

# Massachusetts Juvenile Justice System: FY25 Key Data Takeaways & Opportunities for Improvement

**Presented By: The Office of the Child Advocate**

**Melissa Threadgill**, Senior Director of Policy & Implementation

**Kristi Polizzano**, Senior Policy & Implementation Manager

# Presentation Outline

1. About the OCA & JJPAD
2. FY25 Key Data Trends
3. Opportunities for State Improvement
4. Q & A



**MASSACHUSETTS**

**Office of the Child Advocate**

The Office of the Child Advocate (OCA) is an independent executive branch agency with oversight and ombudsperson responsibilities. 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.

# The Juvenile Justice Policy and Data Board (JJPAD)



Permanent commission created by the Legislature (2018).



Membership consists of representatives of child-serving agencies from the Executive and Judicial Branches, members of the state House and Senate, advocacy organizations and parent representatives



Charged with evaluating juvenile justice system policies and procedures and making recommendations to improve outcomes



Collecting and reporting available aggregate juvenile justice system data

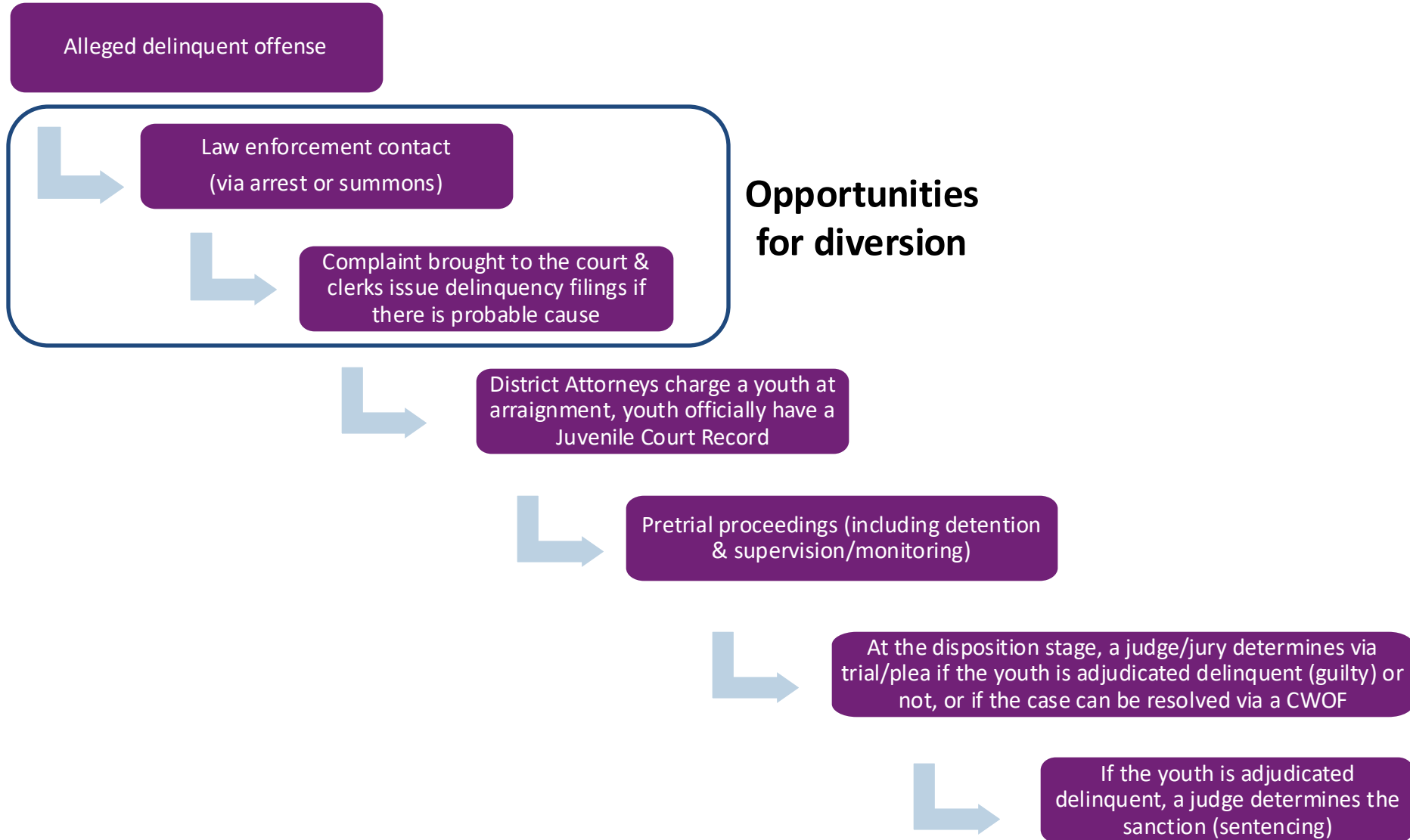


Studying the implementation of any statutory changes to the juvenile justice system



Making recommendations for any statutory changes to improve juvenile justice system

# The “Typical” Process



# **JJPAD Board 2025 Annual Report: Key Data Takeaways**

# Data Notes

- Covers data from FY18 (one year prior to implementation of Criminal Justice Reform Act) through FY25
  - Fiscal years run from July 1 through June 30
- To the extent available, the data is broken down by
  - Offense severity & type
  - Race/ethnicity & sexual orientation and gender identity



# MA Juvenile Justice System: FY25 Data Takeaways

1

Overall juvenile justice system volume remains stable.

2

Arrests now surpass summons as the primary vehicle to bring a youth into Juvenile Court.

3

Youth who enter the system experience greater pretrial court involvement than previously.

4

Alleged weapons-related offenses are increasing at multiple stages.

5

System involvement is concentrated among specific groups of youth.

