-oriented**. Advancing this understanding is essential to **promoting public safety, reducing unnecessary court involvement, and improving outcomes** for youth across Massachusetts.

¹ The Massachusetts Juvenile Court consists of 11 divisions across the state: combining Franklin and Hampshire counties, and Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket counties along with the town of Plymouth.

² Please refer to the Board's Annual Report for a full description of each process point: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/ijpad-2024-annual-report/download>

³ County population rates are based on OJJDP CY23 estimates retrieved from EZAPOPOP here: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>; For underlying counts of all the data in this report, see Appendix A.

Data Findings

In FY25, juvenile justice system use varied widely from county to county across all process points. Key data findings include:

1. **High use of custodial process points:** Suffolk County stood out for its high rates of arrests, pretrial detention, and DYS commitments. Suffolk County's higher arrest rate and lower summons rate may indicate an overreliance on arrests and an opportunity for improved law enforcement practices. This elevated use of custodial measures is partly tied to a higher percentage of Suffolk's arraignments being for a felony than other counties. However, peer counties such as Bristol had a similar proportion of arraignments for felonies, yet had lower arrest and pretrial detention rates than Suffolk.
2. **Variation in arraignment rates:** Several counties—including Berkshire, Franklin/Hampshire, Hampden, and Plymouth—showed disproportionately high rates of arraignments relative to filings. In other words, prosecutors in these counties were more likely to arraign a case that has been filed than divert/dismiss such a case. For Plymouth County this likely reflects the county's comparatively low filing rate.⁴ However, that is not the case for Berkshire, Franklin/Hampshire, or Hampden counties.
3. **Differences in pretrial monitoring/supervision and detention:** Franklin/Hampshire, Plymouth, Suffolk, and Worcester counties used pretrial detention and pretrial conditions of release more frequently than releasing youth on personal recognizance. Suffolk and Worcester counties relied heavily on pretrial detention at this phase, while Franklin/Hampshire and Plymouth counties relied on setting pretrial conditions of release.
4. **Uneven dismissal practices:** Suffolk County had the highest case dismissal rate in FY25. Meanwhile, Plymouth County dismissed cases at the lowest rate in the state.

⁴ As further discussed below, if more cases are screened out prior to filing, as appears to be the case in Plymouth, that may result in a higher proportion of cases that are filed proceeding to arraignment.

Recommendations

To ensure youth are treated equitably across the Commonwealth, the OCA urges local practitioners – police departments, clerk’s offices, district attorney offices, local defense bars, probation offices, and judges – to look carefully at data in their county, and when possible compare it to any agency, office, or individual level data that may exist. In particular, the OCA recommends that local practitioners consider:

- **Are there opportunities to increase the use of diversion**, particularly for cases that are arraigned but ultimately dismissed?
- **Are there opportunities to reduce the level of intensity of system involvement?** For example, are there situations where a youth is arrested and they could instead be summonsed? Are there situations where a youth is detained and could instead be released on conditions, or where they are placed on pretrial conditions of release and they could instead be released on personal recognizance? There is a significant body of research demonstrating the harmful impacts that justice system involvement can have on youth – even if a youth is not diverted, reducing the amount and intensity of system contact can help reduce those risks of harm.⁵
- **Is there variation *within* an office or county that may account for some of these local trends?** For example, are some police officers or departments within a county more likely to use an arrest versus summons than others? Are some Assistant District Attorneys more likely to offer diversion than others? If so, are there opportunities to strengthen policies, training, and quality assurance practices to ensure a reasonably equitable response across an office, understanding that policies cannot capture every nuance of a particular case or situation?

⁵ Gilman, A. B., Hill, K. G., & Hawkins, J. D. (2015). When is a youth’s debt to society paid? Examining the long-term consequences of juvenile incarceration for adult functioning. *Journal of Developmental and Life-Course Criminology*, 1(1), 33-47. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40865-015-0002-5>; Loughran, T. A., Mulvey, E. P., Schubert, C. A., Fagan, J., Piquero, A. R., & Losoya, S. H. (2009). Estimating a dose response relationship between length of stay and future recidivism in serious juvenile offenders. *Criminology*, 47(3), 699-740. DOI: 10.1111/j.1745-9125.2009.00165.x; Hjalmarsson, R. (2008). Criminal justice involvement and high school completion. *Journal of Urban Economics*, 63(2), 613-630. DOI: 10.1016/j.jue.2007.04.003; Barnert, E. S., Dudovitz, R., Nelson, B. B., Coker, T. R., Biely, C., Li, N., & Chung, P. J. (2017). How does incarcerating young people affect their adult health outcomes? *Pediatrics*, 139(2). <https://doi.org/10.1542/peds.2016-2624>; Legewie, J., & Fagan, J. (2019). Aggressive Policing and the Educational Performance of Minority Youth. *American Sociological Review*, 84(2), 220-247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419826020>; Jackson, D. B., Fahmy, C., Vaughn, M. G., & Testa, A. (2019). Police Stops Among At-Risk Youth: Repercussions for Mental Health. *The Journal of Adolescent Health: Official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 65(5), 627–632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.05.027>; Geller A. (2021). Youth–Police Contact: Burdens and Inequities in an Adverse Childhood Experience, 2014–2017. *American Journal of Public Health*, 111(7), 1300–1308. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306259>; Aazami, A., Valek, R., Ponce, A. N., & Zare, H. (2023). Risk and Protective Factors and Interventions for Reducing Juvenile Delinquency: A Systematic Review. *Social Sciences*, 12(9), Article 474. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci12090474>; Wilson, D. B., Brennan, I., & Olaghere, A. (2018). Police-initiated diversion for youth to prevent future delinquent behavior: a systematic review. *Campbell Systematic Reviews*, 14(1), 1–88. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.5>

Finally, the OCA notes that data that would identify any disparities by race/ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation at the county level is limited; because it is not available for all process points it has been excluded from this analysis.⁶ However, as further discussed in [the companion data briefs](#) in this series, there are significant demographic disparities at the statewide level, and those are likely replicated at the local level in some if not all counties. Therefore, the OCA also recommends that practitioners consider ways to identify and address demographic disparities in decision-making at the county level as well.

