

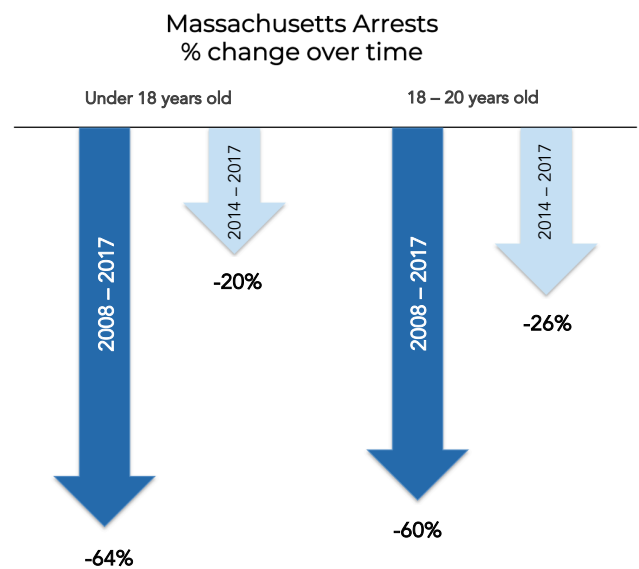
## Massachusetts' Youth Justice System: Data Trends and Three Key Indicators

The Emerging Adult Justice Project at the Columbia University Justice Lab analyzed three key administrative data sets and found that the Commonwealth's youth justice system has been dramatically shrinking since 2008: Arrests of youths under age 18, delinquency court caseloads, and the population of youth ordered to the custody of the Department of Youth Services have all dropped by double digits. The steady decline in youth justice caseloads since 2008 continued even *after* Massachusetts raised the upper age of its juvenile jurisdiction from a youth's 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> birthday in the fall of 2013 (RtA). The Massachusetts Juvenile Court's concerns that the inclusion of 17-year-olds might overwhelm the juvenile justice system never materialized. This is welcome news for justice stakeholders as Massachusetts considers raising the age of its juvenile justice once again to include most youth ages 18-20 as a means to improve youth outcomes and increase public safety.

### (1) Youth crime in Massachusetts is at a historic low

According to Massachusetts State Police data, 6,230 youth under the age of 18 were arrested in 2017 compared to over 17,000 arrests in 2008, amounting to a decline of 64%. In the same time period, **the number of arrests of youth ages 18-20 declined 60%**, from over 21,000 in 2008 to 8,440 in 2017. As such, the total number of youths under age 18 *and* ages 18-20 arrested in 2017 (14,670) is less than the number of youths under age 18 arrested in 2008. Over a third of this decline occurred within 4 years *after* 2014, the first full year the RtA reform was implemented.

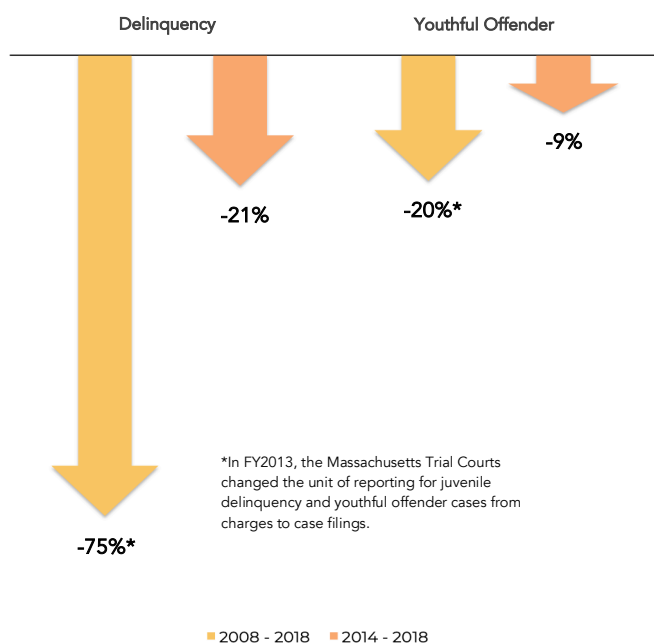
Data Source: Massachusetts State Police CrimeSOLV database, <https://masscrime.chs.state.ma.us/>



### (2) Massachusetts Juvenile Court caseloads continued to decline after RtA

From 2008 until 2013, the year Massachusetts trial courts changed the unit of reporting from number of *charges* to number of *case filings*, caseloads of juvenile courts for delinquency and youthful offender filings had declined steadily. The downward trend continued for both categories of cases after the first full year of RtA's implementation, from a total of 10,050 case filings in 2014 to 8,002 in 2018.

### Massachusetts Juvenile Court caseloads % change over time



A 21% decline in delinquency and 9% reduction in youthful offender case filings occurred between 2014 - 2018 even though Massachusetts Juvenile Court started serving a larger pool of youth with the inclusion of 17-year-olds in their jurisdiction. Just between Fiscal Years 2018 and 2019 (the most recent data available), the **delinquency caseload** dropped by 2,564 filings, amounting to a total of **47% decline since FY2014**. In fact, the **total caseload** of Massachusetts Juvenile Court, which includes all the child welfare cases, dropped by 27%, from 37,157 in FY2014 to 27,116 in FY2019.

Data Source: Massachusetts Trial Court, <https://www.mass.gov/info-details/trial-court-statistical-reports-and-dashboards>; and Massachusetts FY2015 JJAC Three Year Plan, <https://www.mass.gov/files/documents/2016/09/td/fy2015-jjac-threeyrplan.pdf>

### (3) The number of youths in the custody of Department of Youth Services has plummeted

The Massachusetts Department of Youth Services (DYS), the Commonwealth’s youth correctional agency, serves detained youth pending trial (detention) as well as adjudicated delinquent youths and youthful offenders (commitments). The number of youths in all of the categories of DYS custody has shrunk considerably since 2008. The number of **detained youths** has **declined 78%**, from 4,052 in 2008 to 874 in 2018, and almost half of this total decline occurred within the 4 years *after* the RtA was implemented. Similarly, the number of **commitments declined 76%**, from 1,895 in 2008 to 459 in 2018. The average age of the DYS committed population is now 17.9, indicating that older youth, ages 18 – 21 (with 22-year-olds served on a voluntary basis) already constitute a significant part of the DYS caseload.



Data Source: DYS Annual Report 2017, <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/dys-reports-and-resources>; and Massachusetts FY2015 JJAC Three Year Plan

Massachusetts is not alone in experiencing significant declines in youth justice caseloads, even after raising the age of jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Justice Lab reported that the number of youths sentenced to juvenile confinement in Connecticut dropped by 54% from 2005 - 2015 despite the fact that the state raised the age of its juvenile jurisdiction by two years from youths’ 16<sup>th</sup> to their 18<sup>th</sup> birthday during this time period. Similarly, the New York City Mayor’s Office announced on October 1, 2019, that nine months after the state raised the age of its juvenile jurisdiction to include 16-year-olds, the misdemeanor arrests for this age group had decreased by 61% and the number of youths detained in city facilities declined by 18%.

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<sup>1</sup> See, Justice Policy Institute (2017). “Raising the Age: Shifting to a Safer and More Effective Juvenile Justice System.” Available at <http://www.justicepolicy.org/research/11239>.