

Annual Report for Fiscal Year 2021

Juvenile Court of Clayton County, Georgia



Clayton County Youth Development & Justice Center

9163 Tara Boulevard | Jonesboro, GA 30236

T: 770.477.3270 | W: claytoncountyga.gov/government/courts/juvenile-court

Table of Contents

Message from Chief Judge Steven C. Teske	3
Executive Summary	5
Pandemic Response	6
Vision and Mission of the Juvenile Court	6
Jurisdiction	6
Funding	7
Office of the Clerk of Juvenile Court	8
Intake Operations	8
Restorative Justice	10
Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)	11
Probation	13
Child Welfare	14
Court Leadership	15

This report was authored by Colin Slay, Director of Juvenile Court Operations, and covers the period of July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2021. Most of the data presented in this report was generated through our JCATS case management system, managed by [Canyon Solutions](#).

We are appreciative of the Annie E. Casey Foundation for their support of our reform efforts, but we acknowledge that any opinions expressed in this report are those of the author and may not necessarily reflect upon the opinions of the Foundation.

Message from Chief Judge Steven C. Teske

Dear Citizens of Clayton County,

It is with mixed emotions that I present this Annual Report. I am excited about what we have accomplished this past year in the face of a life-threatening pandemic that has catapulted our court to national attention, implementing innovative strategies to process cases while simultaneously ensuring the safety of all. On the other hand, I have announced my retirement after twenty-two years on the bench and will be moving on to work with families in a new role as attorney and advocate. While I am excited about my future endeavors, I am sad to be leaving the Juvenile Court of Clayton County and the wonderful staff that I have enjoyed working alongside for so many years. I would like to devote the remainder of this message to highlighting the achievements made by the court during my tenure, through the hard work of our staff and the support of our many stakeholders in Clayton County.

Immediately upon taking the bench in 1999, the most significant observation was the disproportionate number of children of color arrested, detained, and probated or committed to State custody. I was also alarmed by the disproportionate number of children of color removed from homes, mostly for allegations of neglect. The more I dug, the more I discovered that the drivers of these racially disparate numbers were a broken system coupled with economically deprived families.

On the delinquency side, most of the children of color were detained for minor offenses, resulting in an average of daily detention population of 62, in a 60-bed facility. There were some days the number exceeded 100, requiring mattresses to be brought into the detention facility to accommodate kids who had to sleep on the floor. Due to innovative strategies implemented in the early 2000s, our average daily detention population now fluctuates between approximately ten and fifteen.

On the dependency side, the number of children in foster care was in the mid-800s, and most involved families of color. I was alarmed by how quickly we pulled the trigger to remove children from their homes, for mostly involving what I call, “fixable neglect,” or who had relatives willing and able to temporarily take the children pending the parents’ actions to resolve the underlying cause of the neglect. Using collaborative approaches, with the Juvenile Court taking the lead, innovative strategies and techniques were employed that have reduced the number of children in foster care to an average of approximately the mid-200s. This means we have far fewer children of color removed from their homes and placed into State custody.

These strategies, techniques, and programs, to name a few, include the Finding Alternatives for Safety and Treatment (FAST) Panel, the Clayton County Collaborative Child Study Team (Quad-CST), the School-Justice Partnership, the Second Chance Accountability Court, the Graduated Response System, and the Juvenile Assessment and Risk Instrument System (JARIS). Together, these approaches have been shown by regression analysis studies to influence a dramatic decline in delinquency filings by as much as 82 percent. This means we have far fewer children of color in the juvenile justice system and entering the cradle- or school-to-prison pipeline.

It should be of no surprise that the Clayton County Juvenile Court has been referenced, mentioned, and cited as a national “model” court in several books, including but not limited to, *A Handbook for Evidence Based Juvenile Justice Systems* (Howell, Lipsey, and Wilson), *Choosing the Future for American Juvenile Justice* (Tanenhaus and Zimring), *Not a Crime to be Poor* (Edleman), *Kids for Cash* (Ecenbarger), and numerous journal articles, including, “The Teske Model: An Alternative Approach to Zero Tolerance Policies,” published in the *Children’s Legal Rights Journal* (Zausch).

In conclusion, none of these great outcomes for children, youth, and families would have occurred without the tremendous commitment and dedication of court staff, as well as our fellow stakeholders in both the public and private sectors. I am forever indebted to all.

Wishing Clayton County continued success in all its endeavors, I remain,

Steven C. Teske, Chief Judge of Clayton County Juvenile Court

Executive Summary

As the 2021 fiscal year started in July 2020, we were a few months into the COVID-19 pandemic, and during the preceding months we completely adjusted how we worked. In response to continued judicial emergency declarations, most employees were working remotely; we had shifted to virtual court hearings; we adjusted certain policies, particularly around detention admissions (to help ensure only children deemed a significant danger to the community were detained to reduce the likelihood of a virus outbreak inside the detention centers) and interactions with clients (probation officers and CASAs incorporated “curbside” field contacts with clients); and we had modified our courthouse to help ensure proper social distancing in an effort to prevent the spread of the virus.

