



King County



KING COUNTY AUDITOR'S OFFICE

APRIL 24, 2024

Juvenile Detention: Many Youth Face Long Stays in Facility Designed for Short-Term Support

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

King County does not have structures in place to consistently meet the varied needs of youth in secure detention at the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC). Due to policy changes at the state and local level, King County holds fewer youth in secure detention today, on average, than it did five years ago. As a result, the youth that are there face more serious charges and stay longer. However, CCFJC secure detention is designed for short-term stays and the support provided there does not meet the educational, enrichment, and mental health needs of youth with long periods of detention. Further, staffing shortages present operational challenges that result in youth spending more time confined to their cells. Youth report experiencing boredom, uncertainty, and stress during their time housed in secure detention. Despite ongoing efforts to end secure detention for youth in King County, youth will continue to be held at CCFJC for at least the next four years — and some for longer. We make recommendations to address gaps in care for youth in secure detention in King County.

Acknowledgment

Staff and leaders of the Juvenile Division of the Department of Juvenile and Adult Detention (DAJD) — particularly the detention officers, supervisors, medical and mental health staff, programming, and facility kitchen staff — indicated how much they care for the youth held in detention at the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC) and how committed they are to their work. The work staff perform is difficult and staff continue their work amidst staffing challenges, mandatory overtime, and uncertain employment futures given the policy direction to close the building. Youth we interviewed consistently shared that staff treated them kindly and genuinely cared for their wellbeing.

During the audit period, Juvenile Division leadership showed a commitment to continuous improvement. For example, the Juvenile Division management team reviews daily data indicators, or “tier boards,” to inform operational decisions, reviews division policies and procedures to ensure they are up-to-date, and contracted a third party to conduct a review of the safety and security of staff and youth in detention.

We would like to thank the leaders and staff of DAJD and the Juvenile Division for their collaboration during this audit. DAJD and Juvenile Division leadership made themselves available to answer questions and to respond to document and data requests in a timely and collaborative manner. The leadership team helped audit staff access the detention facility for tours, interviews with staff, and to speak with the youth in secure detention. Staff working on the floor of secure detention at CCFJC took time to answer questions and share their perspectives.

The King County Executive has been working toward developing comprehensive policy solutions for youth in secure detention for almost 10 years. Significant energy has been applied to the Care and Closure planning process and proviso responses. As King County moves to expand community alternatives to secure youth detention in order to close the youth detention center, the County Executive defines his plan as an effort to center youth, care, and connection, and to reduce the harms of the juvenile justice system in which we currently operate. The County Executive notes that bold action is needed to further transform the youth legal system and support young people.

REPORT HIGHLIGHTS

What We Found

The average amount of time youth spend in secure detention in the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC) while waiting for their cases to resolve has grown over time. Overall, the average length of stay for youth in secure detention tripled between 2017 and mid-2023, increasing from 12 days to 36 days. Over 200 youth had stays longer than 100 days in secure detention. While lengths of stay are long for youth facing adult charges, we found that lengths of stay are also growing for youth facing juvenile charges.

Secure detention at CCFJC is designed for short-term stays, and the support provided there does not meet the educational, enrichment, and mental health needs of youth facing long periods of detention. King County does not provide long-term mental health programs to those in secure detention, nor does it offer behavior or substance abuse treatment or job training. In addition, low staffing levels have led to shortened school periods, canceled enrichment sessions, and more cell time for youth, which increases their stress levels. The Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD) has attempted several hiring pushes over the last two years with some success, but negative culture and lack of a mechanism for positive performance improvement make continuous improvement difficult.

Youth shared concerns about the living conditions within CCFJC secure detention, disruptions to daily routines, and limited visitation. According to youth, these challenges can cause stress and increase the risk of violence and mental health-related incidents in the facility.

What We Recommend

We make recommendations for King County to address the therapeutic and skills development needs of youth held in secure detention for long lengths of stay. We also make recommendations to DAJD management to make operational changes such as modifying its housing classification system, providing performance reviews and coaching opportunities between staff and supervisors, and improving youth access to the independent grievance process available through the Office of the Ombuds.

Why This Audit Is Important

Although the King County Executive has been working toward ending youth detention, the County Executive’s Care and Closure Advisory Committee has pushed this goal back to 2028, at the earliest, for youth facing juvenile charges, and likely beyond that for youth facing adult charges. Therefore, youth will continue to be held in secure detention at CCFJC for the time being. These youth have increasingly long lengths of stay and complex therapeutic needs that the status quo is not addressing — particularly for youth facing adult charges. Without the appropriate services to meet their needs in a timely manner, youth in secure detention can face negative long-term impacts to their wellbeing.

Average lengths of stay in secure detention increased 2017–2023.



Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention data, January 2017 – June 2023

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[i](#) Executive Summary

[ii](#) Acknowledgment

[iii](#) Report Highlights

SECTIONS

[1](#) 1: Juvenile Detention Q&A

[10](#) 2: CCFJC Secure Detention is not Designed to Support Increasing Number of Long Stays

[28](#) 3: Impacts of Staffing Challenges

[38](#) 4: Living Conditions

APPENDICES

[42](#) A: Ombuds Response

[43](#) B: Executive Response

[54](#) C: Statement of Compliance, Scope, Objective & Methodology

[57](#) D: List of Recommendations

[60](#) E: Mission and Values Statement



Section 1: Juvenile Detention Q&A

SECTION SUMMARY

Secure detention of youth in King County, also referred to as juvenile detention, has undergone dramatic changes since 2016. In addition to policy changes intended to decrease the number of youth (people under the age of 18) placed in secure detention, King County also changed where some youth are detained. Since 2017, youth facing adult charges (serious offenses limited to older youth, generally ages 16 and 17) are detained in the same facility as youth facing juvenile charges. The number of youth in secure detention declined between October 2018 and August 2021, and has since increased. The King County Executive is currently pursuing a goal to expand community-based alternatives to secure detention and close the youth detention facility. This section answers key questions about juvenile detention in King County — what it is, what has changed, and who is being held.

What is juvenile detention?

When a person under the age of 18 is alleged to have broken a law (or violated Superior Court’s conditions of release) in King County, and is arrested by local law enforcement, they may be confined in secure detention at the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC).

The CCFJC, located in central Seattle at 1211 E. Alder Street, contains the juvenile detention facility operated by the Juvenile Division of the King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD). Along with Juvenile Court courtrooms, offices, and related programs, there is a secure wing where youth (people under the age of 18) are confined. Youth booked into secure detention must have a qualifying allegation by law enforcement or a court order, and many youth are screened out of placement in secure detention despite arrest.¹ Youth are also entitled to a detention hearing after filing of charges.² Youth who remain

¹ See [RCW 13.40.040](#); King County uses a detention risk assessment instrument to aid in determining whether youth may be booked into detention. In addition, some offenses are pre-screened by a judge before placement. Youth not booked into secure detention may be released to their guardian’s custody before or after screening or to a detention alternative such as FIRS ([Family Intervention and Restorative Services](#)).

² See [RCW 13.40.050](#)

in secure detention at CCFJC are held there on the authority of a King County Superior Court judge pending the Court’s adjudication of their case. Youth can also be held there as a consequence for a committed offense or for a violation of the conditions of their case.³ DAJD does not decide which youth are booked into the facility or how long they remain there. Almost all of the youth detained within CCFJC are there pending resolution of their case.⁴ This means that juvenile detention is intended as a short-term placement. While youth may receive credit for the time they spend in detention toward a later sentence, they are very rarely confined in secure detention at CCFJC as the consequence for an offense — and then only for a maximum of 30 days. Depending on the outcome of their case, youth may later be committed to a Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) Juvenile Rehabilitation facility. Juvenile Rehabilitation has two secure residential facilities: Echo Glen in Snoqualmie, Washington; and Green Hill School in Chehalis, Washington.

? For what types of charges are youth held in detention?

