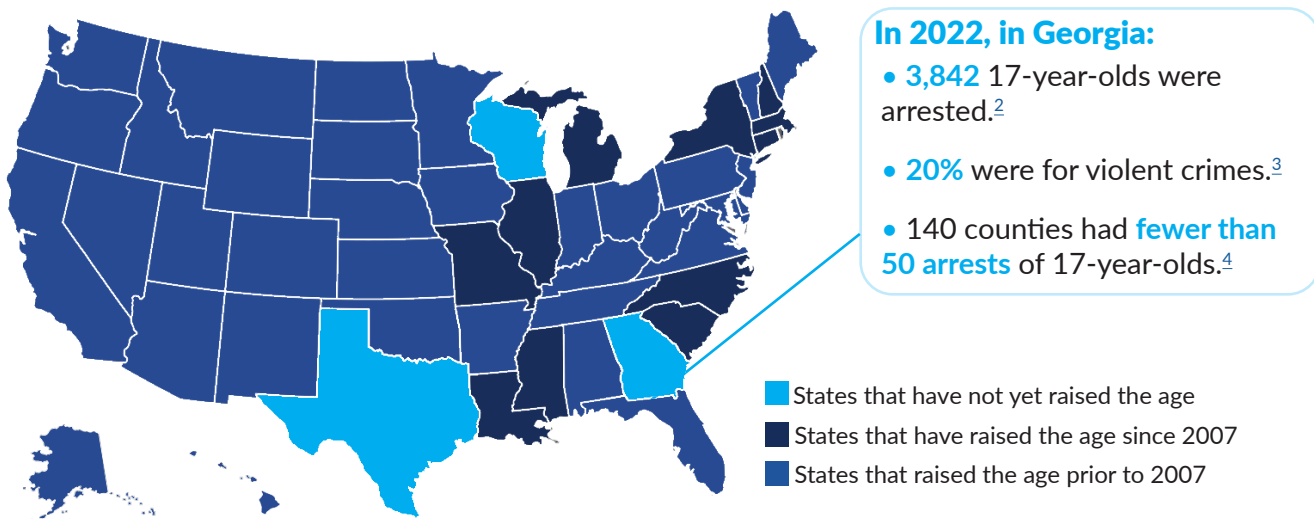


# Raising the Age of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction

Georgia is **one of only three states** that processes all 17-year-olds as adults in the criminal justice system, sending them to adult court rather than through the juvenile justice system.<sup>1</sup>

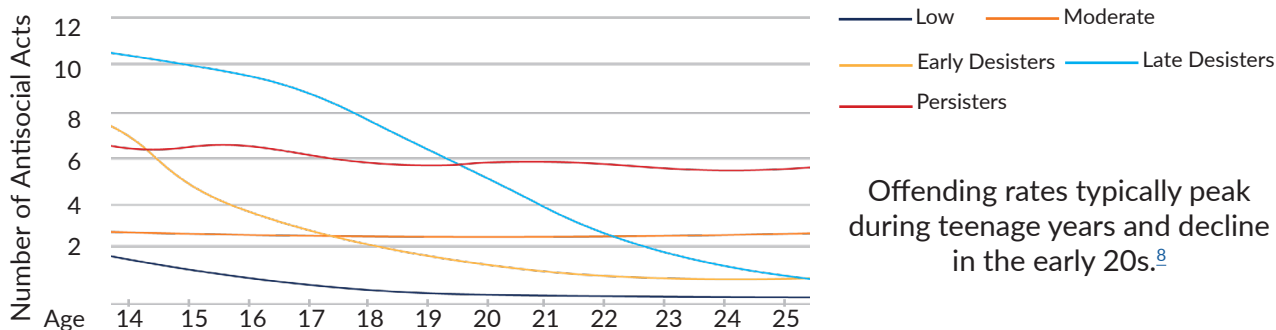


**If Georgia raises the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to 18, youth as young as 13 charged with certain violent felonies may still be tried as adults. Such crimes include murder, rape, armed robbery committed with a firearm, aggravated child molestation, aggravated sodomy, aggravated sexual battery, and voluntary manslaughter.**

## Why raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction?

A growing body of research shows 17-year-olds are still in the **adolescent phase** of brain development, a fundamentally different stage than that of an adult. Executive function skills, which allow for self-control, regulating emotions, and understanding different points of view,<sup>5</sup> are not yet fully developed. When compared to adults, 17-year-olds are:<sup>6</sup>

- less capable of impulse control
- more likely to overreact to situations
- less able to consider the consequences of their actions
- more susceptible to negative peer influences
- more likely to change course if given the right support