Our efforts in response to the pandemic have proven very effective and have been cited as a model response for juvenile courts.¹ While a few of our employees did contract the virus, we were able to avoid large-scale contraction within the court. Participation by parties in court hearings, especially for the initial detention hearings for delinquency and dependency, improved over pre-pandemic rates. Not surprisingly, detention utilization dropped to its lowest levels in the modern era of the Juvenile Court. The use of detention alternatives increased, while overall court filings fell. While we are not yet out of the pandemic at the writing of this report, the lessons we have learned thus far will continue to inform not only the immediate future but will likely become part of the permanent operating procedures of the Juvenile Court. For instance, it is likely that virtual court hearing participation will remain an option for some parties, particularly for parents and caregivers, who often had to take the day off work to attend hearings on short notice. Detention utilization policies for moderate-risk offenses will likely be modified based on our experience in successfully using detention alternatives for these types of offenses during the pandemic.

As outlined in Judge Teske’s preceding message, Clayton County Juvenile Court has a long history of juvenile justice reform; we have built a system that is nimble and focused on solving problems, which enabled us to respond quickly and effectively to the pandemic. Our response would not have been successful if it were not for the many collaborative relationships we have built over the years and the flexibility of our staff. Support from several county departments, ranging from Fire and Emergency Services to the Department of Information Technology to Buildings and Maintenance, was essential in ensuring our operations continued at the height of the pandemic. Collaboration with the other county courts and court-serving agencies was vital in developing an effective and efficient response to the pandemic with regard to court operations. Finally, our staff worked tirelessly to incorporate and refine new procedures and methods of work. We are thankful to all these individuals and organizations.

¹ “Reimagining Juvenile Justice: How the Dual Crisis of COVID-19 and Racial Injustice Inform Judicial Policymaking and Reform,” published in the *Juvenile and Family Court Journal* on July 14, 2021 (Gagnon and Alpern).

Pandemic Response

The global COVID-19 pandemic started a few months prior to the start of the 2021 fiscal year. The first statewide declaration of judicial emergency was issued by Georgia Supreme Court Chief Justice Harold Melton on March 14, 2020. Chief Justice Melton's and the local declaration of judicial emergency issued by Clayton County Superior Court Chief Judge Geronda Carter, were extended each month, through the end of June 2021.

The judicial emergency declarations tolled or suspended several court process time restrictions, prohibited the ability of courts to compel court attendance for in-person court hearings, and encouraged virtual court hearings and virtual meetings to meet operational needs of courts, among other requirements and restrictions. Specific to the Juvenile Court, we immediately began virtual court hearings for emergency detention hearings for delinquency and dependency matters. Most of our staff began working remotely, and we adjusted several policies to limit exposure for court clients and staff. We made several modifications to our facility, including restricting group seating, marking the courthouse for proper social distancing, and adding physical barriers to employee work areas and the courtrooms. Clayton County Fire and Emergency Services provided the Juvenile Court with masks for employees and the public, sanitation equipment and supplies for the courthouse, and temperature scanning devices for both the public and employee entrances to the courthouse.

By mid-August, we began implementing our reconstitution plan. Our staff returned to the office on a modified schedule to help reduce the likelihood of a widespread virus outbreak within a unit. We also began scheduling virtual hearings for other types of proceedings, including dependency adjudications and dispositions. As of the writing of this report, we have resumed all court operations, except for in-person court hearings (although in-person delinquency adjudications are scheduled to begin in August 2021). While most court processes remained modified to help ensure the safety of the public and our employees, we can fully serve the citizens of Clayton County.

Vision and Mission of the Juvenile Court

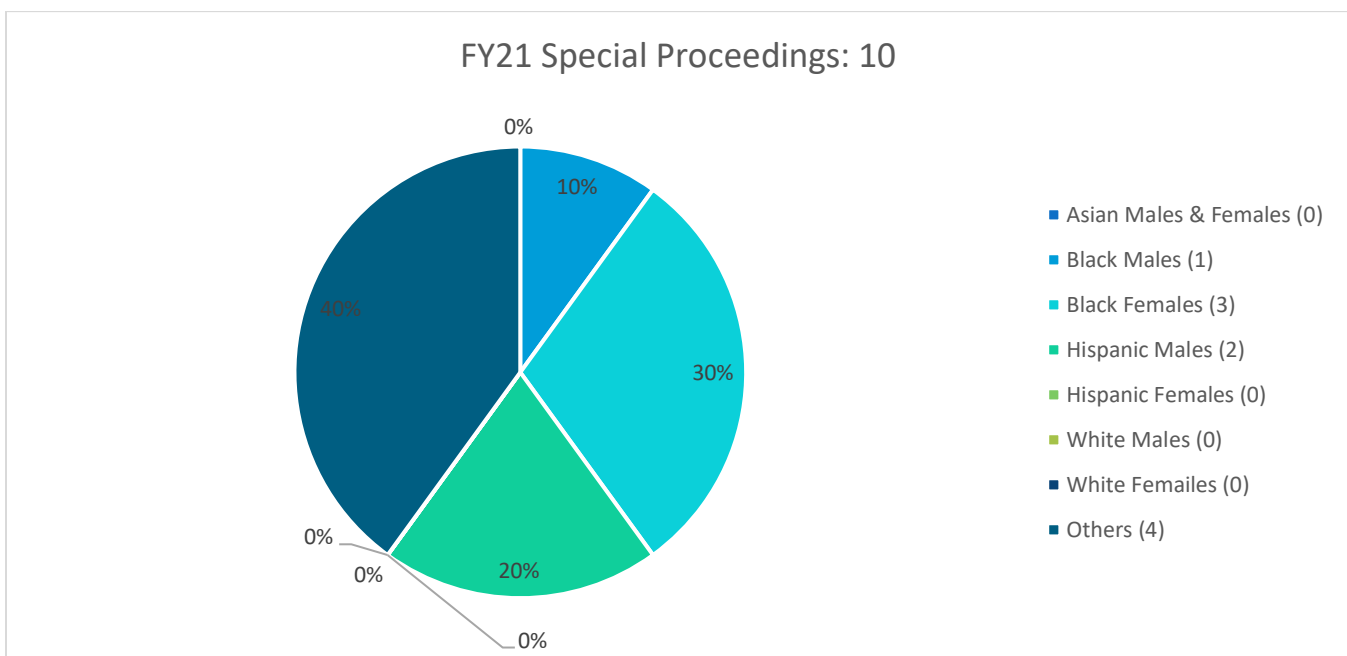
The *Vision* of CCJC is a safe and secure community that utilizes prevention and treatment services in collaboration with families and other organizations to ensure the wellbeing of children.