The Initial Stages of the Juvenile Justice System⁷

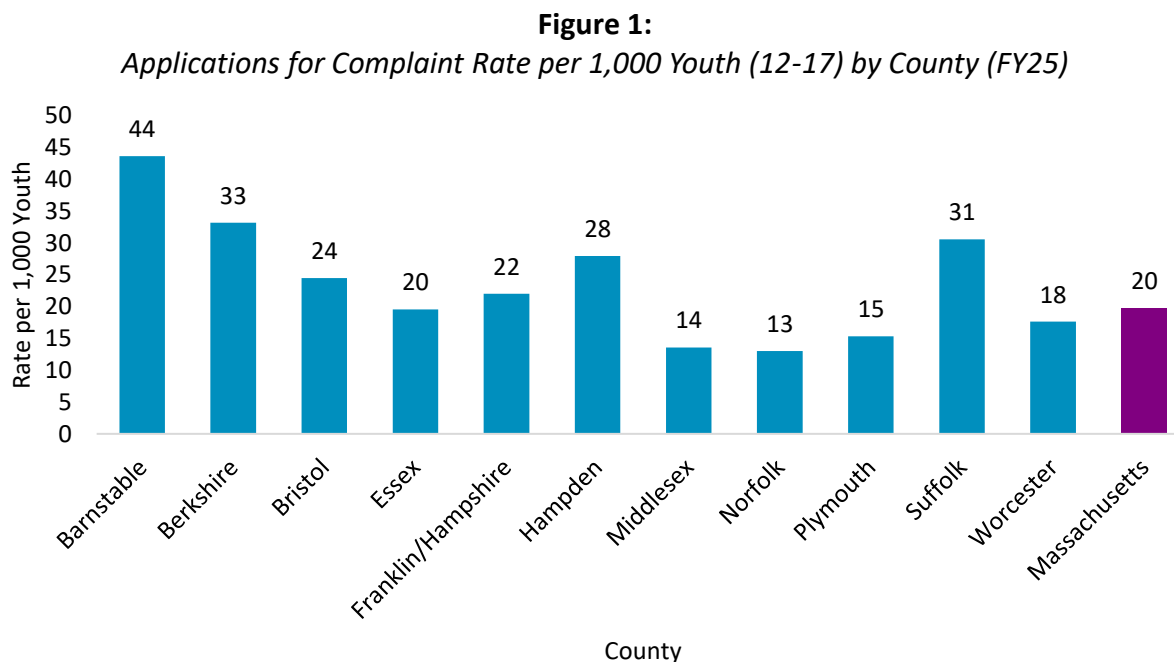


Youth enter the juvenile court system through an “application for complaint.” In several counties— including Barnstable, Berkshire, Bristol, Hampden, and Suffolk—these filings occurred at disproportionately high rates (adjusting for the size of each county’s youth population) compared to the overall rate for the state.⁸

⁶ Data from DYS related to the use of detention broken down by county and various demographic measures is available at <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/jdai-dashboard>.

⁷ The initial phases of the juvenile justice system include data on the use of applications for complaint including the manner in which youth come to the Juvenile Court’s attention (i.e., via an arrest or summons), and delinquency filings.

⁸ Rates are calculated per 1,000 youth ages 12–17 using county-level youth population estimates; the statewide rate is calculated using the total statewide youth population.



Source: data retrieved on 10/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/DemographicsofSelectedJuvenileMatters/JuvenileMattersbyRaceEthn>.

The **way a youth enters the juvenile court matters**. In Massachusetts, an application for complaint can be initiated by a police officer **issuing a summons** for the youth to appear before the Juvenile Court on a set date or **physically arresting the youth**.

Massachusetts police officers are trained that a summons is the preferred method of bringing a juvenile to court, and they are instructed to reserve arrests for when an alleged offense threatens public safety, or if there is “reason to believe the child will not appear upon a summons.”⁹

This is because being arrested can be harmful for youth. Research shows that youth who are arrested are more likely to experience negative outcomes such as school disengagement,¹⁰

⁹ In certain instances, police officers do not have the option to seek a summons and must use an arrest (e.g., violation of an Abuse Prevention Order (209A) or Harassment Prevention Order (258E)); this statutory requirement applies to adults as well as juveniles. For all other offenses, however, police officers have the sole discretionary authority to decide whether to arrest a youth, seek a summons, or give them a warning or offer diversion. MPTC Legal Standards & Procedures for Police Interactions with Youth, September 2021.

¹⁰ Del Toro, J., Jackson, D. B., & Wang, M.-T. (2022). The policing paradox: Police stops predict youth’s school disengagement via elevated psychological distress. *Developmental Psychology*, 58(7), 1402–1412. <https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0001361>; Kirk, D. S., & Sampson, R. J. (2013). Juvenile Arrest and Collateral Educational Damage in the Transition to Adulthood: a Magazine of Theory and Practice. *Sociology of Education*, 86(1), 36–62. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040712448862>

psychological harm,¹¹ and report mental health concerns.¹² Research also documents the harms of negative interactions between police officers and youth, noting that the youth involved can experience negative short and long term outcomes as a result, such as poor emotional well-being, physical health, and poor educational outcomes.¹³ Further, these interactions can often escalate, regardless of the initial intention of those involved, posing risks to both youth and officers.¹⁴

Arrests can also be harmful for society: research indicates that youth who are arrested are *more likely* to commit a future offense than youth who receive a summons.¹⁵ Indeed, a large body of research shows that diverting youth *earlier* in the juvenile justice process (such as pre-arrest) is associated with positive long-term outcomes for the young person and public safety.¹⁶

¹¹ Humiliation: Its Nature and Consequences. (2010). Journal of the American Academy of Psychiatry and the Law Online. https://www.academia.edu/7299348/Humiliation_Its_Nature_and_Consequences

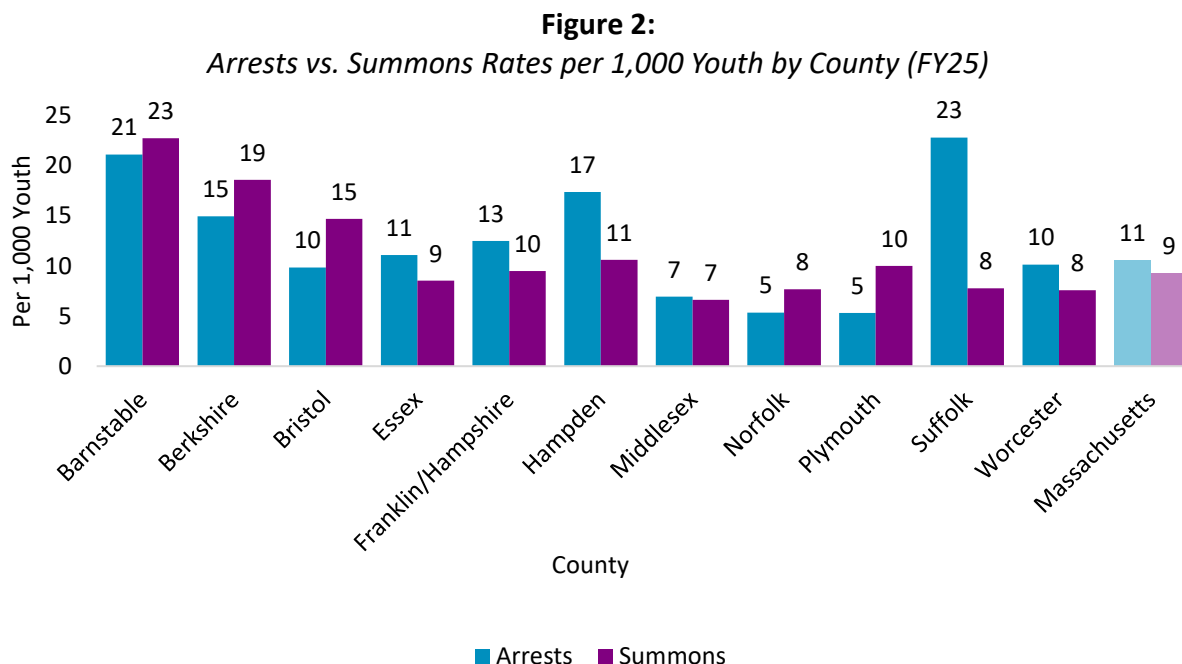
¹² Tolliver, D. G., Abrams, L. S., Biely, C., Meza, B. P. L., Schickedanz, A., Guerrero, A. D., Jackson, N. J., Bath, E., Heard-Garris, N., Dudovitz, R., & Barnert, E. (2023). United States Youth Arrest and Health Across the Life Course: A Nationally Representative Longitudinal Study. *Academic pediatrics*, 23(4), 722–730. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.acap.2022.08.009>