6

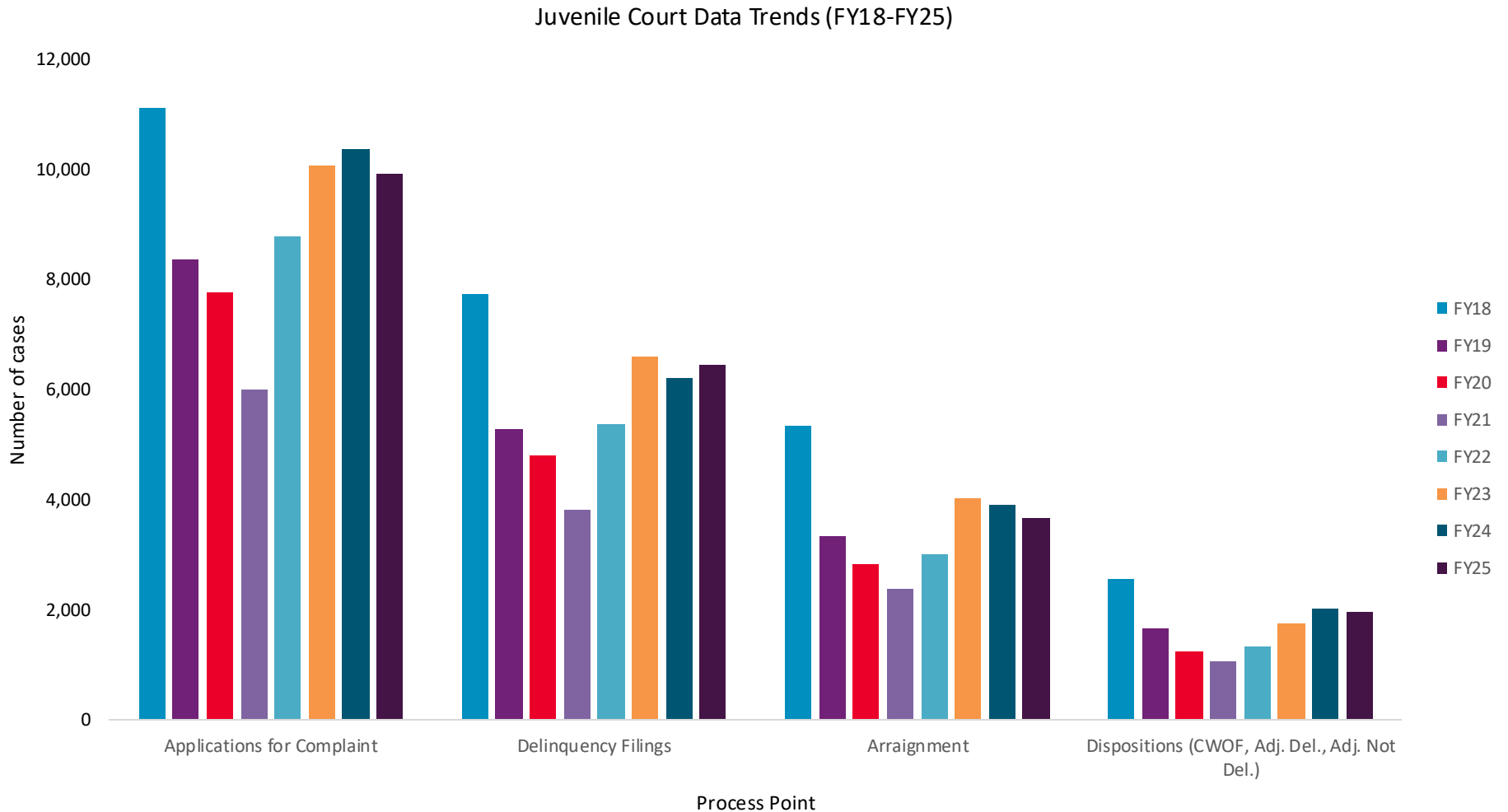
More than two-thirds of cases are dismissed, indicating significant opportunities to divert youth from the process earlier.

7

Despite recent expansion of upstream prevention services in Massachusetts, gaps remain in access to intensive behavioral health and substance use treatment, contributing to justice system involvement among some youth.

# 1. Overall juvenile justice system volume remains stable.

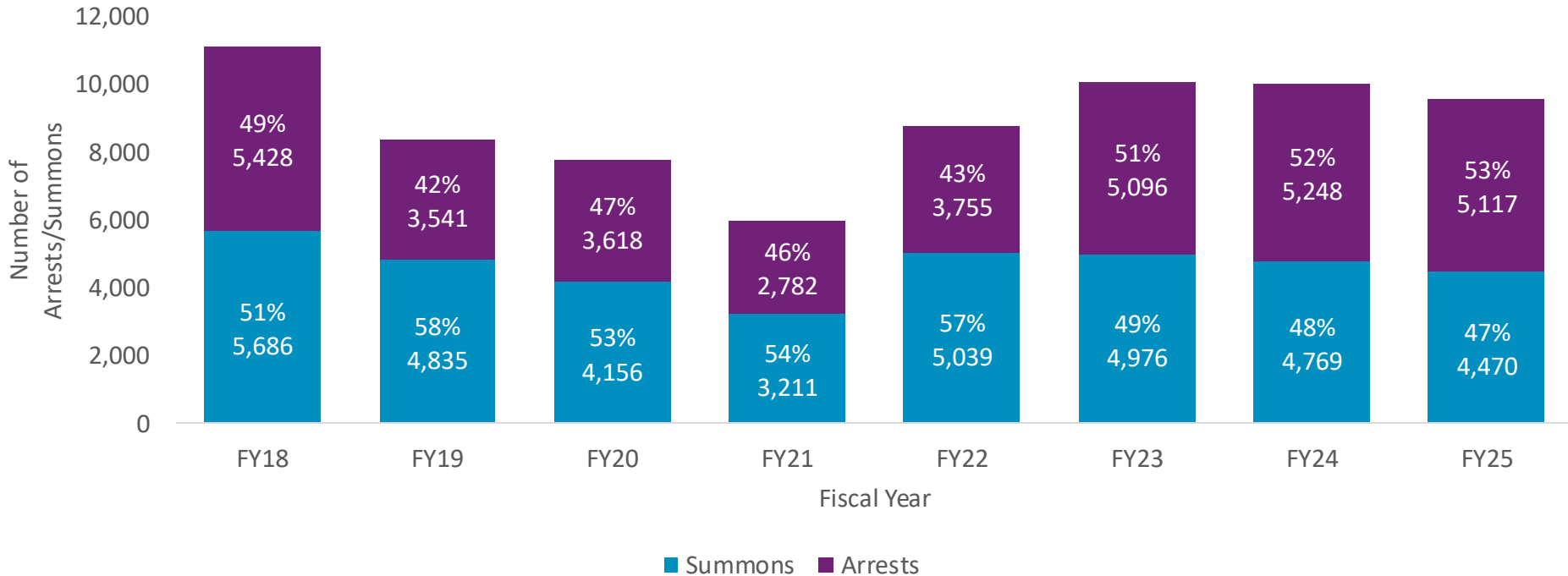
The number of youth involved in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system remained stable compared to FY24. For the third consecutive year, major system entry and processing points show relatively little overall change.



## 2. Arrests now surpass summons as the primary vehicle to bring a youth into Juvenile Court.

For the third year in a row, a higher share of cases entered Juvenile Court through arrest rather than summons.

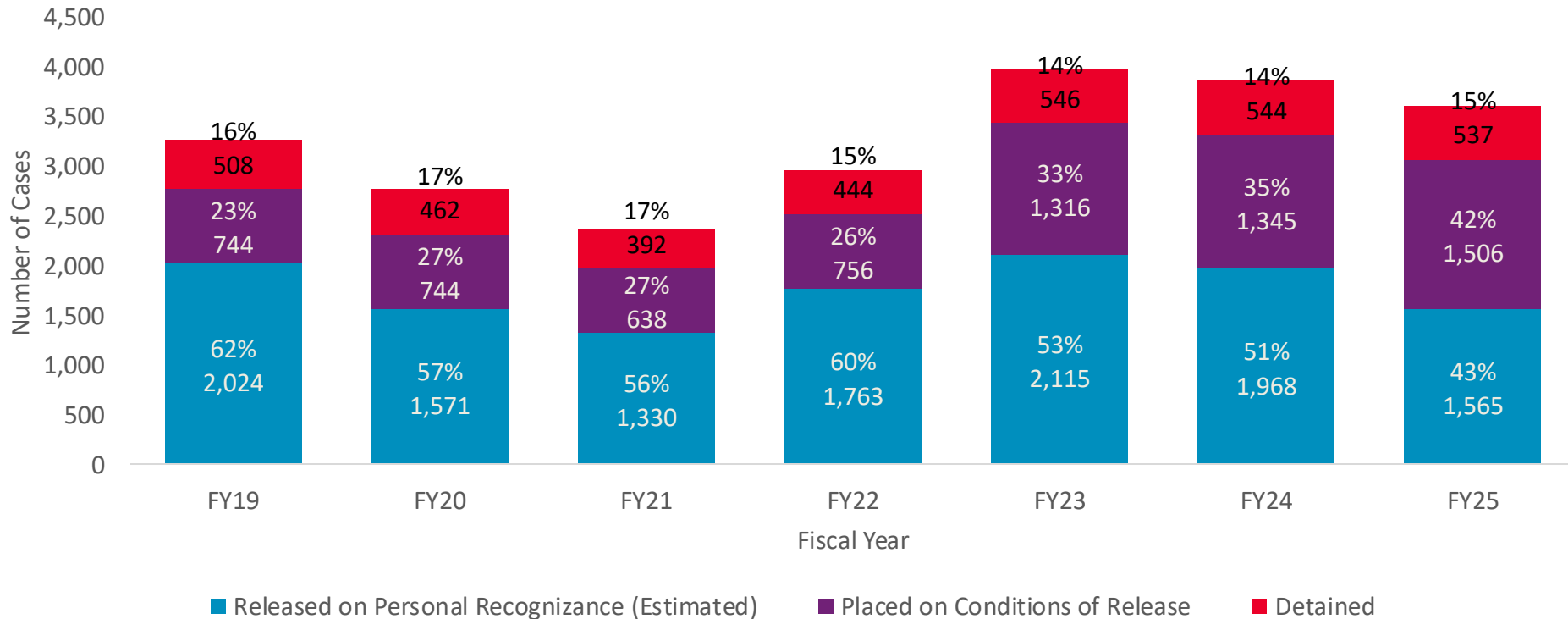
Number of Arrests/Summonses listed in Applications for Complaint (FY18-FY25)