Youth who remain in secure detention for extended periods are usually alleged to have committed serious offenses against others (such as robberies, assaults, or homicides). Youth in juvenile detention can face adult and/or juvenile charges, with different potential sentences. Since November 2017, confined youth facing adult charges in King County are held in juvenile detention instead of an adult facility. The process for adjudicating (resolving) juvenile offenses is different than for adult crimes. Juvenile Court is a specialized division of Superior Court. Allegations in Juvenile Court do not include a right to a jury trial, and sentences are shorter than for adults. Per state law, the juvenile justice system’s intent is to emphasize rehabilitation in addition to accountability.⁵

Under Washington state law, some serious violent offenses are automatically filed as adult charges for youth aged 16 and 17.⁶ In specific circumstances, youth under 16 can also face adult charges if the alleged offense is severe enough and Superior

³ See [RCW 13.40.020\(11\)](#).

⁴ Some youth may be housed in secure detention at the CCFJC post-adjudication if there are additional pending charges in the courts; youth may also be sentenced to secure detention at CCFJC as part of an adjudication of a case, but for no more than 30 days.

⁵ [RCW 13.40.010\(2\)\(f\)](#): “Provide for the rehabilitation and reintegration of juvenile offenders.”

⁶ See [RCW 13.04.030\(1\)\(e\)\(v\) et seq.](#)

Court moves the case to adult jurisdiction.⁷ Youth facing adult charges in Superior Court face potential sentences that are significantly longer than those for juvenile offenses. For example, the equivalent standard sentence for a first-degree assault conviction that ranges from 24 to 30 months under juvenile jurisdiction is 93 to 123 months under adult jurisdiction.⁸

EXHIBIT A: The differences between juvenile jurisdiction and adult jurisdiction.

JUVENILE JURISDICTION



- No right to jury trial
- Penalties less severe
- Juvenile rehabilitation
- Record generally sealed

ADULT JURISDICTION



- Right to jury trial
- Longer penalties
- Adult prison after age 24
- Stays on record

Source: King County Auditor's Office

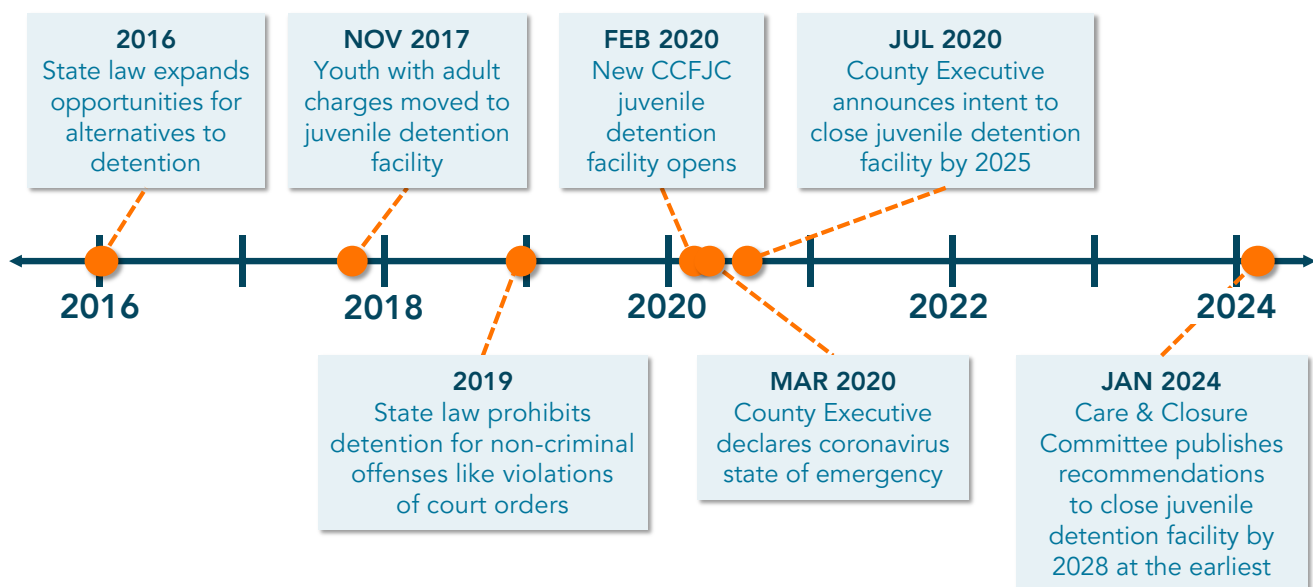
⁷ Under [RCW 13.40.110](#), charges for some youth under 16 may be moved to adult criminal prosecution by court order after hearing.

⁸ Sentence ranges for both adult and juvenile cases depend on the individual's offender score; for simplicity, for this sentence range, the offender score is zero. Note under [RCW 13.40.0357](#), the juvenile sentencing range is 103–129 weeks; converted to months here for consistency.

? How have policy changes in recent years impacted youth secure detention?

Since 2016, policy changes have significantly affected the number and circumstances of youth in secure detention. Both Washington state and King County have made changes to who is eligible for secure detention and where they can be held (see exhibit B). These changes have impacted the number of youth in secure detention and the average length of stay.

EXHIBIT B: Timeline of policy changes related to youth secure detention.



Source: King County Auditor's Office

In November 2017, the County Executive signed an order to transfer youth charged with adult crimes from the King County Maleng Regional Justice Center — which houses adults — to the juvenile detention facility.⁹ This move impacted detention operations at CCFJC because youth charged with adult crimes face significantly longer stays in detention, on average. Court cases involving adult charges usually take longer to resolve than cases involving juvenile charges alone. Section 2 discusses lengths of stay for youth in more detail.

⁹ These cases are referred to as “declines,” in reference to the decline of juvenile jurisdiction by Superior Court. Some charges are automatically declined, while some are discretionary.

In addition, simultaneous changes in state law and county policy encourage alternatives to traditional filing of charges and use of secure detention for juvenile offenses. For example, the Washington State Legislature expanded diversion options in 2018 and prohibited youth detention for noncriminal offenses, like violations of court orders, in 2019. These changes led to a decrease in the total number of youth booked into secure detention in King County.

The move to the new CCFJC facility in February 2020, followed immediately by the COVID-19 pandemic, drove major changes in facility operations. Juvenile detention staff had to implement pandemic-driven limits on visitation and educational and recreational programming and manage health concerns, while simultaneously ramping up the functional needs of a new facility. These changes contributed to large amounts of mandatory overtime and, according to staff, affected their sense of safety. We discuss the impacts of staffing and morale in more detail in sections 3 and 4 of the report.

Finally, in July 2020, the County Executive declared his intent to close the juvenile detention facility by 2025. This goal has since been pushed back to 2028, at the earliest.

? How is King County planning to end secure detention for youth, and how will this impact youth and staff in the future?

The King County Care and Closure initiative is an ongoing effort to implement new alternatives to youth secure detention. In June 2020, the County Executive committed to converting the youth detention units at CCFJC into other uses by no later than 2025, although the timeline has been pushed back to 2028, at the earliest, to allow for finalization, allocation of resources, and implementation of recommendations. The King County Department of Community and Human Services (DCHS) led the community-centered planning process developing the recommendations and the County Executive's Office now leads their implementation. The County Executive transmitted the recommendations made by the initiative's advisory committee and DCHS in January 2024. They include replacing the youth detention center with a respite receiving center with short-term housing, enhanced immediate supports for youth who return home, and a network of community care homes.

Some youth will likely continue to be held in secure detention beyond 2028.

The 2024 proviso response provided to the King County Council explained that

the next step is for the County to fund, implement, and begin operating the new system. However, there was not unanimous support for all recommendations, including by some key stakeholders like Superior Court. Since judges have legal authority for detention decisions, this presents a challenge to meeting the 2028 goal. In addition, the initial phase will focus on youth facing juvenile charges. The advisory committee has acknowledged that making changes for youth facing charges in adult court will require additional planning and involvement from the courts and other stakeholders. Closing the secure detention facility may also require legal changes at the state level. The January 2024 report outlines next actions for the initiative, including reconvening the advisory committee for more deliberation on the recommendations that were not unanimously supported and addressing the licensing and regulatory changes needed at the state level to move forward.

The declaration of the intent to close youth detention created significant uncertainty for both Juvenile Division management and staff.