¹³ Legewie, J., & Fagan, J. (2019). Aggressive Policing and the Educational Performance of Minority Youth. *American Sociological Review*, 84(2), 220–247. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122419826020> ; Jackson, D. B., Fahmy, C., Vaughn, M. G., & Testa, A. (2019). Police Stops Among At-Risk Youth: Repercussions for Mental Health. *The Journal of adolescent health: official publication of the Society for Adolescent Medicine*, 65(5), 627–632. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jadohealth.2019.05.027>; Geller A. (2021). Youth–Police Contact: Burdens and Inequities in an Adverse Childhood Experience, 2014–2017. *American journal of public health*, 111(7), 1300–1308. <https://doi.org/10.2105/AJPH.2021.306259>

¹⁴ Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention. (2018). Interactions between Youth and Law Enforcement. https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/model-programs-guide/literature-reviews/interactions_between_youth_and_law_enforcement.pdf

¹⁵ Liberman, A.M., Kirk, D.S. and Kim, K. (2014), Labeling Effects of First Juvenile Arrests: Secondary Deviance and Secondary Sanctioning. *Criminology*, 52: 345–370. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1745-9125.12039>; Lopes, G., Krohn, M. D., Lizotte, A. J., Schmidt, N. M., Vásquez, B. E., & Bernburg, J. G. (2012). Labeling and Cumulative Disadvantage: The Impact of Formal Police Intervention on Life Chances and Crime During Emerging Adulthood: The Impact of Formal Police Intervention on Life Chances and Crime During Emerging Adulthood. *Crime & Delinquency*, 58(3), 456–488. <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0011128712436414> ; Bales, W., Nadel M., Pesta, G. (2019). An Assessment of the Effectiveness of Civil as an Alternative to Arrest among Youth Apprehended by Law Enforcement <https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/254453.pdf>

¹⁶ Wilson, D. B., Brennan, I., & Olaghere, A. (2018). Police-initiated diversion for youth to prevent future delinquent behavior: a systematic review. *Campbell systematic reviews*, 14(1), 1–88. <https://doi.org/10.4073/csr.2018.5>



Source: Data retrieved on 1/2026 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/MassachusettsTrialCourtApplicationsforDelinquentComplaint/SummaryCaseInitiationbyDivision>

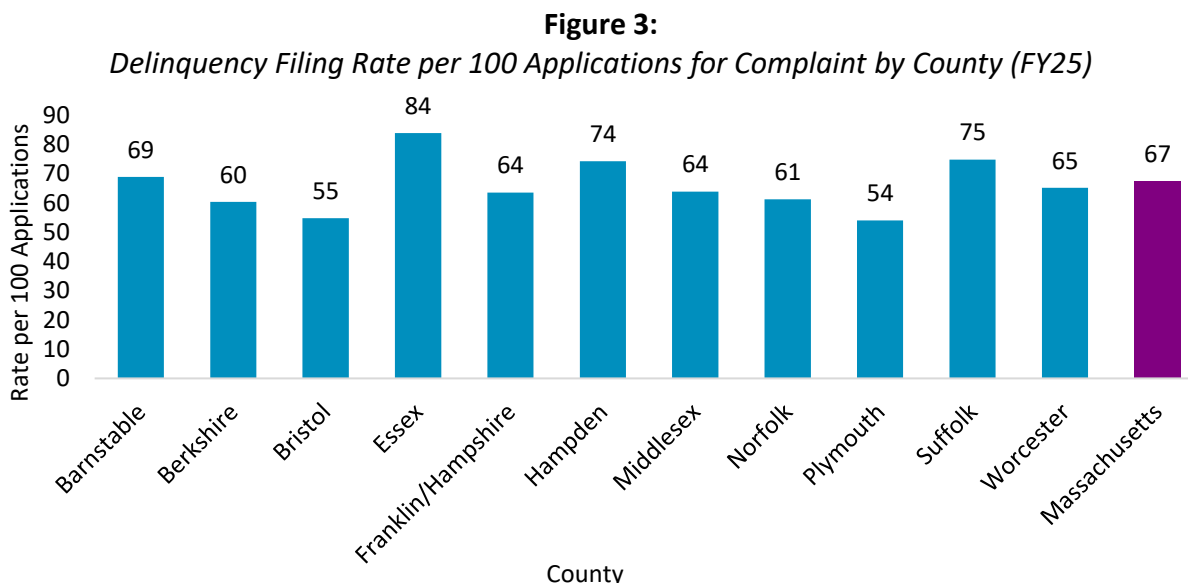
However, as demonstrated in Figure 2, the way youth came to the Juvenile Court varied considerably across the state. Police officers in Suffolk, Hampden, and Franklin/Hampshire Counties were substantially more likely to bring a youth to court via arrest rather than a summons compared to other counties. In FY25

- Suffolk County had the highest arrest rate. For every 1,000 youth in Suffolk County, 23 were arrested in FY25. The summons rate, in comparison, was 8 for every 1,000 youth.
- Hampden County also had a high arrest rate. For every 1,000 youth in Hampden County, 17 were arrested. The summons rate, in comparison, was 11 for every 1,000 youth.
- Franklin/Hampshire had a disproportionately high arrest rate as well. For every 1,000 youth in the county, 13 youth were arrested. The summons rate, for comparison, was 10 for every 1,000 youth.