### 3. Youth who enter the system experience greater pretrial court involvement than previously.

Over the past seven fiscal years, a lower percentage of youth are estimated to be released by the Juvenile Court on personal recognizance (PR), and more are being given pretrial conditions of release (COR).

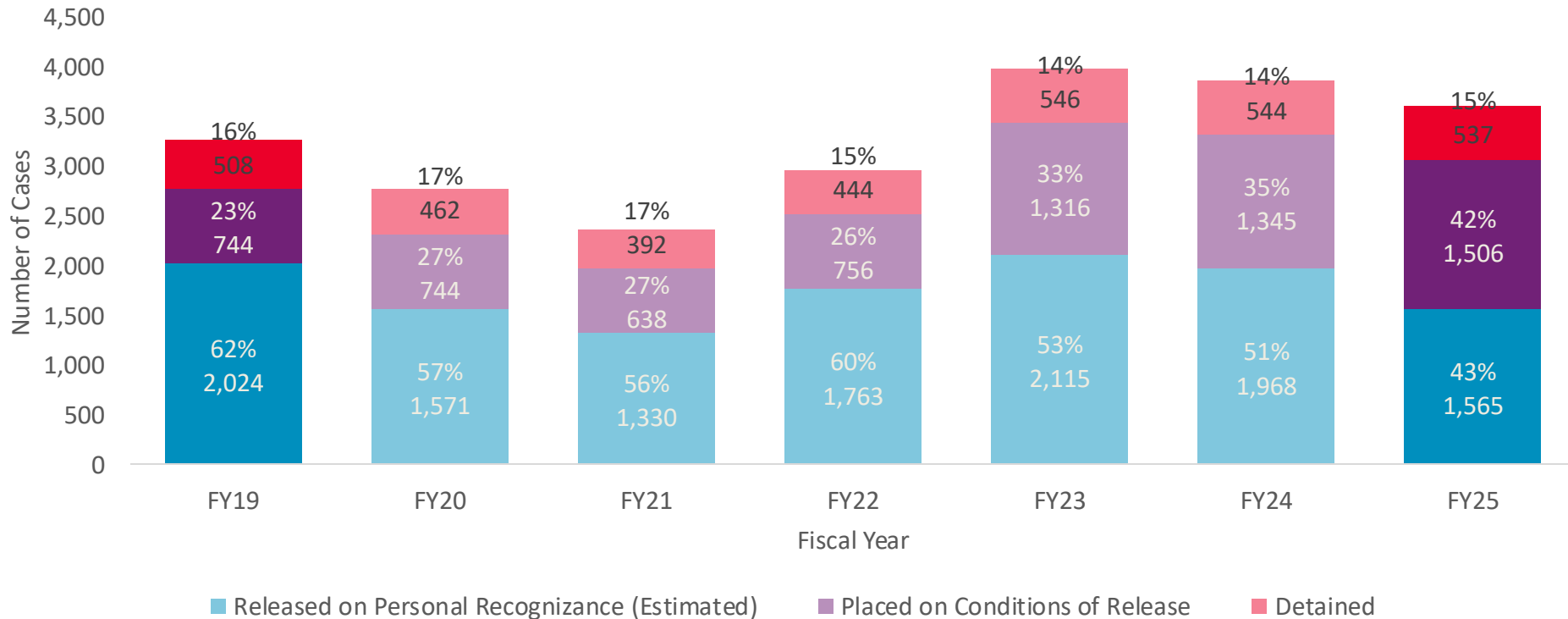
Initial Bail Decisions (FY19-FY25)



### 3. Youth who enter the system experience greater pretrial court involvement than previously.

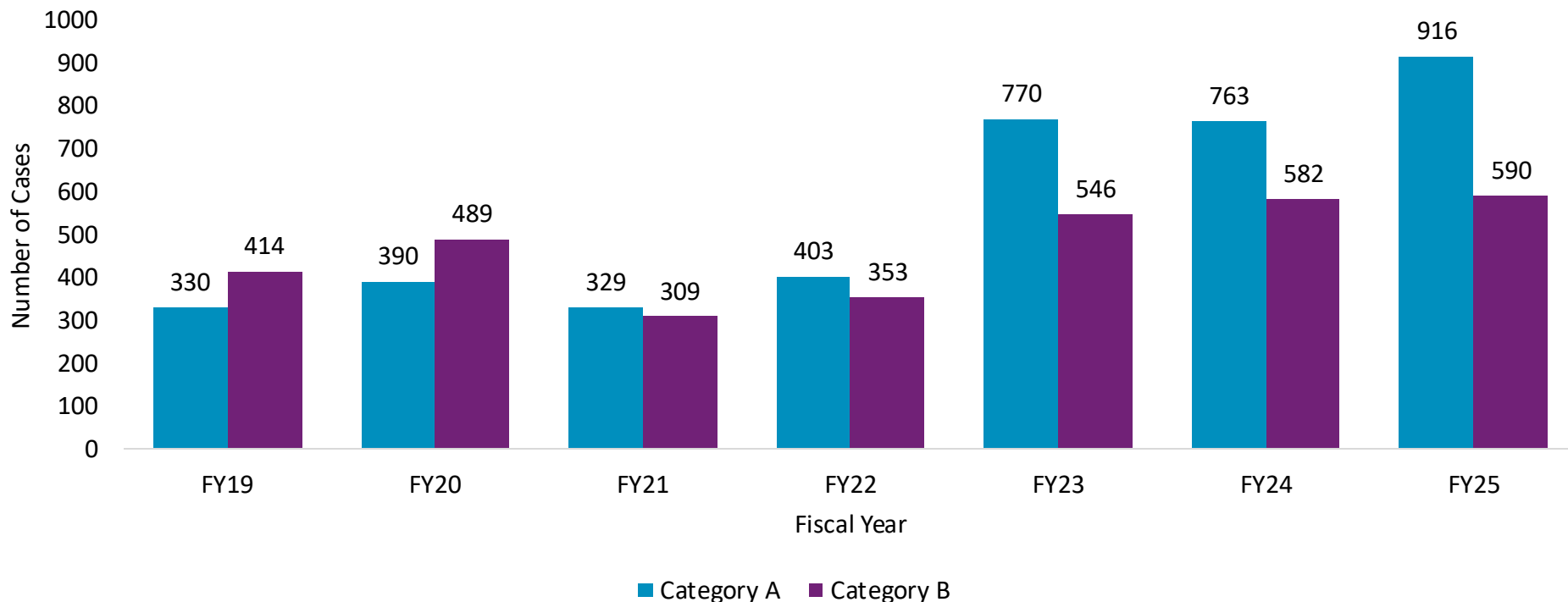
Over the past seven fiscal years, a lower percentage of youth are estimated to be released by the Juvenile Court on personal recognizance (PR), and more are being given pretrial conditions of release (COR).