Prior to the extension of the deadline, many staff expressed strong doubts that King County would be able to close the facility by 2025. Although the County can set up alternatives to secure detention, and judges can choose to place youth in them, closing the facility itself likely requires changes to state law. Staff explained that the uncertainty around closure dampens morale and results in staff exploring employment opportunities with more long-term security. In addition to staff retention, the planned closure affects recruitment efforts. We discuss staffing challenges and planning in section 3 of the report.

? What are the secure detention facilities like in CCFJC?

CCFJC has 7 housing units that can each hold up to 16 youth.¹⁰ Youth are placed in units based on a booking assessment conducted within the first few hours after arrival. Boys and girls are housed separately based on gender identity. Juvenile Division staff state that their goal is to have a mix of ages and gang affiliations within units, but that it is not always possible. Youth have individual cells with a bed, toilet, and sink. (See section 3 of the report for further discussion of time youth spend in their cells.) Each unit has a common area with a television, kitchenette, rooms for telephone calls, a small concrete courtyard with a

¹⁰ Although each unit can house up to 16 youth, juvenile detention officers reported that each unit housed 7–9 youth as of October 2022.

basketball hoop, laundry facilities, and showers (see exhibit C). Each unit also has a classroom where Seattle Public Schools staff provide schooling per Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction standards.

EXHIBIT C: A housing unit at the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center can hold up to 16 youth and each youth gets their own individual cell.



Source: Department of Juvenile and Adult Detention

Secure detention at CCFJC has limited areas for youth services and enrichment outside of the housing units. These areas include a half-court gym, multipurpose classroom, and a nondenominational spiritual center. The secure detention facilities at CCFJC have a library (run by King County Library Services) with books that youth can check out and computers that youth can use. We discuss enrichment in more detail in section 3. The secure facility also has a health clinic where nurses and mental health staff provide services. Kitchen staff for secure detention provide food for the youth per the National School Lunch Program, with oversight from the Washington

State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction. Youth eat meals in the common areas of their units.

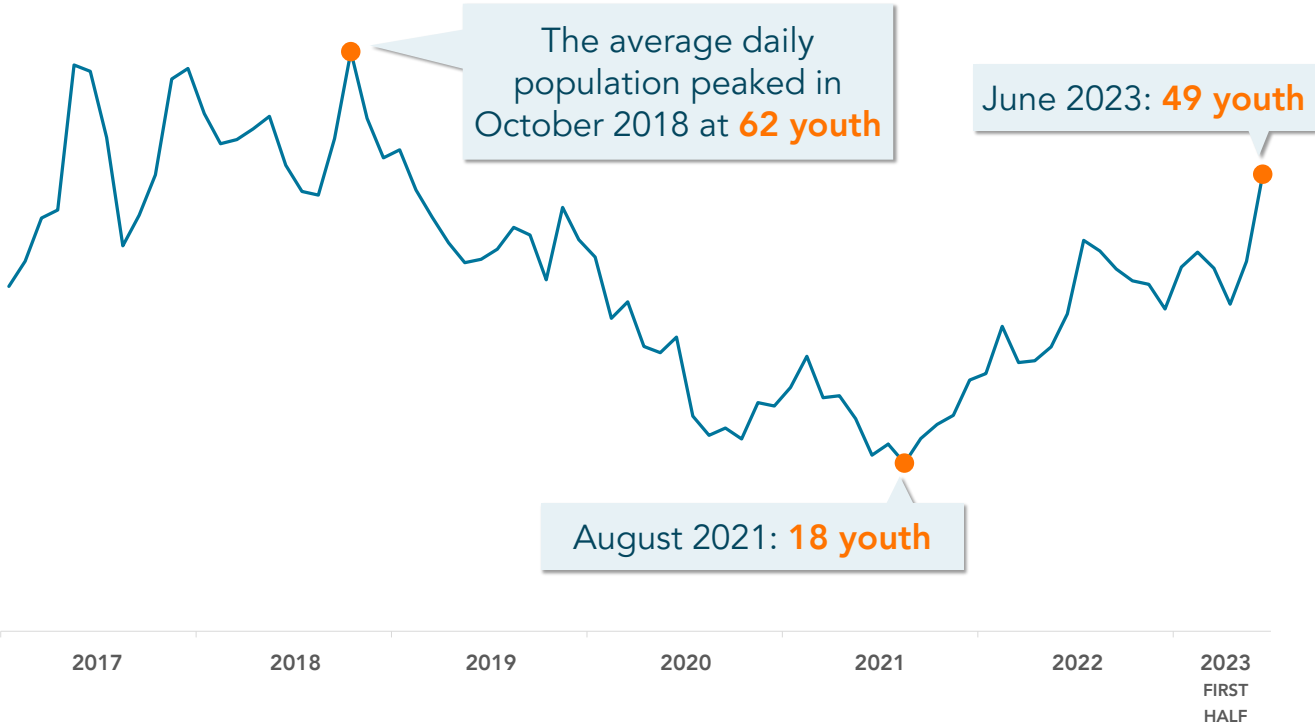
? How many youth are in secure detention at CCFJC, and what are their demographics?

In the first half of 2023, the average daily population in CCFJC secure detention ranged from a low of 35 in April to a high of 49 in June.¹¹ These figures are increases from a low of 18 in August 2021 (see exhibit D). Youth housed in secure detention at CCFJC are mostly male — averaging 87 percent of the population on any given day. Since 2017, girls have made up roughly 13 percent of the youth held in detention. On average, Black youth made up roughly half of the population housed in secure detention at CCFJC between January 2017 and June 2023, a figure disproportionate to their share of the overall county population.¹² The proportion of Black youth in detention increased in 2022 and the first half of 2023, averaging 55 percent. Black girls also have, on average, made up roughly half of the female detention population since 2017.

¹¹ See section 2 for an explanation of the analysis methodology.

¹² Black youth were roughly 13 percent of King County's under-18 population as of 2022 per American Community Survey data.

EXHIBIT D: Average daily population has fluctuated over the last five and a half years.



Source: King County Auditor’s Office Analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention data, January 2018 to June 2023



Section 2: CCFJC Secure Detention is not Designed to Support Increasing Number of Long Stays

SECTION SUMMARY

King County is not providing the mental health or education services that youth with long stays in secure detention need — potentially increasing emotional distress and the likelihood of further institutionalization. Secure detention at CCFJC is designed for short-term stays. While the majority of youth stay less than seven days in secure detention, many youth have very long lengths of stay. The average length of stay for youth in secure detention remains higher than before the COVID-19 pandemic, increasing over time to more than 30 days. The growth in length of stay includes both youth charged with adult crimes and those facing juvenile offenses. Long lengths of stay in secure detention at CCFJC delay youth in starting mental and rehabilitative services, in turn reducing the potential effectiveness of those services. Long lengths of stay also make it difficult to ensure that students maintain academic progress and avoid barriers to timely graduation. Additionally, the number of youth behavior incidents significantly increase the longer youth spend in secure detention. However, DAJD has not completed an assessment to identify the particular needs of youth with longer lengths of stay, and the County's youth detention policy efforts do not address the needs of these youth.

METHODS

- Analyzed DAJD and Department of Judicial Administration (DJA) data on youth demographics, length of stay, charges, and case progression, from January 2017 through June 2023.
- Calculated average daily population by summing the number of days each youth was in the facility during a time period (month, quarter, or year) and dividing by the number of days in that period. We included partial days in the calculation without rounding them up or down. As a result of this method, our average daily population calculations could differ slightly from the point-in-time headcount calculations DAJD uses.
- Calculated length of stay as the total time that each youth was in secure detention on the same booking number. The length of stay does not include time held in other correctional facilities.
- Reviewed DJA case data to identify youth charged with adult offenses for differentiation and further analysis.

- Analyzed differences in the number of behavior events using t-tests and chi-square tests. All analytical results in the report are significant at the 95% confidence level.
- Interviewed staff from the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, Superior Court, the Department of Public Defense, and the Care and Closure Advisory Committee.

For more information on our methods, please see appendix C.