Our *Mission* is to endeavor to protect and restore the children of the county as secure and law-abiding members of society, and to strengthen families and reduce the need for further intervention by the prompt treatment, rehabilitation, and supervision of delinquent children and children in need of services, and the decisive processing of dependency cases.

Jurisdiction

Generally, the Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over children in Clayton County who are alleged to be delinquent, in need of services, or dependent. The age limits and subject matter of our jurisdiction for these matters varies. For detailed information on juvenile court jurisdiction, please refer to the [Official Code of Georgia Annotated \(OCGA\) § 15-11-10](#).

<p>CCJC served</p> <p>1,963</p> <p>children in FY21</p>	<p>In FY21,</p> <p>11/19</p> <p>Termination of Parental Rights cases resulted in the severance of parents' rights</p>	<p>CCJC held</p> <p>1,231</p> <p>virtual court hearings in FY21</p>
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Funding

The majority of the CCJC’s funding comes from the Clayton County Board of Commissioners, and more than half of it is dedicated to the salaries and benefits of the court’s more than 70 employees. The remainder is devoted to operational costs. Programs and treatment services are largely funded through cooperative relationships with partners and through grant funding.

<p>CCJC’s operational budget for FY21 was</p> <p>\$4,691,228.</p>	<p>CCJC collected</p> <p>\$4,842</p> <p>in</p> <p>Supervision Fees during FY21.</p>	<p>CCJC received</p> <p>\$625,140</p> <p>in grant funding during FY21.</p>
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Office of the Clerk of Juvenile Court

The Clerk's Office is responsible for making and maintaining a record of all juvenile traffic citations, petitions, motions, orders, and other legal processes filed with the court. Deputy clerks assign court-appointed attorneys, schedule hearings, issue summons, schedule interpreters, prepare court dockets, record case dispositions, and receive all fines, fees, and other monies ordered by the court. They also attend all court hearings and provide the judges with administrative support during those hearings.

Fees Collected by the Clerk's Office in FY21

Description	Amount Collected
Publication Fees	\$2,560.00
Restitution	\$5,126.80
Supervision Fees	\$4,824.00
Traffic Fines	\$3,777.93
Copy Fees	\$544.00
Contempt Fines	\$0.00
Total of Fees Collected	\$16,832.73

Intake Operations

Intake Operations is responsible for receiving all referrals, known as "juvenile complaints," from law enforcement, parents, school officials, the Division of Family and Children Services (DFCS), and private citizens. Intake is like the triage unit of a hospital: Intake officers make detention decisions for children taken into custody by police on delinquency matters, decide on shelter care placement in dependency matters, and pre-screen complaints for their processing pathway (formal or informal).