If an application for complaint is initiated by a summons, the clerk magistrate determines if there is probable cause to believe that the youth committed the alleged delinquent offense. If a clerk determines there is probable cause on a summons, they issue a “delinquency filing.” Clerks can also dismiss or divert a case at this point. **Cases initiated by arrest typically cannot be dismissed or diverted by a clerk.**¹⁷

¹⁷ Arrests, typically, go right to the “Delinquency Filing” stage, skipping the clerk magistrate’s hearing. The exception to this is if an arrest or summons is for a first-time offense for a youth, and that offense is a misdemeanor for which the punishment is a

Youth in Essex, Hampden, and Suffolk counties had the highest rates of delinquency filings in the state. In Suffolk and Hampden counties, high arrest rates likely drove this trend, as cases initiated by arrest typically cannot be dismissed or diverted by a clerk. In Essex County, where summonses were used at a similar rate to arrests, there may be opportunity for clerks to divert more cases at this stage.



Source: Data retrieved on 10/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/DemographicsofSelectedJuvenileMatters/JuvenileMattersbyRaceEthn>.

Arraignments and Pretrial Proceedings¹⁸



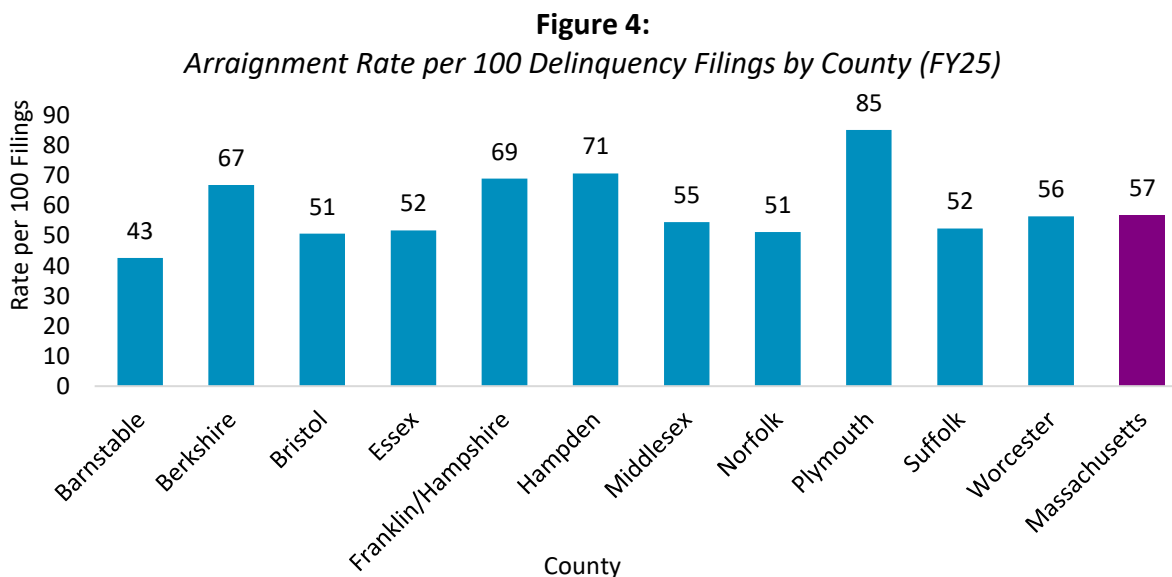
An arraignment marks the point when a youth is formally charged in court—an event that leaves a lasting mark on their record.¹⁹ In FY25, youth in Berkshire, Franklin/Hampshire, Hampden, and Plymouth counties were arraigned at disproportionately high rates compared to the rest of the state. Plymouth County stood out most: for every 100 delinquency filings, 85

fine, imprisonment in a jail or house of correction for not more than 6 months, the complaint does not issue, and the youth's case is dropped.

¹⁸ This part of the juvenile justice system includes data on 58A ("dangerousness") hearings, pretrial supervision and monitoring, pretrial detention admissions, and the reasons why youth are detained pretrial. To learn more about the Pretrial Phase of the Juvenile Justice system, check out the Board's 2025 report on this topic: <https://www.mass.gov/doc/improving-massachusetts-juvenile-pretrial-phase-an-assessment-of-the-current-pretrial-system-and-recommendations-for-improvement/download>

¹⁹ This is the point at which an official "Criminal Offender Record Information" (CORI) record is created. Massachusetts also has "Court Activity Record Information" (CARI) records for youth once the court process begins before an arraignment.

resulted in an arraignment. This should be considered the context of the county's comparatively low filing rate, however. If more cases are screened out prior to filing, that may result in a higher proportion of cases that are filed proceeding to arraignment.



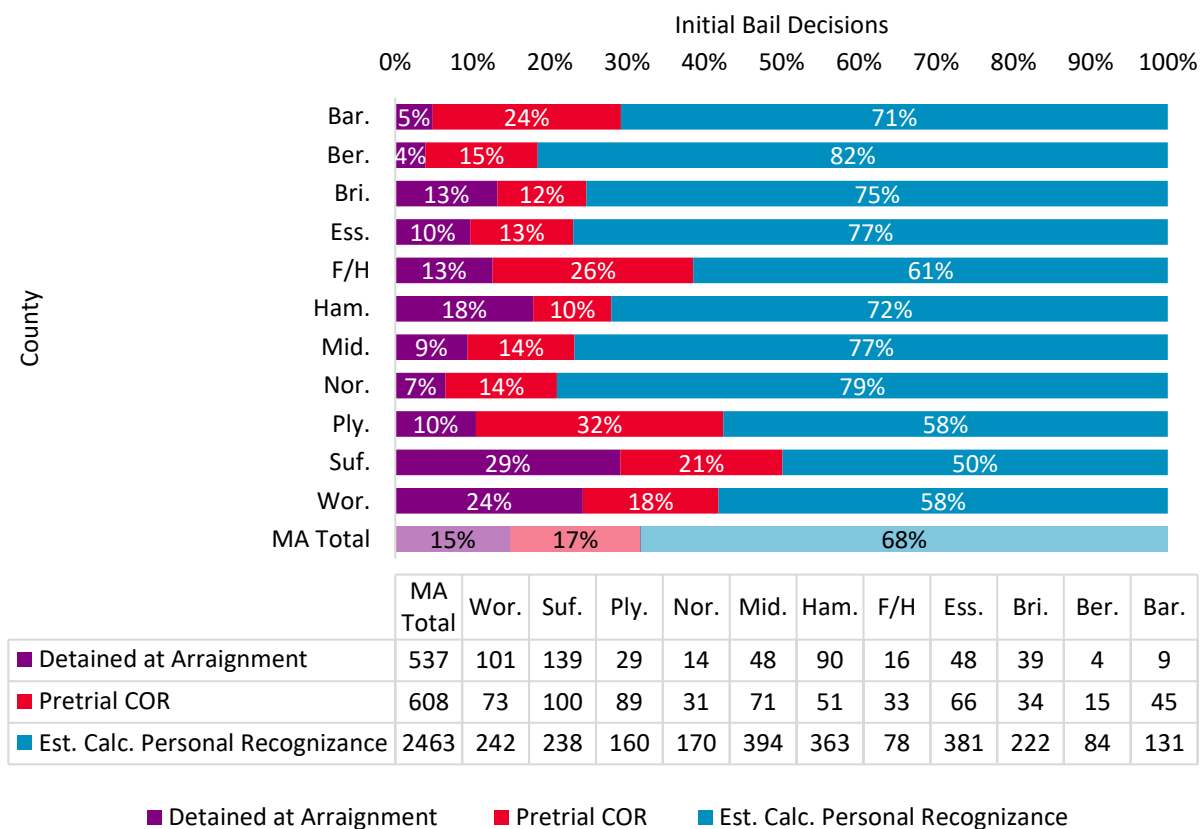
Source: Data retrieved on 12/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:
<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/JuvenileCourtCasesArraigned/CountyMapCharacteristics>.