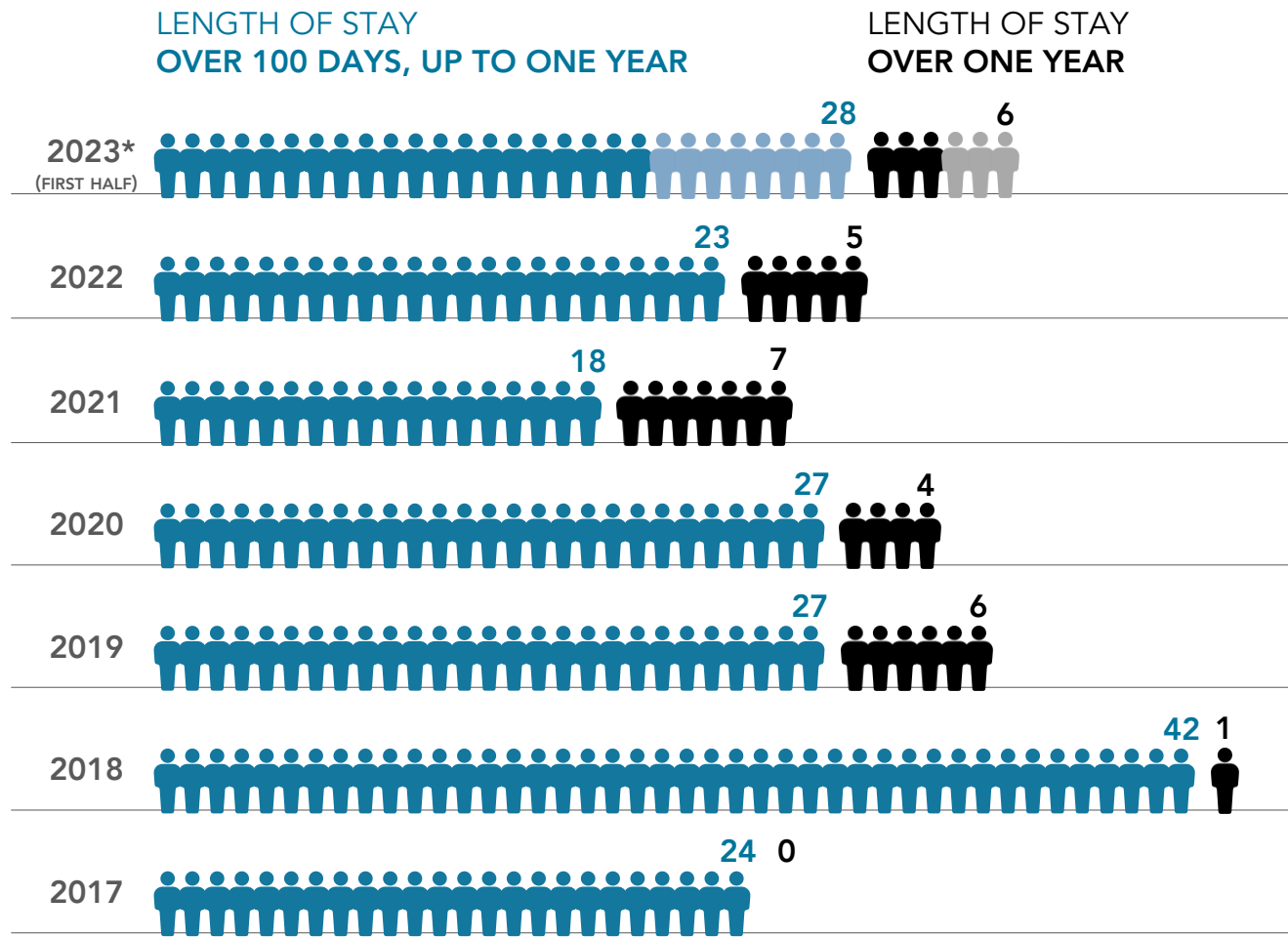
Many youth have long lengths of stay

Over 200 youth have had long lengths of stay in secure detention since 2017.

Between 2017 and mid-2023, over 200 youth stayed at least 100 days in secure detention. Although the majority of youth stay in detention for less than a week, the number of youth with these short stays has reduced dramatically, from about 608 in 2017 to 176 as of the first half of 2023. This reduction reflects the progress King County has made in reducing the use of detention for youth. The number of youth with long stays, however, did not decrease over this time period. Instead, more youth had stays of at least 100 days in secure detention in the first half of 2023 alone than in the entire year of 2017 (see exhibit E). While no youth released from secure detention in 2017 had a stay longer than a year, 26 youth released between 2018 and mid-2023 did.¹³ In mid-2023 (the end of our data analysis timeframe), another 11 youth not yet released from secure detention had already stayed for at least 100 days, three of whom had already stayed more than a year.

¹³ Note “released” throughout the report means youth moved from secure detention at CCFJC; it includes youth transferred to the Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families Juvenile Rehabilitation facilities.

EXHIBIT E: Many youth experience stays of greater than 100 days.



*Note count is based on youth released each year; 2023 data is for first half of year and includes youth released and youth in secure detention as of the end of June 2023. Also note counts are by bookings, not individuals; 14 of the 218 stays in the chart were experienced by the same youth (a total of 204 youth).

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention data, January 2017 to June 2023

Long stays in detention limit the potential success of rehabilitation efforts

Long lengths of stay in secure detention at CCFJC lead to delays in starting mental health and rehabilitative services, which can reduce the effectiveness of the services. Studies by the University of Washington and the DCYF show that age and opportunities for skills development are key factors reducing recidivism.¹⁴ The younger a child is when a therapeutic intervention begins, the more likely they are to

¹⁴ Walker, S. C., and Bishop, A. S. (2016). Length of stay, therapeutic change, and recidivism for incarcerated juvenile offenders. *Journal of Offender Rehabilitation*, pp. 55(6), pp. 355–376; Fox, A. M., Miksicek, D., and Veele, S. (2019). *An evaluation of Dialectical Behavior Therapy in Washington State’s Juvenile Rehabilitation*. Olympia, WA: Department of Children, Youth, and Families, Office of Innovation, Alignment, and Accountability.

benefit from it. Additionally, youth who have received effective skill-development services have greater success post-detention. However, because secure detention at CCFJC is intended for short-term stays, treatments which are longer term are not generally provided. For example, the Juvenile Division does not provide many of the services or support in secure detention at CCFJC that are available to long-term residents at DCYF's Juvenile Rehabilitation Division (JR), such as substance abuse treatment, vocational training, or dialectical behavior therapy.

Some youth with a secure detention placement at CCFJC can take part in inpatient substance abuse treatment through third-party providers but do so outside of the facility at the discretion and direction of Juvenile Court. As youth stay in secure detention at the CCFJC for increasingly longer periods of time, the likelihood of therapeutic interventions being effective — regardless of location — decreases due to the time sensitivity of the delay in starting them.

Long stays may negatively impact academic achievement

Long lengths of stay make it difficult to ensure that students leave secure detention at CCFJC on track for on-time graduation or improvements