Initial Bail Decisions (FY19-FY25)



# Growth in the use of pretrial conditions of release is driven primarily by increases in Category A monitoring.

Pretrial Conditions of Release Cases by Supervision/Monitoring Category (FY19-FY25)



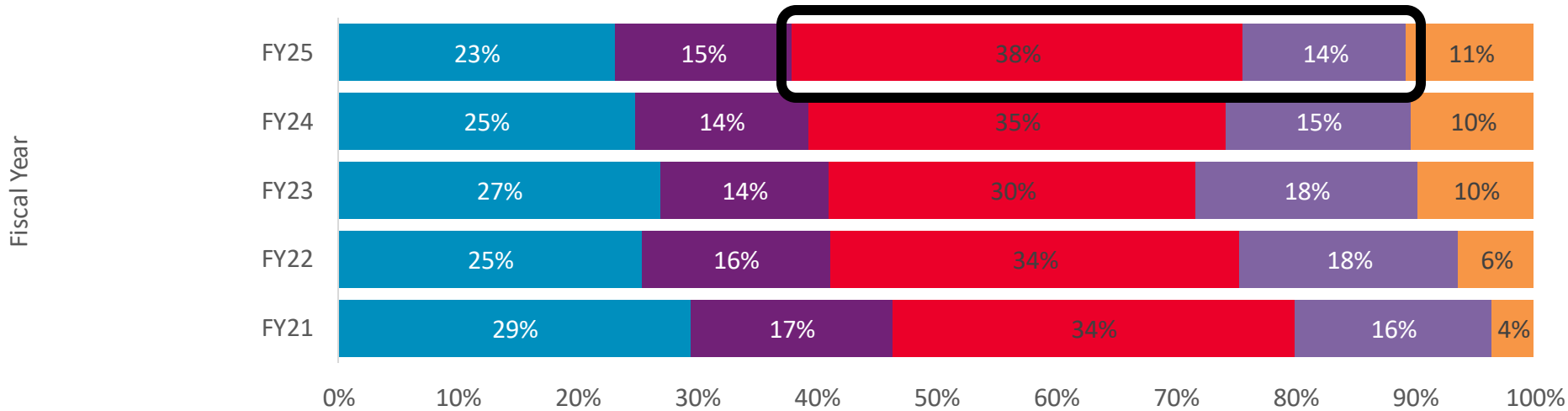
Category A conditions are **not** supervised by a local probation officer. Instead, they are monitored by the statewide pretrial unit. However, if probation identifies a youth has violated their conditions, that violation *could* result in the youth being detained.



Data Note

# In FY25, over half (52%) of all pretrial detention admissions were a result of bail/personal recognizance being revoked or a probation violation hearing.

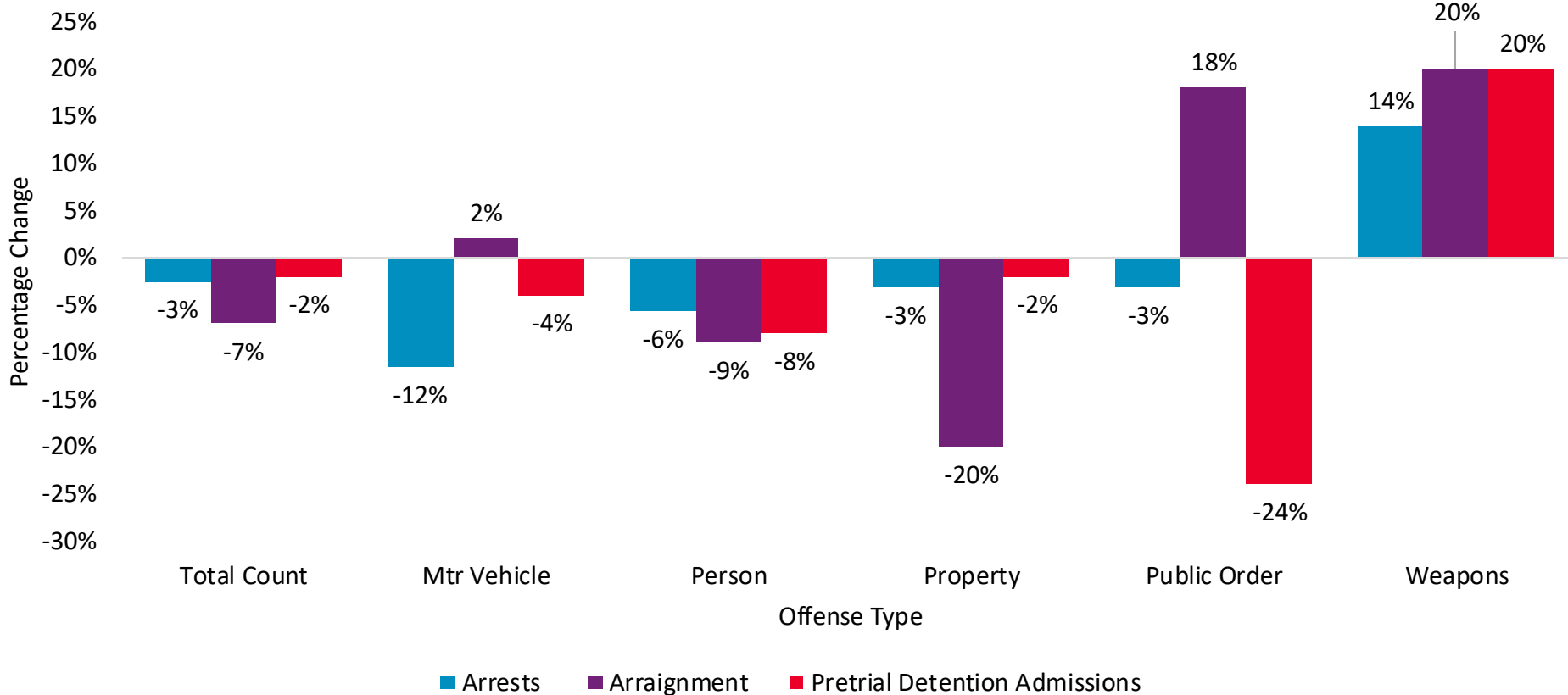
Detention Admissions by Reason Detained (FY21-FY25)



	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY24	FY25
■ Held on Cash Bail	163	170	205	220	203
■ 58A - Danger to Public	93	105	108	130	130
■ Bail/PR Revoked	186	230	234	310	332
■ Probation Violation Hearing	91	122	141	138	120
■ Unknown	20	43	75	92	94

# 4. Alleged weapons-related offenses are increasing at multiple stages.

Change in Offense Types\* (FY24-FY25)