Intake Operations made

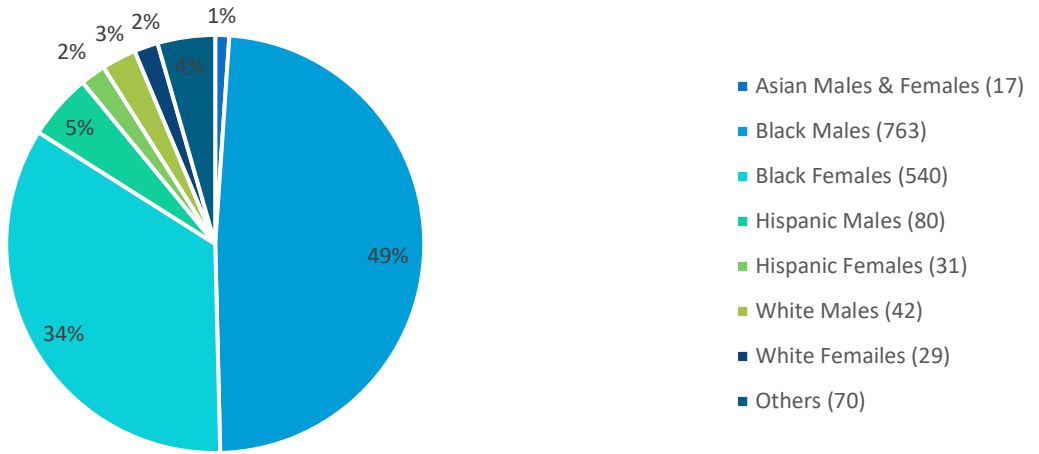
144

detention decisions and detained

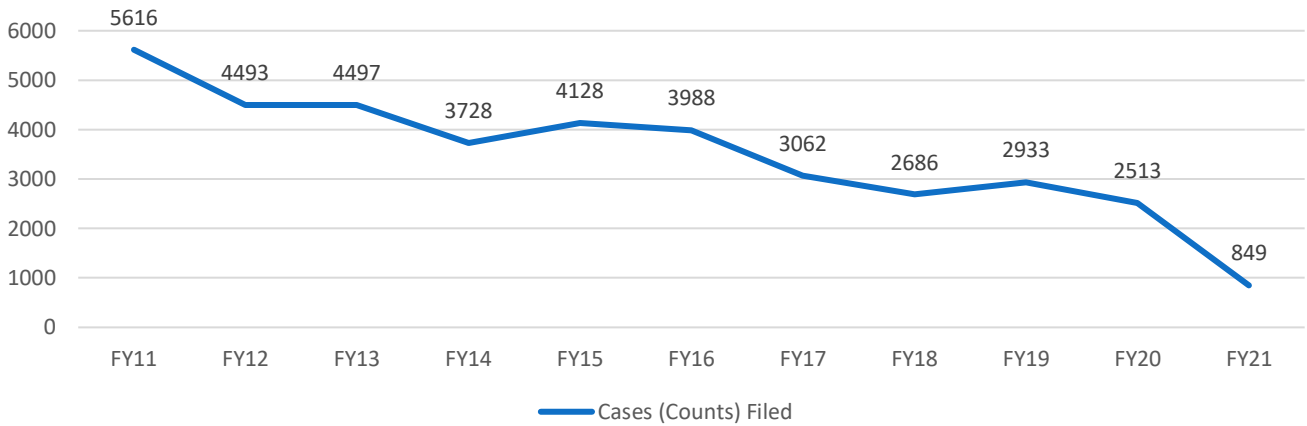
81

children during FY21.

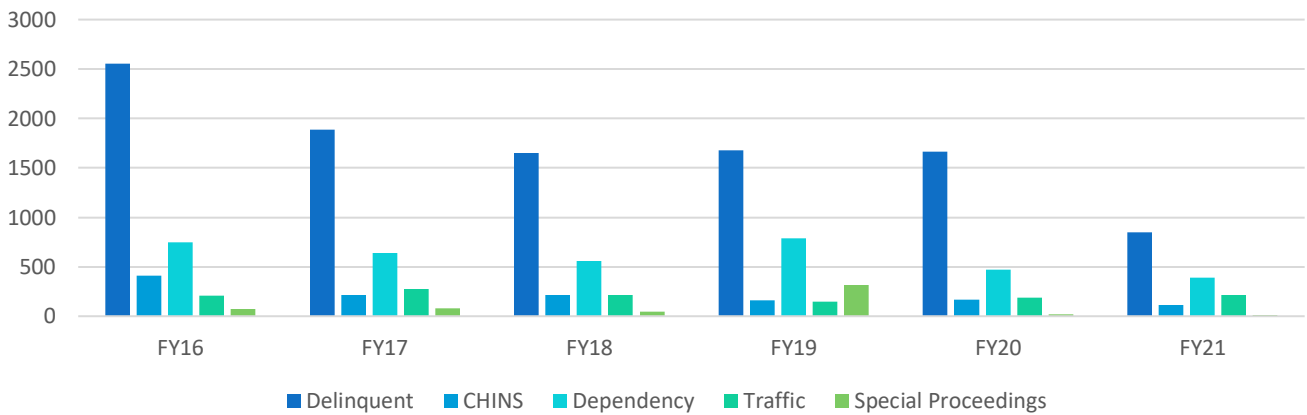
FY21 Total Court Filings: 1,572



Trends: Cases (Counts) Filed, Fiscal Years 2011-2021



Trends: Cases (Counts) by Category, Fiscal Years 2016-2021



Restorative Justice

Restorative Justice serves a vital role in the court, especially given the plethora of research suggesting that informal processes produce better outcomes for children who commit minor offenses than traditional formal justice processes. Georgia law endorses the use of informal processes for children who are alleged to have committed a non-serious delinquent act or who are children in need of services. We utilize pure diversion, informal adjustment agreements, and alternative dispute resolution (ADR) approaches, such as mediation.

Our Restorative Justice Division also manages our general programming for court-involved children. Over the years, the court has moved away from internal provision of programs in favor of collaborating with our partners in the community to provide programs for children involved with the court. Serving in the capacity of program manager, Court Officer II, [Keshia Johnson](#), coordinates with the Clayton County System of Care to design, schedule, and monitor programs for informal processes, our school-justice partnership, and probation.

Clayton County's School-Justice Partnership a National Model

The School Referral Reduction Program has been the target of much national attention for its innovative approach to addressing school disciplinary issues and minor school-related offenses. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (AECF), National Council of Juvenile and Family Court Judges (NCJFCJ), Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, and other influential organizations have identified Clayton County's School-Justice Partnerships Model as an evidence-based approach to dismantling the School-to-Prison Pipeline, the result of zero-tolerance policies that push students who commit minor school infractions into the juvenile justice system.

A team that includes key staff from the Juvenile Court, Clayton County Public Schools, Clayton County law enforcement, and the Clayton County System of Care have provided technical assistance on the model to more than 50 jurisdictions across the nation. This work has been supported by AECF and NCJFCJ.

During FY21, Restorative Justice screened

192

cases for informal processes and monitored

78

informal contracts for a period 90-180 days.