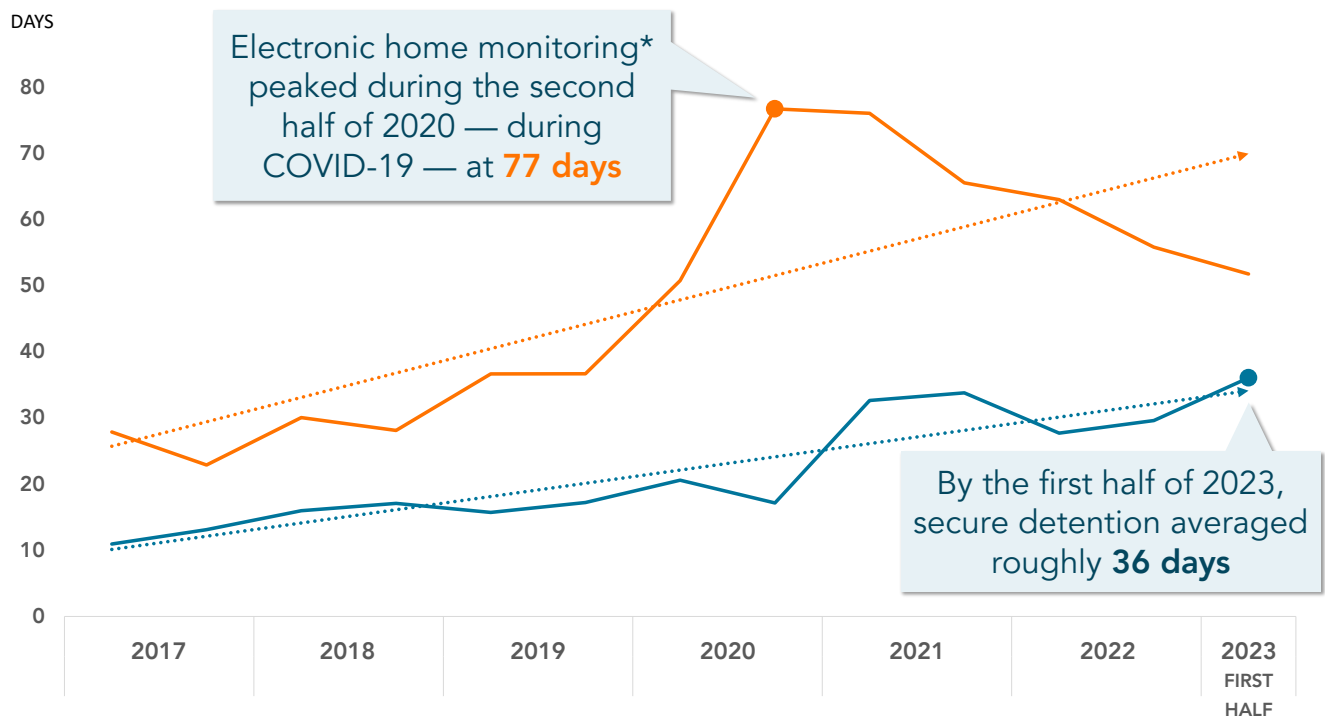
academically. Teachers shared that as stays are getting longer, a stay in secure detention at CCFJC could delay graduation for a young person who was on track for graduation prior to their incarceration. Teachers at CCFJC face fluctuating student counts and ages, making adequate teacher ratios and curriculum development challenging. One teacher leads each school period and teaches all youth in the living unit. This means that, depending on the living unit, classroom ages span from 12 to 18 years old and include a range of educational needs. Teachers then rotate to a different living unit at the end of the class period to begin the next class.

The number of teachers assigned to the facility is determined by the Washington State Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction based on the annual average daily population of the facility. However, teachers indicated that during periods of higher population in the facility this can result in more living units in need of instruction than there are teachers. This leaves living units with an "open period" with no instruction, in turn limiting the ability to maintain consistent curricula for all youth in detention. Instruction is also adversely impacted by low staffing levels at CCFJC secure detention, which has resulted in classes being cut short. Due to these challenges, youth receive general education credits that can be insufficient to meet state requirements for high school graduation. We discuss the impacts of low staffing further in section 3.

The average stay in detention is increasing

The average amount of time youth spend in any form of county-monitored detention has increased since 2017. This includes secure detention as well as alternatives to secure detention, like electronic home monitoring. In 2017, youth spent an average of 12 days in secure detention. By 2022, the average rose to 29 days in secure detention. Similarly, youth spent an average of 26 days in alternatives to secure detention in 2017 and 59 days in alternatives to secure detention in 2022. Exhibit F, below, shows the average length of stay for both types of detention by half-year, along with the linear trend for each type. Both have increased over time; the average length of time in alternatives to secure detention peaked during the second half of 2020 during the COVID-19 pandemic.¹⁵

EXHIBIT F: Average length of stay has increased since 2017 for both secure detention and alternatives to secure detention.



*Note 2023 data includes the length of stay for youth released and for youth in secure detention as of the end of June 2023. As explained above, the increases in average length of stay are related to the reduction in the number of youth booked into secure detention.

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention data, January 2018 to June 2023

¹⁵ Note the average term appears lower as it approaches the end of the data period because the terms of youth currently in the facility are ongoing.

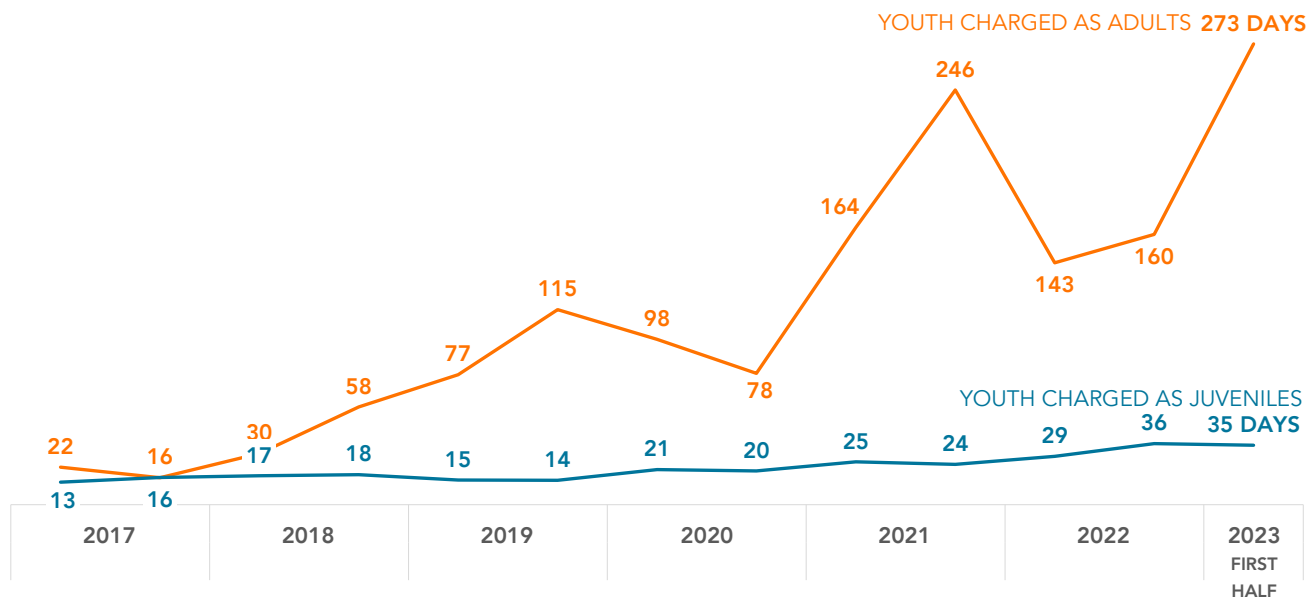
Multiple factors drive growing lengths of stay **The average length of stay for youth in secure detention is growing due to multiple factors: expanded detention alternatives for some youth, moving youth charged as adults from adult to juvenile detention, and the amount of time for cases to resolve.** First, the number of youth booked into detention declined from 2017 through the third quarter of 2021, in response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the policy changes explained in section 1. Implementation of these alternatives resulted in youth charged with many lower-level crimes not being placed in secure detention at all. Second, youth whose circumstances do result in a secure detention placement are more likely to have longer stays due to the greater seriousness and complexity of their cases. This includes youth charged with adult crimes. And, finally, these cases also take longer to resolve than those with lower-level charges.

Youth in detention today face more severe charges **Youth housed in secure detention in 2023 generally face more severe charges than youth a few years ago.** The decline in secure detention bookings largely results from a reduction in the number of youth booked for lower-level offenses. Accordingly, youth placed in secure detention today often face serious charges that are either ineligible for diversion or perceived as presenting a greater risk to the community. For example, while 8.3 percent of youth booked into secure detention in the first quarter of 2017 faced an alleged Class A felony — the most serious offenses, including rape and murder — this percentage had increased to 35.7 percent by the last quarter of 2022.

Adult-charged youth have the longest stays **The proportion of the population in secure detention includes youth charged with adult crimes, who have much longer stays than youth charged with juvenile offenses.** Youth with adult charges are often 16- and 17-year-olds alleged to have committed serious violent crimes. As discussed in section 1, until November 2017, these youth were held at the Maleng Regional Justice Center, but, following policy changes, King County began to house youth charged with adult offenses in juvenile detention.¹⁶ These youth are now required to be held in juvenile detention under Washington state law. In 2018 — their first full year in juvenile detention — youth charged as adults made up 22 percent of the daily population in juvenile detention. In 2021, they peaked at 39 percent of the population, before returning to 19 percent in 2022. However, over the same period, the average length of stay tripled for adult-charged youth (see exhibit G).