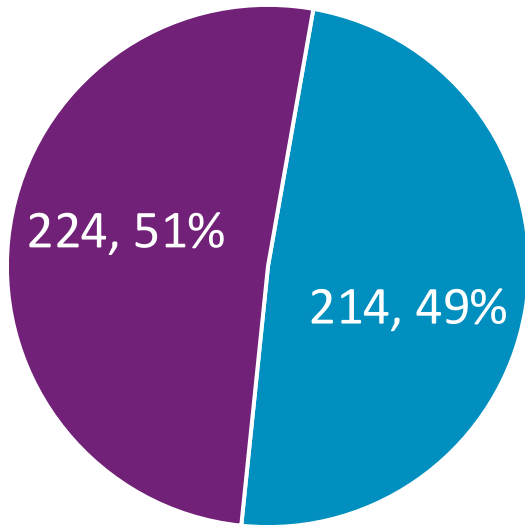


## Data Note

*\*Alleged alcohol and drug offenses were omitted due to the fact that there are very few drug or alcohol-related cases overall compared to other offense types.*

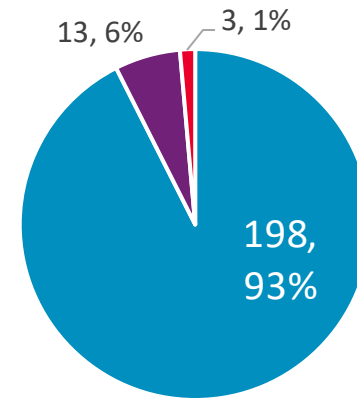
# Half (49%) of filings for alleged weapons-related charges involved a firearm.

Firearms as a Percentage of Weapons Charges (FY25)



■ Firearm ■ Other Weapon

Firearm Charges by Possession and Discharge (FY25)



■ Possession ■ Discharge ■ Other\*



Data Note

*\*Other includes charges involving alleged manufacturing or trafficking of a weapon.*

## 5. System involvement is concentrated among specific groups of youth.



**The majority of youth involved in the system are boys.** Since FY18, system involvement has declined more rapidly for girls than for boys.



**LGBTQ+ youth are more frequently detained due to cash bail** being set rather than being held without bail compared to youth who are detained who do not identify as LGBTQ+.



**Youth involved with the child welfare system are overrepresented in the deep end of the juvenile justice system.** In FY25, 45% (n=400) of detention admissions and 42% (n=74) of all first-time commitments to DYS were for youth with DCF involvement.

# Disparities are starkest at the “front door” of the juvenile justice system

In FY25, compared to their white peers in Massachusetts...