At an arraignment, judges decide whether to release a youth on personal recognizance, impose conditions of release, or order pretrial detention.²⁰ Compared to the rest of the state, in FY25

- Suffolk and Worcester counties relied heavily on pretrial detention at this phase, and
- Franklin/Hampshire and Plymouth counties were more likely to set pretrial conditions of release.

²⁰ Youth can be placed on pretrial probation as a disposition post-arraignment by a judge. If the youth complies with all of the conditions of their pretrial probation, the matter will ultimately be dismissed by the prosecution. If the youth fails to comply, the prosecution of the matter may resume (at the discretion of the district attorney). In FY25, there were 242 new pretrial probation as a disposition cases. Further breakdown of pretrial probation data as a disposition at the county level is not available and therefore was not able to be included in this brief.

Figure 5:
Initial Bail Decisions by County (FY25)

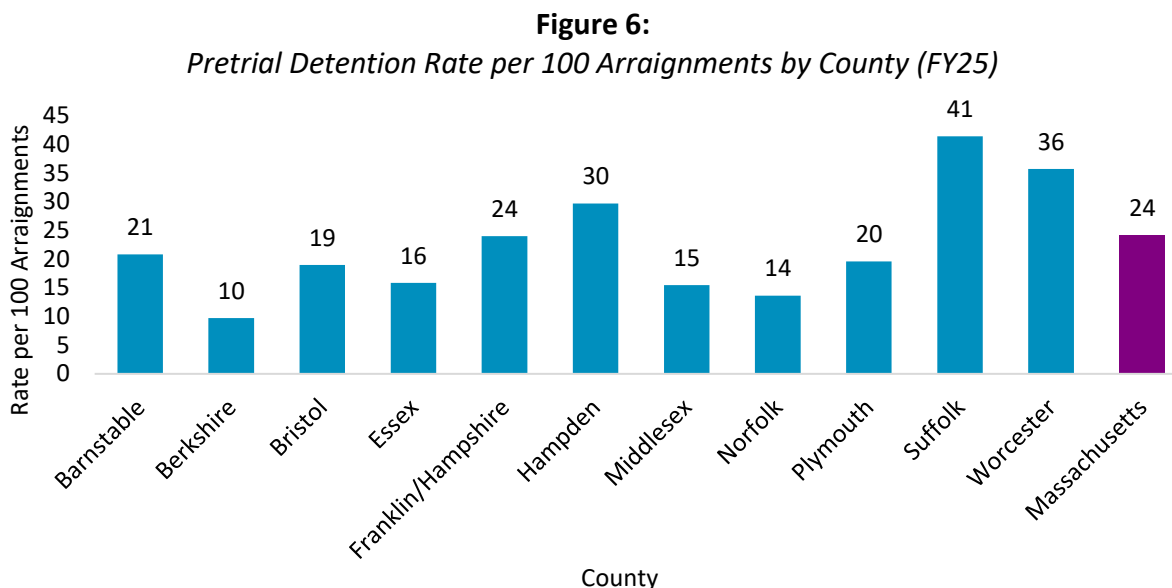


Pretrial conditions of release (COR) data primarily reflect youth supervised at the county level, rather than youth monitored by the statewide pretrial unit. However, Barnstable, Essex, Hampden, and Middlesex counties reported a small number of monitored cases in their county-level data, which are included in these totals. Personal recognizance (PR) counts were estimated by subtracting the number of youth detained at initial arraignment and youth placed on conditions of release (primarily Category B, and in limited cases, Category A) from the total number of initial detention decisions reported during the year. Therefore, PR counts at the county level may include youth released on Category A conditions.

County Key: Bar. = Barnstable (including Barnstable, Dukes and Nantucket), Ber. = Berkshire, Bri. = Bristol, Ess. = Essex, F/H. = Franklin & Hampshire, Ham. = Hampden, Mid. = Middlesex, Nor. = Norfolk, Ply. = Plymouth, Suf. = Suffolk, Wor. = Worcester

Source: Pretrial conditions for release data provided to the OCA by the Massachusetts Probation Service. Detained at arraignment data was retrieved 11/12/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/MassachusettsJuvenileCourtDelinquencyInitialBailDecisions/InitialDecisionbyDivision>.

Youth may be detained pretrial at arraignment following a 58A ("Dangerousness") hearing or if they are unable to meet bail requirements. Detention can also occur later in the pretrial process due to probation violations or the revocation of bail or personal recognizance.



Source: Data retrieved on 12/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:
<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/JuvenileCourtCasesAraigned/CountyMapCharacteristics>

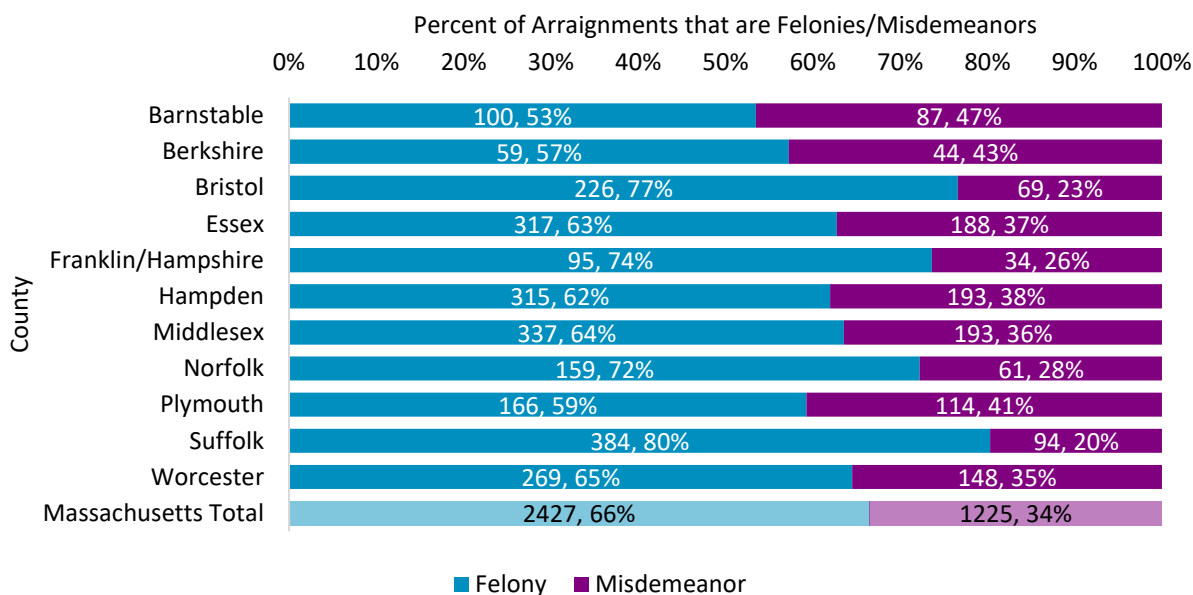
Pretrial detention practices vary sharply across Massachusetts. For every 100 arraignments, 41 youth in Suffolk County and 36 in Worcester County experienced detention at some point—compared to just 10 in Berkshire County.