During FY21,

156

cases were screened by ADR, and

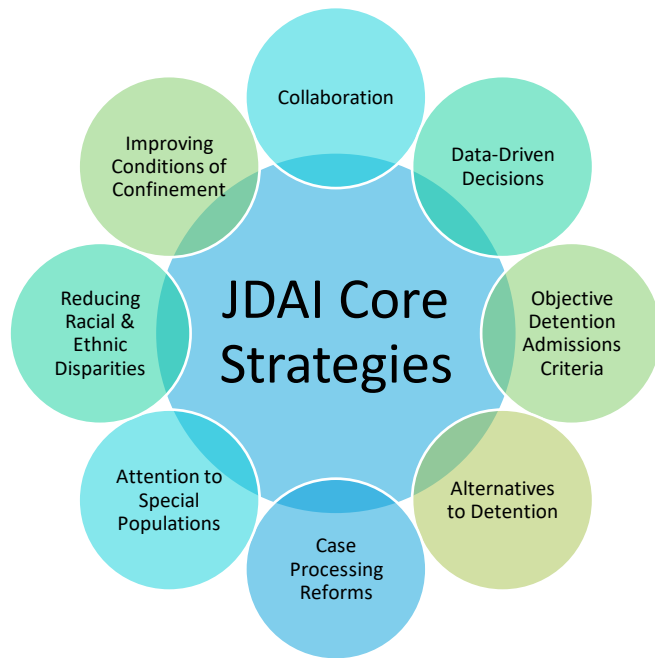
21

children participated in mediated agreements.

Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI)

Our JDAI unit is named for the 25-year-old project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, one of the nation’s most effective, influential, and widespread juvenile justice reform initiatives. JDAI is primarily focused on the overuse of detention by juvenile justice systems. For more information on the national JDAI movement, please visit JDAI’s online community, [JDAIconnect](#).

Clayton County became a JDAI replication site in 2003, in response to tremendous stress on our juvenile justice system. Our JDAI Unit encompasses our detention review committee, the Finding Alternatives for Safety and Treatment (FAST) Panel, the Clayton County Collaborative Child Study Team (Quad-CST), and our liaison with the Clayton County System of Care.



Drop in the Average Daily Population in Detention:

99%

Reduction in the Average Length of Stay in Detention:

68%

Drop in rate of Commitments to DJJ:

97%/96%

(overall/youth of color)

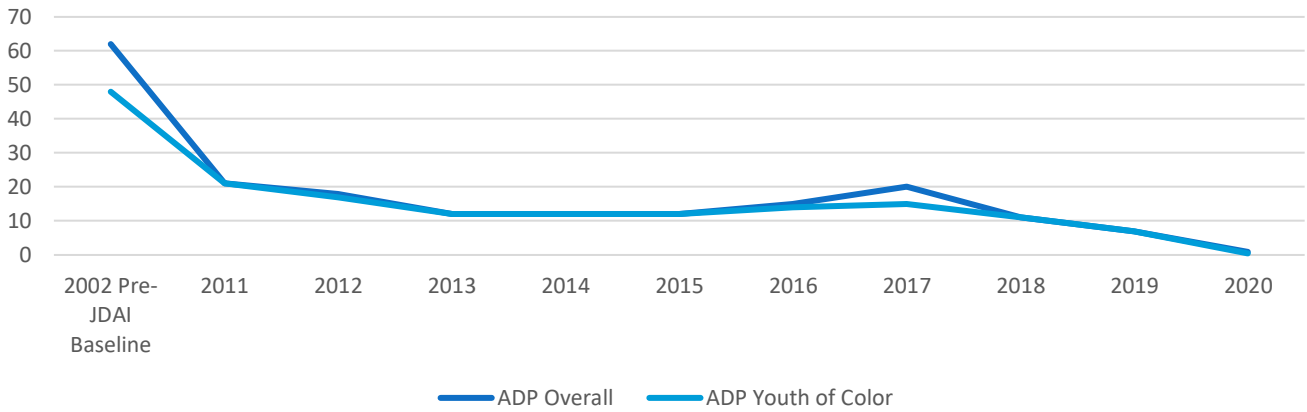
Rate of Failures to Appear and Rearrest for youth released on detention alternatives:

<1%

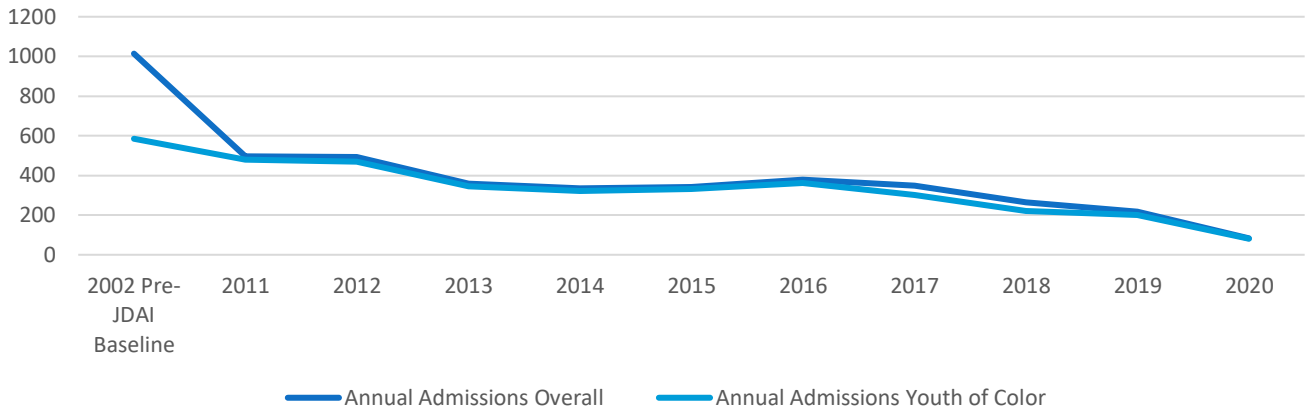
Reduction in the number of juvenile petitions filed in CCJC:

97%

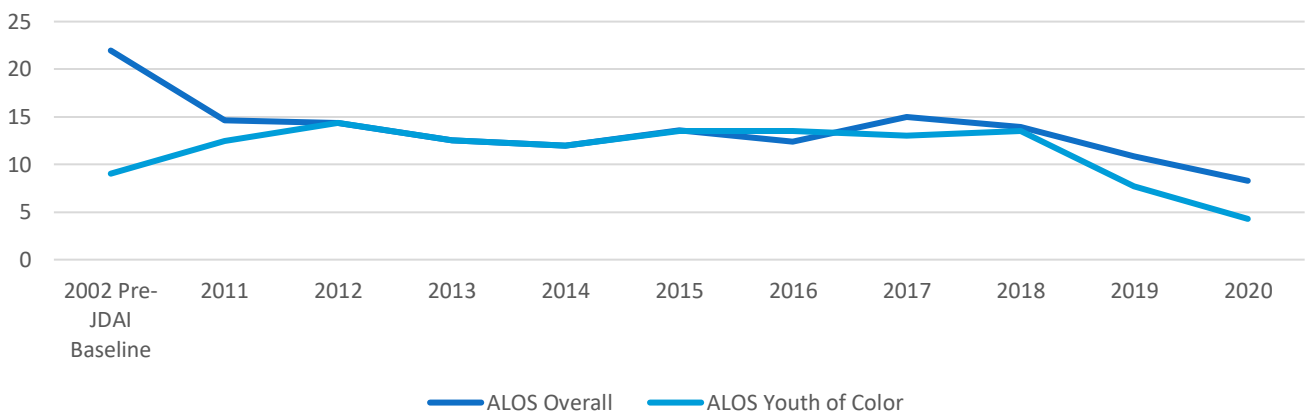
Trends: Average Daily Population in Detention

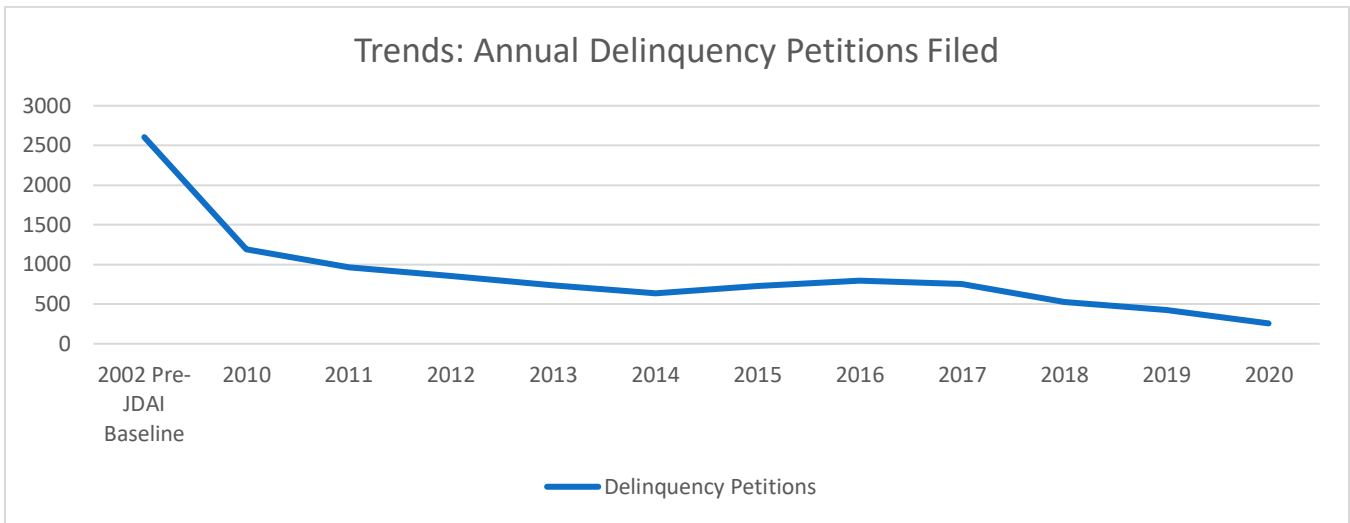
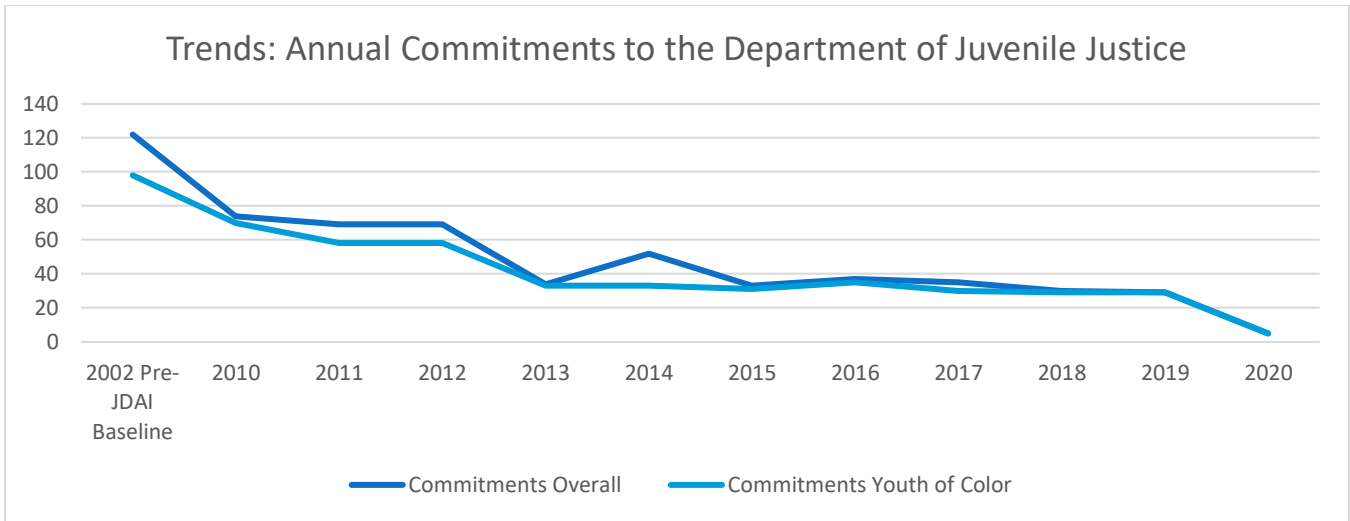