## Latino/Hispanic Youth

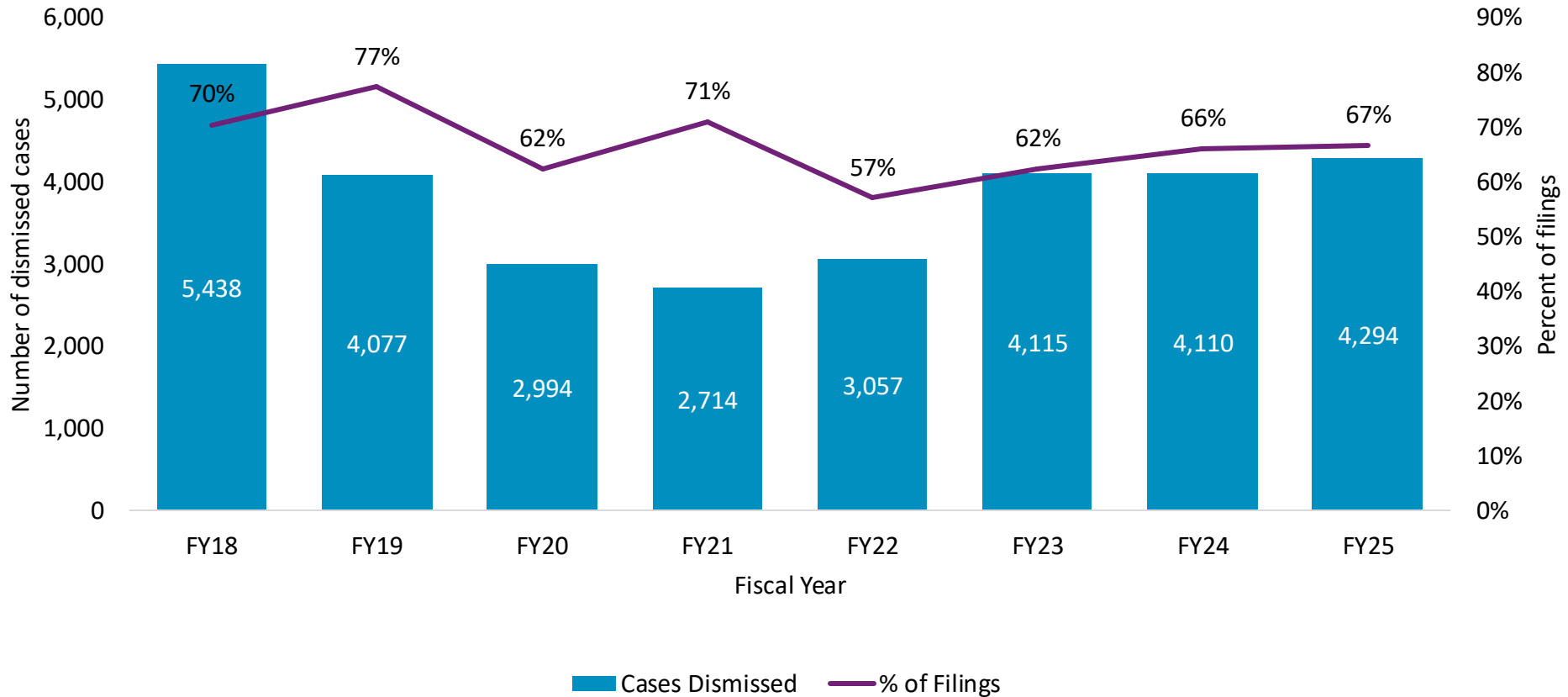


## Black/African American Youth



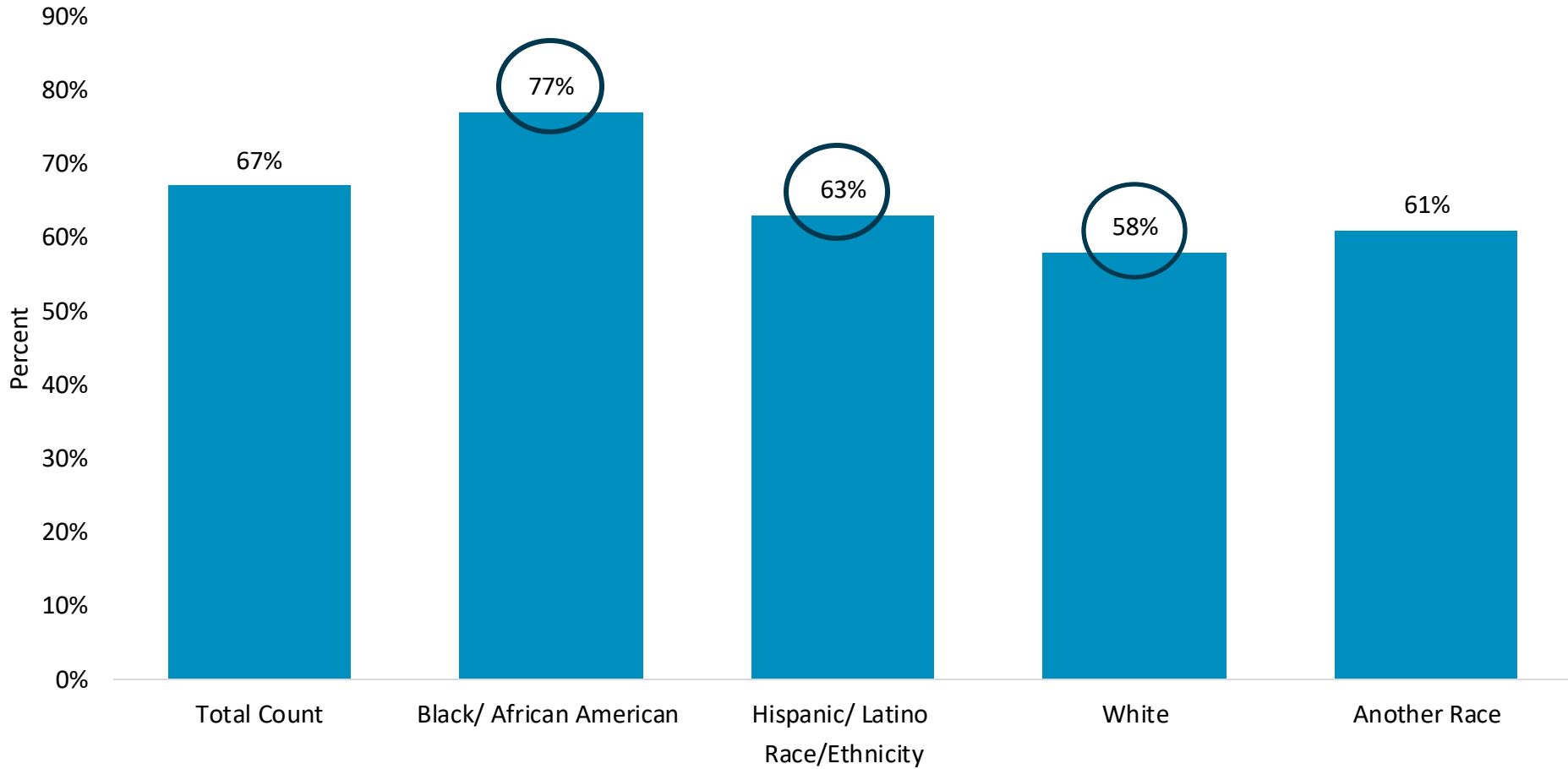
# 6. More than two-thirds of cases are dismissed, indicating significant opportunities to divert youth from the process earlier.

Dismissed Cases (FY18-FY25)



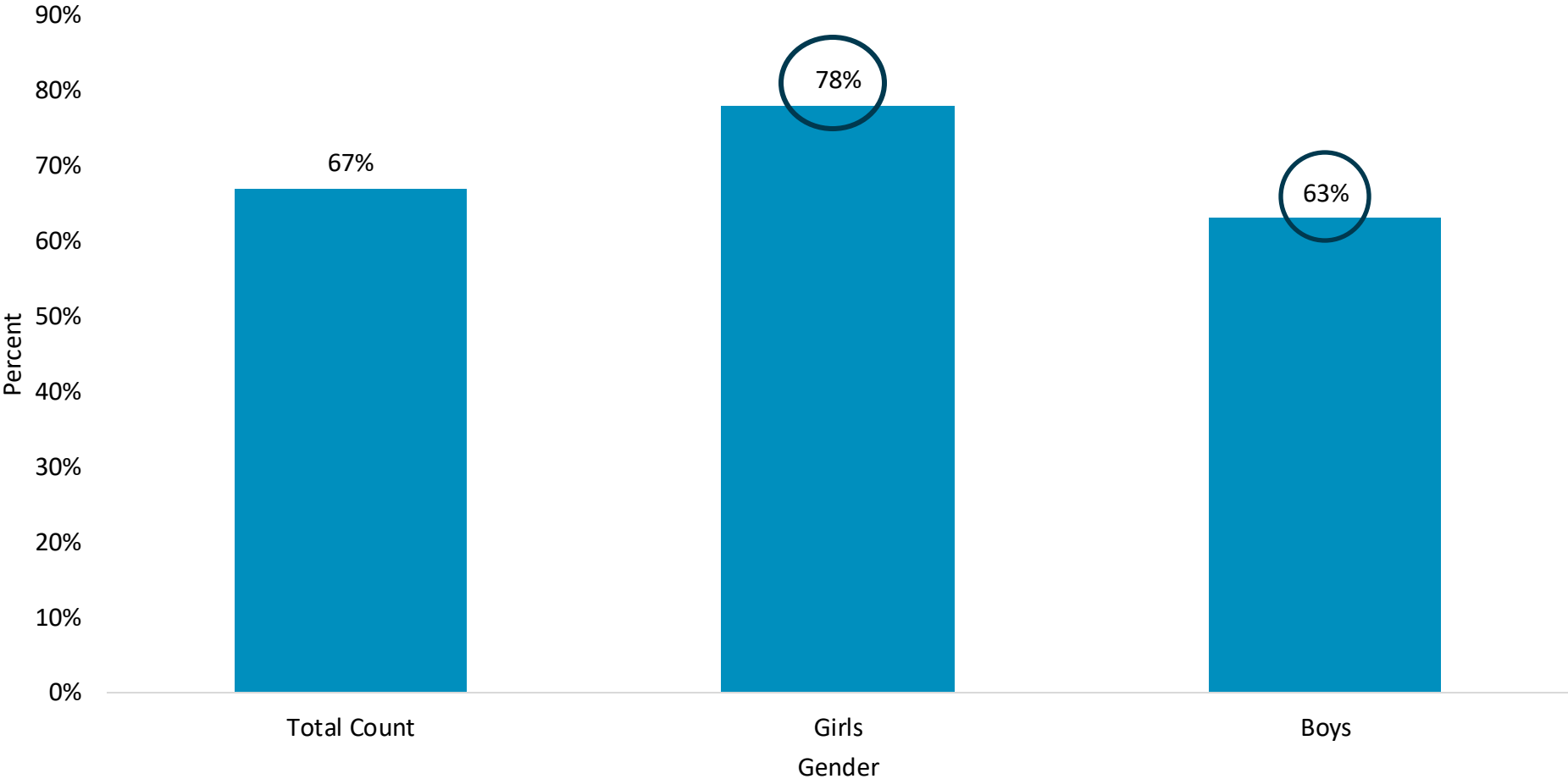
# Data shows that Black and Latino youth have higher dismissal rates compared to white youth.

Dismissals as a Percentage of Delinquency Filings (FY25)

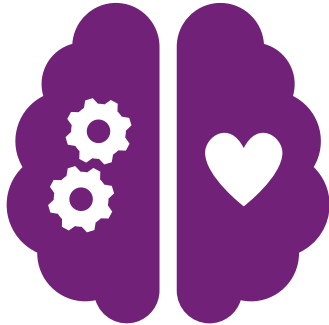


# Data shows that girls have higher dismissal rates compared to boys.

Dismissals as a Percentage of Delinquency Filings (FY25)



# 7. Despite recent expansion of upstream prevention services in Massachusetts, gaps remain in access to intensive behavioral health and substance use treatment, contributing to justice system involvement among some youth.



## Department of Mental Health data shows:

- Since FY18, full-service authorization applications have declined 46%.