More serious alleged offenses do not fully explain the relatively high detention rates in some counties. Of the counties with higher-than-average detention rates:

- Suffolk had a higher percentage of arraignments for a felony (80%) than the state (66%).
- Hampden (62%) and Worcester (65%) had a smaller proportion of felony cases than the state (66%).

Additionally, there are counties that had a higher proportion of felony arraignments than the state and *lower* pretrial detention rates. These counties include Bristol (77% of arraignments are felonies) and Norfolk (72% are felonies). Franklin/Hampshire had the same rate of pretrial detention as the state but a higher proportion of felony arraignments (74%).

Figure 7:
Arraignments by Offense Severity by County (FY25)



Source: Data retrieved on 12/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/JuvenileCourtCasesAraigned/CountyMapCharacteristics>

The most common reason for pretrial detention statewide is the revocation of bail or personal recognizance. However, reasons for detention differ by county:

- In both **Bristol** and **Middlesex** counties, 30% of detentions were for youth who were held before or after a 58A hearing (a finding of “dangerousness”).
- In **Suffolk** County, youth were more likely to be held due to cash bail than in any other county (37% of detentions).

Table 1: Reason Youth are Held at DYS Pretrial by County

County	58A - Danger to Public	68A - Hold for Eval	Bail/PR Revoked	Probation Violation Hearing	Unknown	Cash Bail
Barnstable	3%	0%	41%	36%	13%	8%
Berkshire	0%	0%	70%	0%	0%	30%
Bristol	30%	0%	14%	13%	32%	11%
Essex	21%	0%	38%	18%	19%	5%
Franklin/Hampshire	0%	0%	68%	3%	3%	26%
Hampden	2%	0%	63%	5%	0%	30%
Middlesex	30%	0%	24%	15%	21%	10%
Norfolk	23%	0%	37%	10%	20%	10%
Plymouth	15%	2%	35%	20%	13%	17%
Suffolk	14%	1%	31%	11%	8%	37%

Table 1: Reason Youth are Held at DYS Pretrial by County

Worcester	17%	0%	30%	20%	6%	28%
Massachusetts Total	15%	0%	38%	14%	11%	23%

Source: Data provided to the OCA by the Department of Youth Services.

Dispositions and Sanctions²¹



When a youth's case reaches disposition, they may be adjudicated delinquent ("guilty") or not delinquent ("not guilty"). A youth's case may also be resolved via a CWO ("continued without a finding").²² In FY25

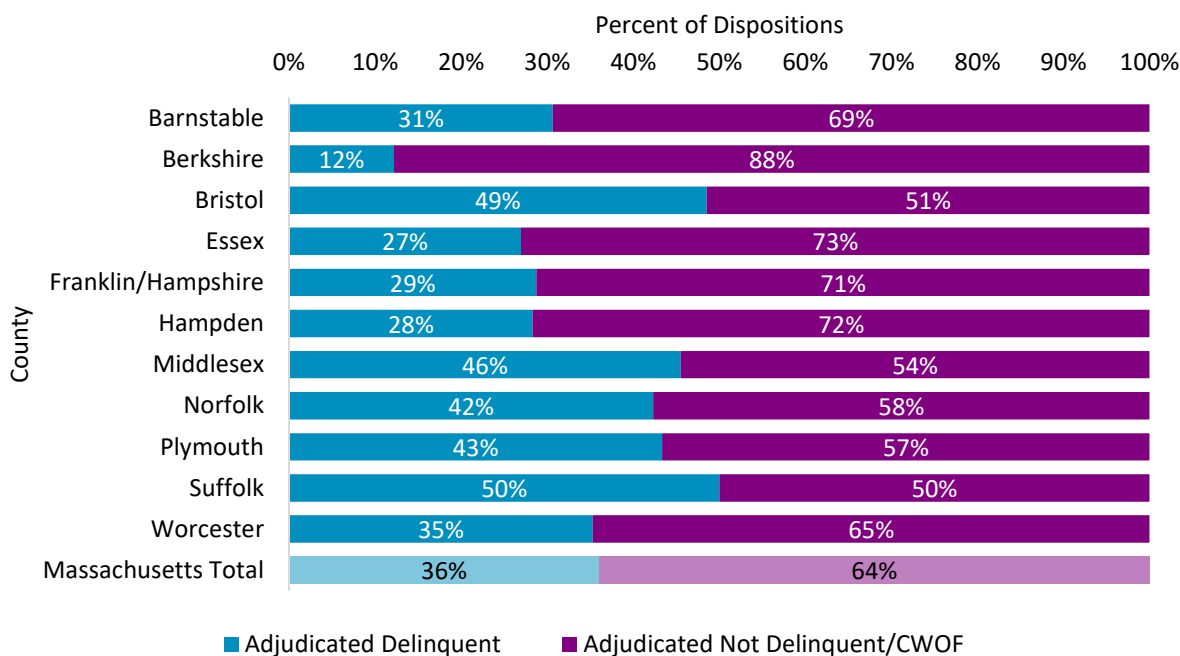
- Barnstable, Berkshire, Essex, Franklin/Hampshire, Hampden, and Worcester counties had a greater percentage of cases adjudicated not delinquent or resolved via a CWO than the rest of the state.²³
- Berkshire County had the lowest rate (12%) of cases adjudicated delinquent.

²¹ Data regarding dispositions and sanctions are reported at the time of the initial disposition. In some instances, dispositions may change throughout the life of a case (e.g., a CWO can turn into a Delinquent Adjudication). A case can be dismissed prior to a plea or trial due to a number of procedural or legal reasons. That data is reported in the "Judicial Dismissals" section below.

²² In this report, dismissals are reported separately from dispositions to align with the Juvenile Court's public reporting. Differences in the rates of dismissals may reflect local practices of resolving cases with older outstanding warrants through dismissal, per the Trial Court's public dashboard: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/MassachusettsJuvenileCourtDelinquencyDismissalsandAdjudications/AdjudicationRates>

²³ The Trial Court does not disaggregate "CWO" from "Adjudicated Not Delinquent" in its county-level data reporting. Therefore, we are unable to report county-level differences in the use of these two determinations.