Trends: Annual Admissions to Detention



Trends: Average Length of Stay in Detention (Days)





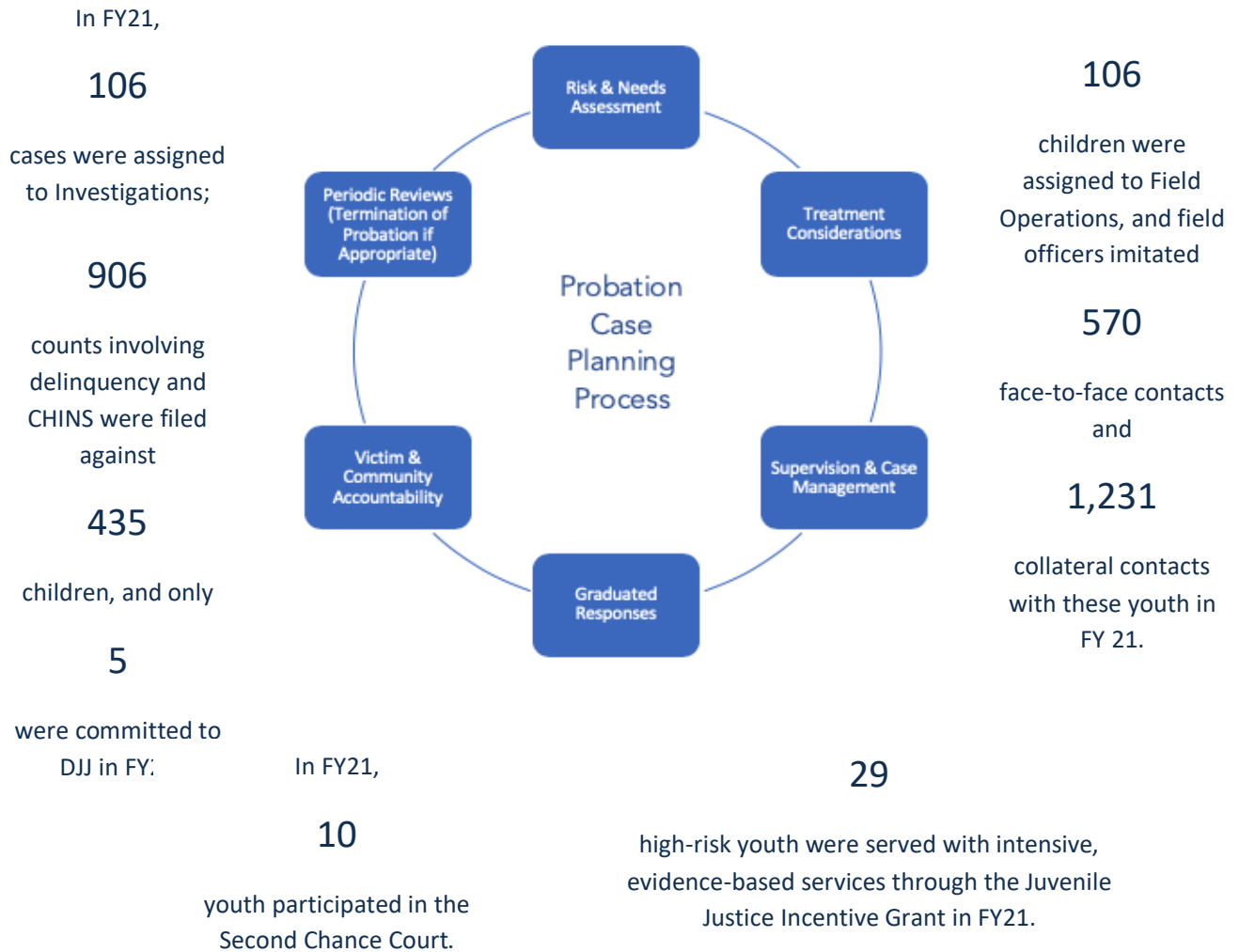
Probation

We divide the probation function of our court into three units: Investigations, Field Operations, and Special Juvenile Justice Programs.