¹⁶ See [Executive Order JJS-8-1-EO](#)

EXHIBIT G: The average length of stay for youth charged as adults has grown since their relocation to the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center in November 2017.



*Note that the chart uses juvenile detention data; lower lengths of stay in earlier years may differ from Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention data as they show time in youth detention versus Maleng Regional Justice Center.

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention and Department of Judicial Administration data, January 2017 to June 2023

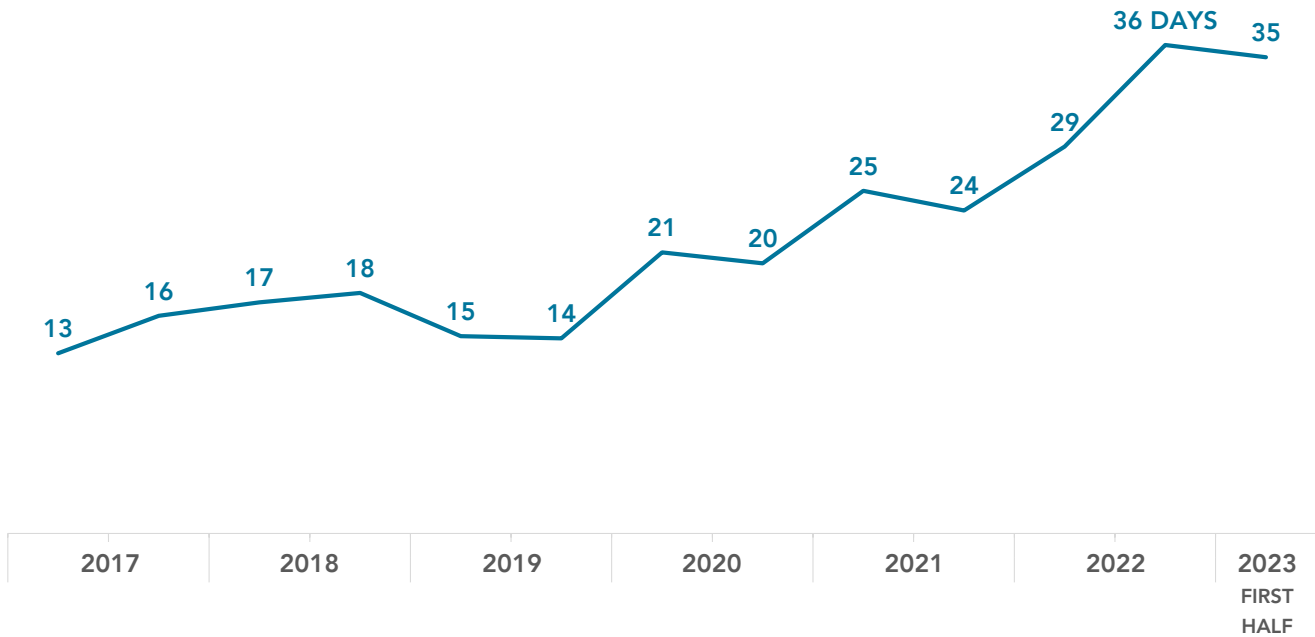
Length of stay is growing for youth facing juvenile offenses

The average length of stay is also growing for youth who are facing solely juvenile offenses.

In the first half of 2017, the average length of stay for youth charged with juvenile offenses was 13 days, compared to 36 days in the second half of 2022 (see exhibit H). Youth facing juvenile offenses alone can be under 16 years old, but often include youth 16 and over facing charges not serious enough to be adult offenses and youth who turn 16 while in secure detention. From the first half of 2017 to the first half of 2023, the average age of youth booked into secure detention declined from 16.3 to 15.8 years old.

Some youth facing juvenile charges stay in CCFJC secure detention for extremely long periods of time.

Since 2018, more than one-third of stays of a year or more were for youth booked with juvenile charges, half under the age of 16. For example, one youth booked at age 13 was detained for 712 days. There may be more significant negative impacts from long stays in secure detention to youth charged solely with juvenile offenses compared to older, adult-charged youth.

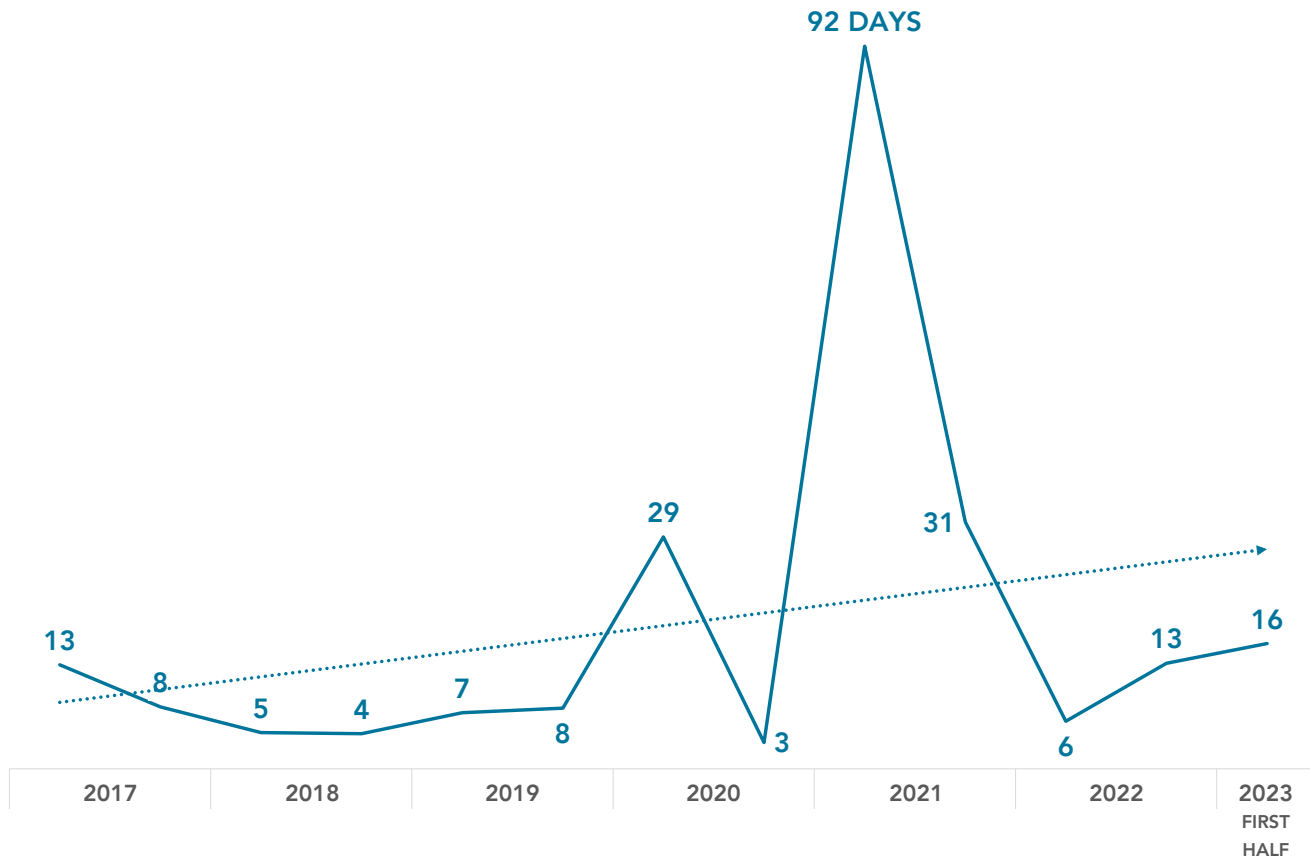
EXHIBIT H: Average length of stay has increased for youth facing juvenile charges since 2017.

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention and Department of Judicial Administration data, January 2018 to June 2023

Many of the youngest youth in secure detention face long lengths of stay

Many of the youngest youth in secure detention stay for extended periods, increasing the risks of long-term impact on their wellbeing.