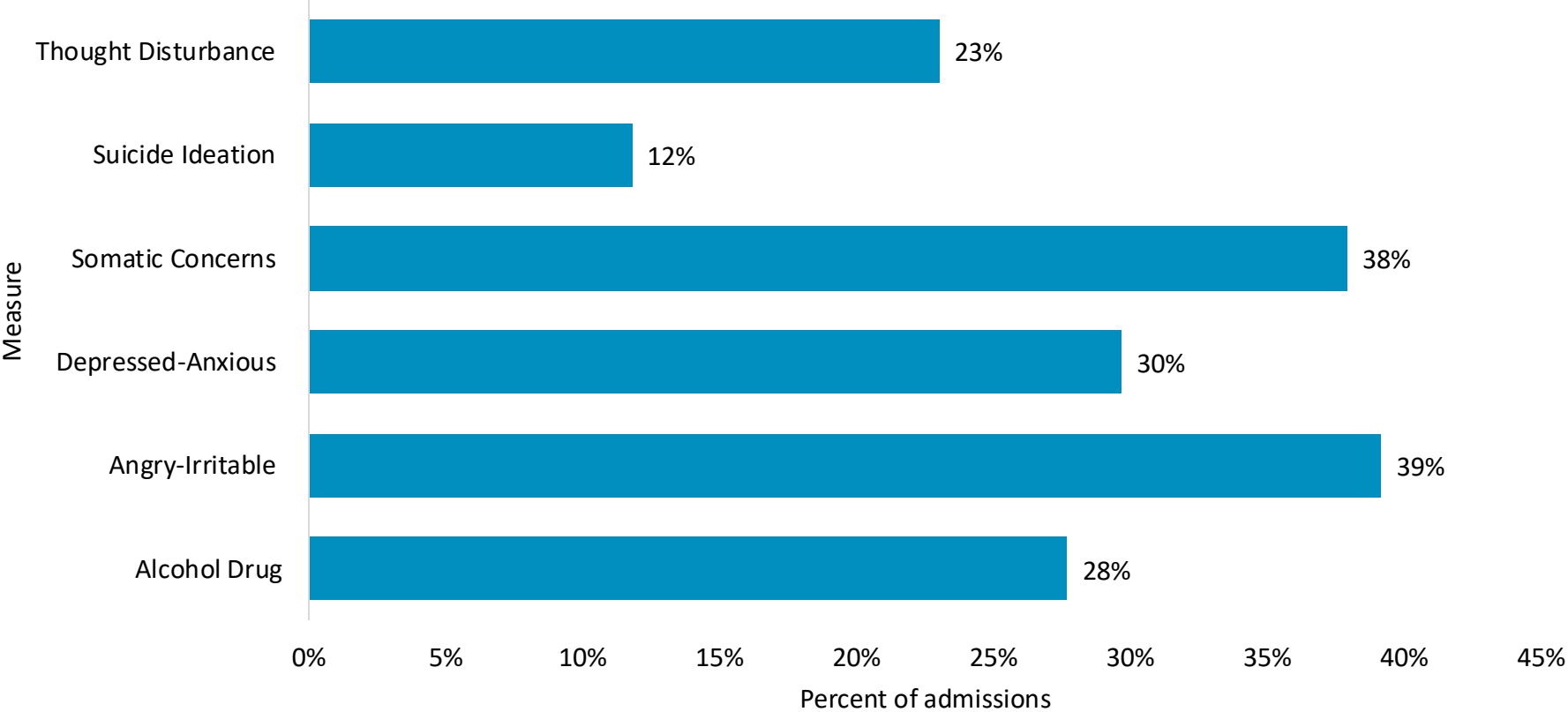
## Department of Public Health data shows:

- BSAS admissions for youth stabilization, outpatient, and residential treatment have dropped substantially.
- Since FY18, referrals to BSAS from the juvenile justice system have declined 79%.



# At the same time, behavioral health needs among youth detained pretrial remain significant and have not declined.

Pretrial Detention Admissions by Average Caution/Warning MAYSI Responses (FY22\*-FY25)

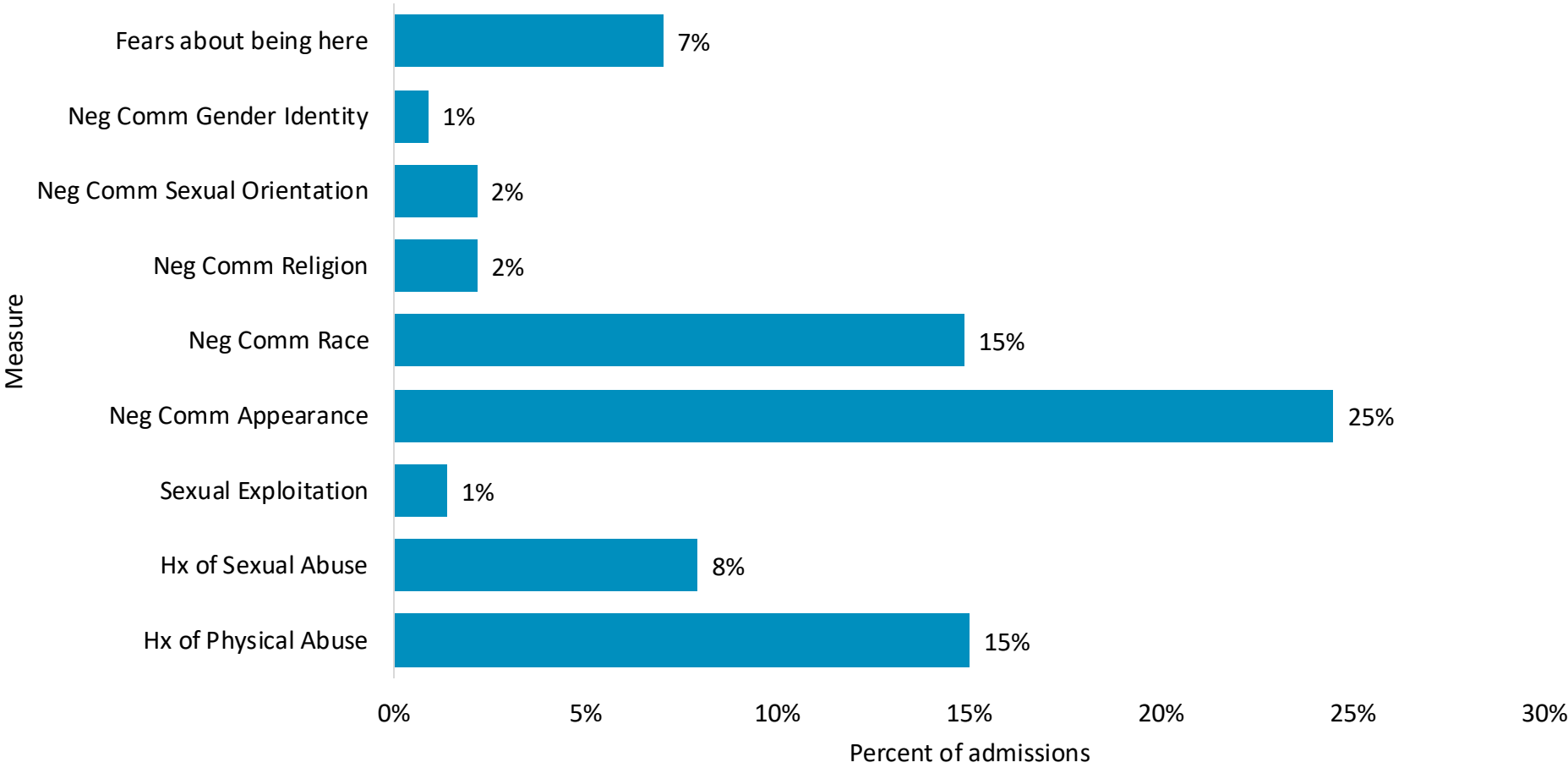


**Data Note**

*\*FY22 is the earliest year the Board has available data.*

# Additionally, detained youth continue to report a history of abuse.

Pretrial Detention Admissions by Average PREA "Yes" Responses (FY22\* -FY25)



**Data Note**

*\*FY22 is the earliest year the Board has available data.*

# MA Juvenile Justice System: FY25 Data Takeaways

1

Overall juvenile justice system volume remains stable.