The Investigations Unit is responsible for conducting pre-disposition investigations, completing risk classification and needs assessments, preparing pre-disposition reports for the court, and supervising children released on Community Detention Orders prior to disposition.

Field Operations performs the traditional probation function of supervising all children placed on probation by the court. They utilize a system of graduated responses to manage probated children and work with the families to develop case plans that build on the child’s and family’s strengths, while holding them accountable to the terms of their probation orders.

Special Juvenile Justice Programs encompasses the “deep end” probation programs, including the Second Chance Court, which uses an accountability court framework to supervise and treat designated felony offenders, and the [Juvenile Justice Incentive Grant](#) programs for high-risk offenders: [Multisystemic Therapy](#) and [Aggression Replacement Training](#).



Child Welfare

Our Child Welfare Division is comprised of our Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASA) and Judicial Citizen Review Panel (JRCP) programs.

CASA is a lauded national program that utilizes specifically selected, screened, and trained volunteers to advocate for children who have been the victim of abuse and/or neglect and are in foster care, the custody of relatives, or who are involved in custody disputes. In our court, CASA staff and volunteers serve as the child’s *guardian ad litem* during

Juvenile Court and certain Superior Court hearings to advocate in the child’s best interests. To inquire about becoming a CASA volunteer, please contact our CASA Volunteer Training Supervisor, [Griffin Shirley](#).

The JCRPs are a program of the [Georgia Council of Juvenile Court Judges](#). Their purpose is to assist judges in determining the most appropriate permanency plan for children in foster care. The panels are comprised of citizen volunteers who have been screened and trained by the Council and court and act in the best interests of the child. To inquire about volunteering to serve on a JCRP, please contact our JCRP Coordinator, [Annell Hudson](#).

CASA volunteers and staff advocated for

1,537

children, logging more than

894

hours in the courtroom and

1,438

other hours advocating for children in FY21.

CASA volunteers and staff completed

99

home evaluations and spent

709

hours in training in FY21.

JCRPs logged

20.75

hours in

14

panels, and

6/32

children achieved permanency.

Court Leadership

The court is served by three full-time judges and a part-time associate judge. Chief Judge Steven Teske has served the court since 1999; he was appointed as chief judge in 2011, and as noted earlier in this report, is set to retire from the Juvenile Court in October 2021. Judge Deitra Burney-Butler has served the court as judge since 2009. Judge Bobby Simmons has served the court since 2011. Associate Judge Salvia Fox was appointed to the juvenile court bench in 2018. The Clayton County Superior Court reappointed our full-time judges to their last four-year term in 2019.

The administration of the court is managed by Director of Juvenile Court Operations, Colin Slay. Mr. Slay was appointed to this position in 2018; his previous service, across multiple divisions of the court, dates to 1998. Mr. Slay is assisted in his duties by the Chief of Staff, Tiffany Moen. Mrs. Moen served as the court's Chief of Child Welfare before being appointed to her current position in 2018. [Mrs. Moen](#) also serves as the court's public information officer.

Why It All Matters

Austin was originally referred to the Restorative Justice Division for consideration of an informal contract for running away from home. Court Officer Pamelyn Harris was assigned her case and began working with Austin and her family. Austin was placed on an informal agreement, and over the next five months, Ms. Harris worked diligently to help improve communication between Austin and her father.

Ms. Harris quickly became a trusted ear for Austin and worked to encourage her to pursue her dreams. She helped Austin understand the danger she was placing herself in when she left home, including victimization of child sexual abuse—something that Austin unfortunately experienced while a runaway. Ms. Harris helped Austin obtain employment as a pet groomer, and Austin's home situation improved and stabilized. Austin successfully completed the terms of her informal agreement, and her case was dismissed, and record sealed, in accordance with the Juvenile Code.

Ms. Harris has kept in touch with Austin since the termination of her informal agreement, and Ms. Harris recently learned that Austin has enlisted in the Marine Corps (Ms. Harris had helped connect Austin with the Marines recruiter). In a recent conversation with Ms. Harris, Austin stated, "Officer Harris, I just remembered everything that you told me, and I knew that I had to do what I need to do to make a life for myself like you told me."

This story exemplifies why our approaches can have a positive impact on the lives of the children and families we serve. Unfortunately, in many juvenile courts across the country, Austin's case would have been formally processed, and she likely would have been placed on formal probation, something that in and of itself increases the odds that she would have been detained. Research shows that entering detention only one time can decrease the odds of graduating from high school by as much as 50 percent and increase the odds of further involvement with the juvenile justice system (*No Place for Kids: The Case for Reducing Juvenile Incarceration*, published by the Annie E. Casey Foundation). Thanks to the many reforms that Clayton County Juvenile Court has implemented since 2003, Austin's case took an informal route and produced a positive outcome.

We would like to thank Ms. Harris for sharing this story and for her hard work with Austin and her family—Austin's real name was changed to protect her identity.