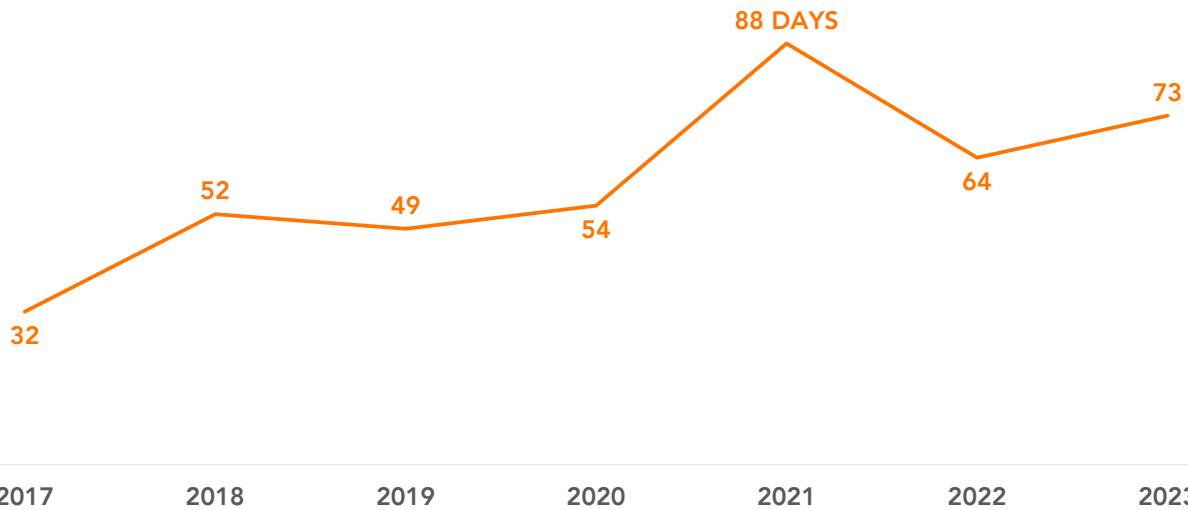
In 2018 and 2019, youth under age 14, when booked into secure detention, spent an average of six days there, with 140 youth under age 14 booked into secure detention during these two years. From early 2020 through mid-2023, 104 youth under age 14 were booked into secure detention — only three-quarters as many despite the additional year and a half. However, over that period, youth booked when under age 14 spent an average of 25 days in secure detention. A total of 21 youth under age 14 spent more than 15 days in secure detention during this period, including 7 that spent over 90 days. Notably, none of these cases featured adult charges, and many were not facing serious felonies. For example, one 13-year-old accused of misdemeanor domestic violence assault spent 80 days in secure custody in 2021. As discussed above, because age is correlated with the potential success of therapeutic interventions, increasing lengths of stay in secure detention for younger youth correspond to an increased potential of recidivism and further institutionalization.

EXHIBIT I: Average length of stay for securely detained youth under age 14 has increased.

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention and Department of Judicial Administration data, January 2018 to June 2023

Time to case resolution affects length of stay

Lengths of stay in secure detention are increasing, in part because cases take a long time to resolve. Superior Court data on time to case resolution show that cases for youth housed in secure detention took 20 percent longer in 2022 than in 2017, on average. While some of the increase in average length of stay may be attributable to youth in detention facing more serious charges, the average amount of time youth spend in secure detention before case resolution has also increased. The most serious offenses made up an increasing share of secure detention placements between 2017 and 2023, and also increased their average length of stay. This means that these serious offenses are taking longer to resolve for youth in secure detention. Exhibit J shows that the average length of stay in secure detention for youth accused of the most serious offenses doubled between 2017 and 2022 and continued to increase through the first half of 2023. We make recommendations that may help address this finding later in the report.

EXHIBIT J: From 2017–2023, average length of stay increased for the most serious felonies.

Note: Our grouping of “most serious offenses” for analysis included all charges of A-level felonies (A+, A++, A, A-); it did not include all potential offenses listed under RCW 9.94A.030(32).

Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention and Department of Judicial Administration data, January 2017 to June 2023

County leaders recognize the limitations of the Juvenile Division’s current service model

King County leaders and detained youth recognize that the services available for youth in secure detention are insufficient, especially as the makeup of youth in detention has changed to more youth with longer stays. County leaders have consistently noted that county secure detention is short-term. There is not a specific definition or duration for what constitutes “short-term.” However, DAJD staff noted that state law limits the potential time secure detention may be used as a sanction to no more than 30 days. County leaders acknowledge the support and enrichment limitations of secure detention at CCFJC for youth with stays of greater than 30 days. For example, the August 2023 Care and Closure Advisory Committee’s proviso report explains that “[y]outh in detention also highlighted that they wanted more programs to support their growth such as anger management and intensive therapy.” Given that the majority of time youth spend in the facility today is spent by youth who are there 30 days or more, the lack of longer-term services — especially for those under age 16 — runs counter to King County’s policy goal of limiting the negative effects of secure detention.¹⁷

¹⁷ As of July and August 2023, 88 percent of the time spent by youth in secure detention is spent by youth who are there for stays over 30 days.

County policy approaches are not focused on length of stay

King County’s efforts to reduce youth detention have not directly addressed length of stay in secure detention, increasing the likelihood of negative outcomes for some youth. As explained in section 1, policy changes reduced the number of youth booked into secure detention by developing alternatives for lower-level offenses. The Care and Closure Advisory Committee developed recommendations to close secure detention at CCFJC by identifying community-based alternatives to secure detention, but there is not agreement on all recommendations.¹⁸ In addition, the County Council has mandated monitoring of the amount of time that youth spend isolated in their cells outside of ordinary rest periods. Despite these undertakings, no county plan or program has directly addressed the specific needs of youth as they relate to the length of time spent in secure detention, in spite of general understanding that secure detention was designed and programmed for short-term stays. For example, DAJD’s 2019 proviso report to the County Council on the relocation of adult-charged youth to juvenile detention summarizes its efforts to ensure equitable access to the existing services in secure detention, as requested by the County Council. But neither the proviso nor the report includes any program changes specific to meeting the needs of youth with longer stays. This approach presents risks because it does not address the ongoing harm of extended stays in secure detention, both for individual youth and as the average length of stay increases.

County plans do not focus on youth with adult charges

Ending secure detention for youth facing adult charges is likely to be a challenging and lengthy process, but King County does not have a plan to specifically address services for these youth in the meantime. Washington state law generally requires securely detained youth charged as adults to be held in a juvenile detention facility.¹⁹ The Care and Closure January 2024 proviso response specifies that its recommendations are intended to serve all youth, but the committee recognizes that implementing alternatives for youth charged as adults will take further planning and coordination, identifying the need for efforts seeking changes in state law to allow for alternatives. However, the report also explains that the timeline for these actions, among many others, runs through 2028. This means that youth

¹⁸ “The goal of the Care and Closure plan is to radically transform the County’s response to youth in crisis. At the end of this phase of the King County’s Care and Closure plan, the County Executive will submit a set of recommendations to Council that expand community-based alternatives to secure youth detention and close the juvenile detention center located within the CCFJC.” Care and Closure Advisory Committee August 2023 report, p. 25.

¹⁹ Youth under age 18 must be placed in juvenile detention, barring a written court finding that an adult placement is in the interest of justice, [RCW 13.04.116\(1\)\(C\)\(i\)](#).

facing adult charges are likely to continue to be detained at CCFJC for the foreseeable future, but the County doesn't currently have a plan or strategy to specifically address youth needs.

Analysis is needed to identify and meet needs of youth with longer stays

DAJD has not completed an assessment to identify the needs of youth with longer lengths of stay, even as the facility may be ill-suited to meet their needs.

Despite the changes in the population and experiences of King County's securely detained youth, the County has not conducted a holistic analysis of the needs of these youth that considers longer lengths of stay. Juvenile Division staff noted that aspects of the current facility and its operations limit their ability to meet the therapeutic and wellbeing needs of youth with longer lengths of stay.