2

Arrests now surpass summons as the primary vehicle to bring a youth into Juvenile Court.

3

Youth who enter the system experience greater pretrial court involvement than previously.

4

Alleged weapons-related offenses are increasing at multiple stages.

5

System involvement is concentrated among specific groups of youth.

6

More than two-thirds of cases are dismissed, indicating significant opportunities to divert youth from the process earlier.

7

Despite recent expansion of upstream prevention services in Massachusetts, gaps remain in access to intensive behavioral health and substance use treatment, contributing to justice system involvement among some youth.

# Opportunities for State Improvement

# What Can We Do?

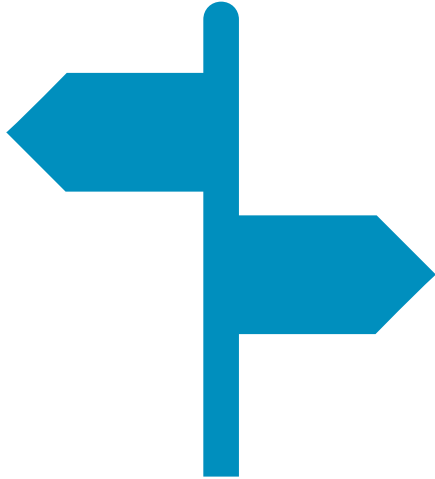
**Reduce Entry at the “Front Door.”**

**Prevent deeper system involvement for youth at the pretrial phase.**

**Improve the Commonwealth’s delinquency intervention approach for youth who remain involved in, or are at risk for deeper involvement in, the juvenile justice system.**

**Improve data reporting and accountability.**

# Reduce Entry at the “Front Door”



Increase police-led diversion to reduce system entry.



Increase use of summons in lieu of arrest.

# Prevent deeper system involvement for youth at the pretrial phase.



The Juvenile Court should conduct a system-wide review to understand:



Individual judges should review their practices to understand:

whether **more youth can be released on personal recognizance without conditions** that may increase the likelihood of violations and pretrial detention for youth.



Learn more about the pretrial phase of the juvenile justice system in the Board's 2025 report [here](#).

# Improve the Commonwealth's delinquency intervention approach for youth who remain involved in, or are at risk for deeper involvement in, the juvenile justice system.



The state should strengthen and standardize pathways to connect youth away from the juvenile justice system to appropriate state services.



JJPAD Board should study and make recommendations regarding effective state interventions for higher-risk youth and/or youth with more complex cases/needs.

# Improve data reporting and accountability.

The Trial Court no longer reports data for cases that were expunged.



The state should maintain de-identified files, for research purposes only, to ensure data accuracy.

Police and school data remain significantly underreported, preventing the Board from identifying key communities to support.



Police departments and schools should fully report their data as outlined in law. Additionally, DESE should audit which schools are underreporting or not reporting at all to determine why data is inaccurate and provide technical assistance to support data collection in specific school districts.

Juvenile recidivism data is extremely limited. Currently, Massachusetts only publicly reports recidivism data for youth committed to DYS.



The state should develop a plan for studying recidivism at other juvenile justice system process points

**Coming soon...**

# 2026 Projects: OCA Data Briefs

OCA will publish focused data briefs expanding on some of the key themes identified in the JJPAD's 2025 Annual Report related to:

- County-level disparities
- Racial and ethnic disparities
- Sexual orientation and gender identity disparities



# Discussion & Questions

The JJPAD Board wants to hear from you!  
Contact us with any questions, ideas, or to share your experiences  
with the MA juvenile justice system with us!



**E-mail:**

[Kristine.polizzano@mass.gov](mailto:Kristine.polizzano@mass.gov)

# Learn More about the JJPAD

## JJPAD Reports:

<https://www.mass.gov/lists/jypadcttf-legislative-reports-and-key-documents>

## Juvenile Justice Data Website:

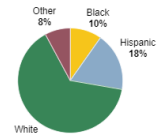
<https://www.mass.gov/resource/massachusetts-juvenile-justice-system-data-and-outcomes-for-youth>

### Youth Arrest Data: Demographic and Geographic Breakdowns

"Demographics of youth arrests", below, shows **total arrests and the demographics** of the youth who were arrested over time. From the drop down menu, you can select a demographic variable (race/ethnicity, gender, or age) of interest and see the breakdown of that variable in youth arrests over time. You can also look at data by calendar year or fiscal year, and look at either the total number of arrests in a given category, or the percent change in arrests in that category year over year.

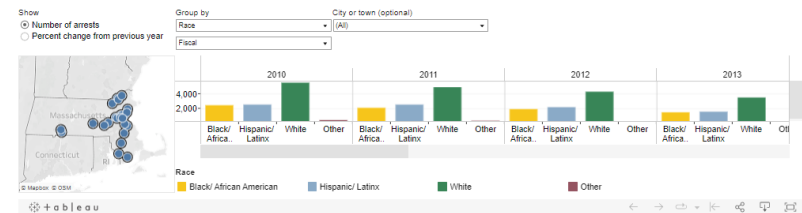
You can also look at the demographic data over time of youth arrested in cities with a population over 50,000 by selecting a city from the drop down menu.

As a point of comparison, this page also includes a visualization showing the racial distribution for **all Massachusetts youth** (not just those in the juvenile justice system) based on U.S. Census data.



Estimated percentages for the race of all Massachusetts youth, ages 12 to 17, in 2020 (Source: [EZAPOP](#)). [Download this data.](#)

### Demographics of youth arrests, statewide and by selected cities



Statewide youth arrests are shown by race, gender, and age group for each fiscal year since 2010. Arrests by demographics can be viewed for selected cities with a population above 50,000. Beginning in FY19, youth under 12 can no longer be arrested or prosecuted in the juvenile justice system as a result of "An Act Relative to Criminal Justice Reform." [\(Download this data\)](#)

Interested in receiving the JJPAD newsletter? [Sign up here!](#)

# Contact the OCA's Complaint Line

Any individual can contact the OCA to express concerns, ask questions, or receive resources and information about a service a child or young adult is receiving, or eligible to receive.

OCA Complaint Line staff are experienced clinicians with extensive and diverse expertise in human services, particularly child welfare. Translation services are available in multiple languages.

This is not an emergency/crisis line.

We will get back to you Monday through Friday from  
9am to 5pm

**Call:**

[617-979-8360](tel:617-979-8360)



**Online:**



<https://oca.my.site.com/s/oca-casewebform>

**E-mail:**

[Childadvocate@mass.gov](mailto:Childadvocate@mass.gov)





## **Questions? Ideas?**

Kristi Polizzano, Senior Policy and Implementation  
Manager

Email: [Kristine.Polizzano@mass.gov](mailto:Kristine.Polizzano@mass.gov)

### **Website**

<https://www.mass.gov/orgs/office-of-the-child-advocate>