Figure 8:
Dispositions by County



Source: Data retrieved 11/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/MassachusettsJuvenileCourtDelinquencyDismissalsandAdjudications/AdjudicationRates>.

Sanctions are the outcomes imposed when a youth is adjudicated delinquent—the juvenile court’s equivalent of a “sentence” in adult court. Common sanctions include:²⁴

- **Commitment to DYS custody**, sometimes extending up to a youth’s 21st birthday;²⁵
- **Suspended DYS commitment**, where the youth is supervised by Massachusetts Probation Services (MPS) and only committed if they fail to meet conditions;
- **Probation** supervision through MPS; or
- **No sanction** at all.²⁶

²⁴ The Juvenile Court can also impose or suspend an adult sentence if the youth was adjudicated as a youthful offender. A youthful offender case involves a youth between 14 and 18 years old who is indicted by a grand jury for allegedly committing an offense which, if they were an adult, would be punishable by imprisonment in state prison and who meets any of the following criteria: (1) the youth has previously been committed to DYS; (2) the youth has committed an offense which involves the infliction or threat of serious bodily harm in violation of law; (3) the youth has committed certain firearms and weapons offenses. As defined in M.G.L c119 §52: <https://malegislature.gov/Laws/GeneralLaws/PartI/TitleXVII/Chapter119/Section52>

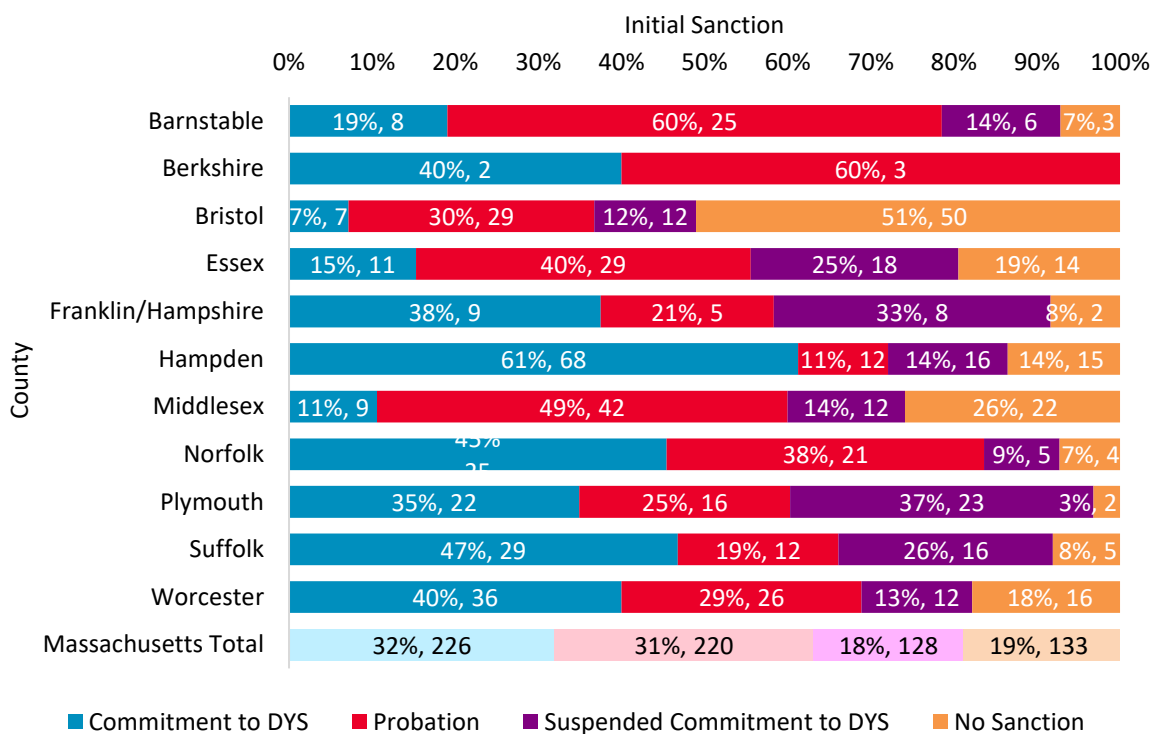
²⁵ Youth charged as a juvenile, but whose cases are disposed after their 18th birthday can be committed to DYS until they are 19 or 20 years old. Youth with a youthful offender case can be committed to DYS until age 21. (MGL c. 119 §58.) While youth are committed to the physical custody of DYS, youth may live in the community or a DYS facility at different points throughout their commitment disposition.

²⁶ In these cases, judges adjudicate a youth delinquent for a given case and put the case “on file” unless or until a certain circumstance occurs.

Sanction use varies widely across Massachusetts. Compared to the overall state sanction rates:

- Berkshire, Franklin/Hampshire, Hampden, Norfolk, Plymouth, Suffolk, and Worcester had higher DYS commitment rates.
- Barnstable, Berkshire, Essex, Middlesex, and Norfolk had higher probation rates.
- Bristol and Middlesex imposed no sanction more frequently than rest of the state.

Figure 9:
Sanctions by Court County (FY25)



Source: Data retrieved 11/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:

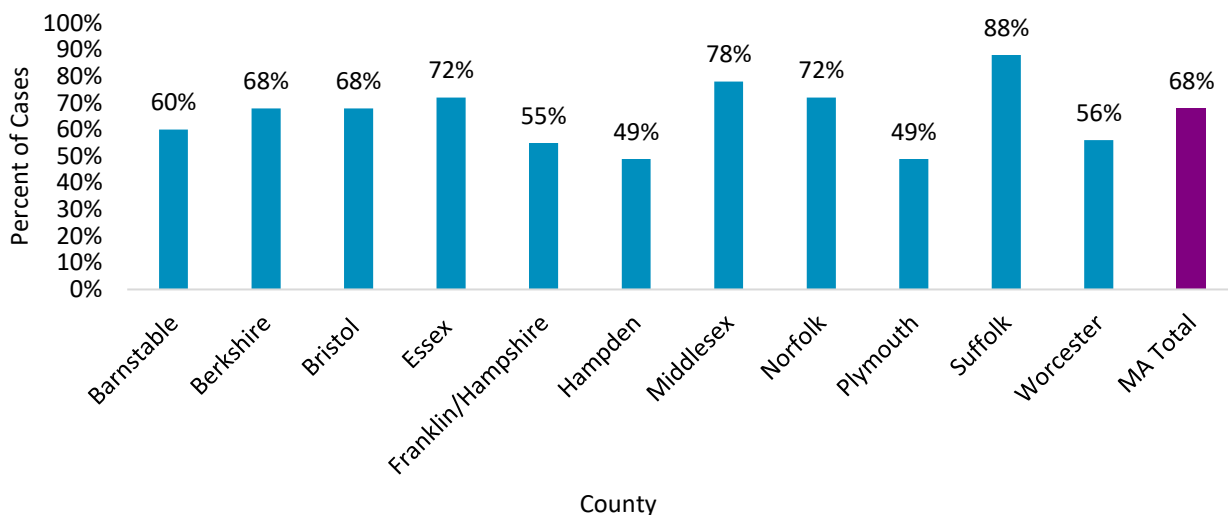
<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/MassachusettsJuvenileCourtDelinquencyDismissalsandAdjudications/AdjudicationRates>.