The U.S. Supreme Court\* finds adolescents are **more capable of change** than adults and should be given the **opportunity to rehabilitate**.<sup>7</sup>

\*Graham v. Florida (2010)

## Juvenile v. Adult Criminal Justice Systems

Juvenile courts and juvenile court-ordered plans take a more holistic approach to rehabilitation when compared to the adult criminal justice system. By using a youth's naturally high capacity for change and growth, we can **redirect behavior** into more healthy and socially positive outcomes. In short, responding to a 17-year-old's misbehavior in **developmentally appropriate ways** can reduce the likelihood that the child will commit offenses as an adult.<sup>9</sup> The following are some of the various services offered by the Juvenile Justice System in Georgia:



Mental health treatment/  
substance abuse counselors



Diversion programs



Career development and  
job readiness training



Evidence-based programs



Accountability courts



Education opportunities

**Juvenile courts prepare youth for adulthood while recognizing they are still children.**

## Reducing Detention Rates While Improving Public Safety

Evidence-based alternatives to detention have been proven to reduce the likelihood of criminal activity.<sup>10</sup> By employing these strategies, Georgia has seen a **55% reduction** in juvenile incarceration since 2013.<sup>11</sup>

Georgia's **Juvenile Justice Incentive Grants (JJIG)** and **Community Service Grants (CSG)** fund the delivery of evidence-based programs proven effective for juveniles: Seven Challenges, Trauma Focused-Cognitive Behavioral Therapy, Multisystemic Therapy-Problem Sexual Behavior, Multi-Systemic Therapy, Aggression Replacement Therapy, Functional Family Therapy, and Thinking for a Change.<sup>12,13</sup> Together these grants make these therapies available to juvenile court jurisdictions encompassing 99% of Georgia's at-risk youth population.<sup>14</sup>

### JJIGs in 2023



Served **927** youth at moderate or high risk to reoffend<sup>15</sup>



**73%** successfully completed their evidence-based programs<sup>16</sup>



**93%** were actively enrolled in or had completed high school<sup>17</sup>



**62%** reduction in out-of-home placements in JJIG-participating counties<sup>18</sup>

### CSGs in 2023

Served **392** youth at moderate or high risk to reoffend<sup>19</sup>

**76%** successfully completed their evidence-based programs<sup>20</sup>




**92%** were actively enrolled in or had completed high school<sup>21</sup>

**57%** reduction in out-of-home placements in CSG-participating counties<sup>22</sup>


## Outcomes from Raising the Age

States that have recently raised the age as part of their juvenile justice reform efforts have experienced **no** or **minimal cost increases** while lowering arrest and detention rates. Connecticut, Illinois, and Massachusetts have seen significant drops in juvenile arrests after raising the age up to 18.<sup>23</sup>

### North Carolina: Outcomes from Year Three

-  As of December 2019, 16- and 17-year-olds in North Carolina go into the juvenile court system.<sup>24,25</sup>
-  The number of criminal complaints received dropped by 5.4% from 2020 to 2021.<sup>26</sup>
-  Although the number of delinquency complaints has risen since 2019 (54%), there has been a 57% increase in the number of 16 and 17-year-old juveniles served in community programs.<sup>27</sup>

### Connecticut Outcomes

-  Juvenile arrests have decreased by 50% since moving 16- and 17-year-olds from the adult justice system to the juvenile system in 2010.<sup>28</sup>

### Massachusetts Outcomes

-  Juvenile delinquency arraignments have decreased by 60% since raising the age in 2013.<sup>29</sup>

## Preparing for the Future

The Georgia Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) is the 181<sup>st</sup> school district in the state. **Georgia Preparatory Academy** is the middle and high school within the DJJ school system with 28 campuses across the state in detention and transitional centers. An online version of the Georgia Preparatory Academy is available for youth under DJJ supervision who are unable to return to public high school. Additionally, **Pathways to Success** is an adult education program that offers GED instruction and testing. The **Connections Graduate Program** focuses on re-entry, work skills development, and post secondary options.<sup>35</sup>

## Fast Facts

- Nationally, youth are **36 times** more likely to commit suicide in an adult facility than a juvenile facility.<sup>30</sup>
- In 2022, the average daily caseload of youth in Georgia receiving mental health services was **515**.<sup>31</sup>
- From 2014-2023, more than **16,000 youth** have received individual or group therapy through evidence-based models delivered by the Georgia juvenile justice system.<sup>32, 33</sup>
- Data show lower level offenders emerge from incarceration **more inclined** to conduct criminal activity after being confined with higher level offenders.<sup>34</sup>





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