Judicial Dismissals

Cases may also be dismissed by a judge at any point in the juvenile justice process post delinquency filing. Cases may be dismissed for several reasons, including because a case was diverted, because a judge or clerk found there was not probable cause, because there was insufficient evidence to continue prosecuting the case at any point pre- or during a trial, or in

situations where a victim does not wish to testify. The Trial Court does not report whether the case was dismissed by a judge or withdrawn/*nolle prossed*²⁷ by a prosecutor.²⁸

Figure 10:
Percent of Cases Dismissed by County (FY25)



Source: Data retrieved 11/2025 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/viz/MassachusettsJuvenileCourtDelinquencyDismissalsandAdjudications/AdjudicationRates>.

County-level data showed notable variation:

- **Plymouth and Hampden** counties dismissed cases at the lowest rate in the state.
- **Suffolk County** had the highest dismissal rate in the state.
- **Essex, Middlesex, and Norfolk** counties had higher dismissal rates than the rest of the state.

²⁷An entry on the record of a legal action denoting that the prosecutor will proceed no further in an action either as a whole or as to some count or as to one or more of several defendants. See: <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/nolle%20prosequi>

²⁸ This number does not include the cases in which youth successfully complete their terms of probation as a result of a case being “continued without a finding” (CWO). In this report, dismissals are reported separately from dispositions to align with the Juvenile Court’s public reporting.

Conclusion

Overall, FY25 data shows that a youth's experience in the juvenile justice system in Massachusetts continues to depend heavily on where they live. Counties varied substantially in their reliance on arrests, arraignments, pretrial detention, conditions of release, and case dismissals, suggesting that local decision-making plays a significant role in shaping outcomes for youth.

In several counties, elevated use of custodial or restrictive process points did not always correspond with higher case severity or lower dismissal rates, highlighting opportunities to safely reduce system involvement earlier in the process. These findings underscore the importance of a continued need for local, county, and state practitioners to review practices to reduce unnecessary system involvement, and ensure youth are treated equitably across the Commonwealth.

Appendix A: Juvenile Justice Process Points by County (FY25)

Table 2: “Front Door” of the Juvenile Justice System Process Points by County (FY25)

Court County	MA Youth Population (CY23)	Arrests	Summons	Applications for Complaint (Total)	Delinquency Filings
Barnstable	14,589	308	332	637	439
Berkshire	7,688	115	143	255	154
Bristol	43,415	427	638	1,062	582
Essex	59,322	658	506	1,161	975
Franklin/Hampshire	13,354	167	127	294	187
Hampden	34,579	601	367	967	718
Middlesex	112,126	777	744	1,520	971
Norfolk	53,826	288	414	700	429
Plymouth	39,834	212	399	610	330
Suffolk	39,817	909	310	1,218	912
Worcester	64,282	651	487	1,133	739
Massachusetts Total	482,832	5,113	4,467	9,557	6,436

Source: Massachusetts population data retrieved from EZAPOP here: <https://www.ojdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop/>. Summons, arrest, applications for complaint, and delinquency filings retrieved between 10/2025 and 1/2026 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here: <https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/vizzes>. FY25 data excludes expunged cases at each court point except Applications for Complaint and Delinquency Filings.

Table 3: Pretrial Proceedings by County (FY25)

Court County	Arraignments	Held at Initial Arraign-ment	Not Held at Initial Arraign-ment	58A Hearing	Pre-trial COR	Pre-trial Deten-tion	Detain-ed without Bail Set	Detain-ed with Bail Set	Bail/ PR Re-voked	Probation Violation Hearing	58A Hearing	Other/ Un-known
Barnstable	187	9	176	1	45	39	36	3	16	14	1	5
Berkshire	103	4	99	2	15	10	7	3	7	0	0	0
Bristol	295	39	256	57	34	56	50	6	8	7	17	18
Essex	505	48	447	73	66	80	76	4	30	14	17	15
Franklin/Hampshire	129	16	111	5	33	31	23	8	21	1	0	1

Table 3: Pretrial Proceedings by County (FY25)

Hampden	508	90	414	24	51	151	105	46	95	7	3	0
Middlesex	530	48	465	69	71	82	74	8	20	12	25	17
Norfolk	220	14	201	8	31	30	27	3	11	3	7	6
Plymouth	281	29	249	11	89	55	46	9	19	11	8	7
Suffolk	478	139	338	58	100	198	126	72	61	21	27	16
Worcester	417	101	315	47	73	149	108	41	44	30	25	9
Massachusetts Total	3,653	537	3,071	355	3,012	881	678	203	332	120	130	94

Source: Arraignment and 58A Hearing data retrieved between 10/2025 and 1/2026 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/vizzes> Pretrial detention admissions data provided to the OCA by the Department of Youth Services. Pretrial supervision/monitoring cases provided to the OCA by the Massachusetts Probation Service.

Table 4: Dispositions, Sanctions, Probation and Commitment Data by County (FY25)

Court County	Adjudicated Delinquent	Commitment to DYS	Probation	Suspended Commitment to DYS	No Sanction	First-time Commitments	Probation (Administrative)	Probation (Risk/Need)	Total Probation (RN and Admin)
Barnstable	42	8	25	6	3	9	41	58	99
Berkshire	5	2	3	0	0	3	17	7	24
Bristol	98	7	29	12	50	9	137	38	175
Essex	72	11	29	18	14	14	93	83	176
Franklin/Hampshire	24	9	5	8	2	4	31	24	55
Hampden	111	68	12	16	15	54	107	142	249
Middlesex	85	9	42	12	22	10	79	89	168
Norfolk	55	25	21	5	4	7	51	27	78
Plymouth	63	22	16	23	2	18	81	49	130
Suffolk	62	29	12	16	5	25	18	27	45
Worcester	90	36	26	12	16	24	87	98	185
Massachusetts Total	707	226	220	128	133	177	1,486	1,284	2,770

Table 4: Dispositions, Sanctions, Probation and Commitment Data by County (FY25)

Source: Disposition and sanction data retrieved between 10/2025 and 1/2026 from the Massachusetts Trial Court's Tableau Public page here:

<https://public.tableau.com/app/profile/drap4687/vizzes> First-time commitment data provided to the OCA by the Department of Youth Services. Post-adjudication probation data provided to the OCA by the Massachusetts Probation Service.

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