Youth detained in secure detention at CCFJC today have limited access to its outdoor space, which is lacking green space; and the indoor gym is half the size of a standard basketball court, limiting recreational activities. Staff also highlighted that educational spaces in the facility are spread across living units instead of being in a designated location, which would allow for larger classrooms or for classes and programs to cover multiple living units at a time. These limitations may exist because, as a short-term facility, the County did not fully consider the needs of long-term detainees when it designed the secure detention spaces in 2012 — years prior to the policy changes (described in exhibit B) that resulted in longer lengths of stay in secure detention at CCFJC.

Additionally, staff shared that the enrichment activities offered to youth housed in secure detention at CCFJC generally involve short-term development goals since length of stay is uncertain pending case resolution. This makes it challenging to know how long the Juvenile Division should design a program to last, and youth with longer stays may be unable to achieve longer-term development goals that align with their length of stay. Most enrichment is on an ad hoc or limited cycle, lasting no longer than three months. Many of the design aspects missing in the secure detention facility at CCFJC are common in longer-term residential facilities such as those operated by community-based organizations or by the Washington State DCYF JR, reflecting the state's charge to provide long-term care and rehabilitation of the youth in its custody. In alignment with our recommendations, the first of the "next actions" included in the January 2024 Care and Closure proviso response is for DAJD to "identify activities that improve outcomes for youth currently detained in CCFJC," with programs and services implementable within six months of funding. These efforts should consider length of stay as a central component of these needs. The

efforts could also help inform implementation of the Care and Closure plan's development of programs and services.

Recommendation 1

The King County Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should conduct an analysis of the needs of youth who are securely detained in the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center. The analysis should consider and document:

- actual lengths of stay experienced by youth in the facility
- age-appropriate therapeutic and skill needs of youth detained for extended periods
- how services could be differentiated for longer lengths of stay.

Recommendation 2

Based on the results of the analysis in Recommendation 1, the King County Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should document and implement a plan to address gaps between the programs and services that securely detained youth need and those that are being provided.

In partnership with Superior Court, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office and the Department of Public Defense, the plan could include:

- options for specific programs or services for securely detained youth
- identification of physical improvements to the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center
- identification of placement alternatives to CCFJC secure detention, including placement in a Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families-operated facility and other alternatives
- documentation of alignment with the actions included in the January 2024 Care and Closure Final Strategic Planning Report on the Future of Secure Juvenile Detention.

Efforts to address time to case resolution have not reached tangible results

Superior Court, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and the Department of Public Defense (DPD) have examined the lengthy times to case resolution, but they have not identified solutions to resolve cases more quickly or address the increase in lengths of stay. Staff involved in the legal process explained that its adversarial nature does not lend itself to quick case resolutions. For instance, actions

involving specialized evaluation and evidence, such as expert review and testimony, can slow case progress. Given the varied roles and interests among the parties, finding universally agreeable solutions to reduce case time is difficult. There is a monthly operations meeting that includes DAJD, DPD, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and Superior Court staff where participants discuss challenges about case resolution and length of stay. However, the participants have not found solutions to shorten processes that they can all agree on.

The Juvenile Division could leverage its data analysis capabilities to publicly report information on length of stay

CCFJC does not publicly report much of the information and analysis it has on youth lengths of stay, which could aid in development of public policy and improve transparency. We found that the Juvenile Division has strong internal data analytics capabilities and publishes critical information to meet state reporting requirements. It provides this information annually in summary reports on its portion of the King County website. However, because the data measures the Juvenile Division provides are aggregated and largely averages, specific data elements critical to analysis of length of stay are not publicly available. For instance, the Juvenile Division does not actively report the number of youth with detention stays longer than 30 days. Data transparency and open data are a best practice, although there are challenges in meeting the practice throughout the justice system. Providing anonymized, publicly reported data helps enhance public trust and ensure that policy efforts are reaching intended goals. The Juvenile Division could use its extensive data and analytic information as an opportunity to increase the amount and frequency of anonymized data available to policy-makers and the public regarding the length of detention to highlight the experience of youth in secure detention. For example, DAJD could actively track and report the number of youth with detention stays longer than specific time thresholds, such as 30-day intervals, as well as share information on lengths of stay for youth charged as adults or as juveniles.

Recommendation 3

As part of its publicly available detention population data reporting, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should track, document, and report the number of youth in secure detention for extended periods and report that information to the Department of Public Defense, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and Superior Court for their use in addressing time to resolution and long lengths of stay.

Longer stays correspond to behavior incidents

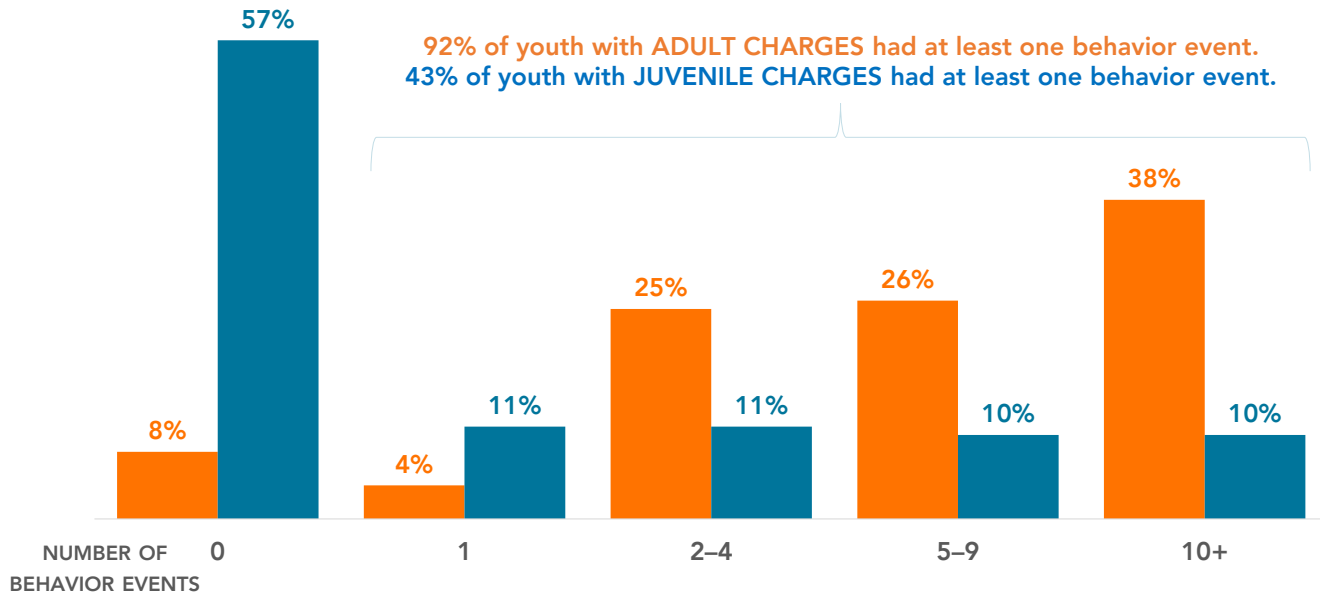
The number of youth behavior incidents increase significantly the longer youth spend in secure detention. We examined youth behavior incidents recorded by juvenile detention officers (JDOs) at CCFJC.²⁰ Youth with at least one behavior incident are more likely to have subsequent incidents, and youth with long lengths of stay are much more likely to have behavior incidents than those who stay less than a week. Only 14 percent of youth held in detention for a week or less had a behavior incident, compared with 83 percent of youth held for at least one month. Of the subset of youth held for at least 100 days, the percent with at least one behavior incident remained 83 percent, but the frequency of youth with 10 or more behavior events grew from 18 percent to 37 percent.

There are multiple factors that could drive the association between length of stay and behavior events. Youth with more serious charges (and, therefore, longer stays) may be more likely to have behavior challenges that could make incidents more likely. Increased time in secure detention — particularly without services tailored to support those with long stays — could also be a cause of increased incidents. Finally, youth who are housed for longer stays, such as one month or more, may have more opportunities to be involved in a behavior incident as more time passes.

Youth facing adult charges are more likely to have behavior events

Older youth facing adult charges are significantly more likely to have behavior events than those only facing juvenile charges. Most youth booked into secure detention do not have any behavior incidents, particularly if they are never charged in either juvenile or adult court (and, therefore, have very short stays in detention). Overall, we found that 29 percent of boys and 20 percent of girls had behavior events while in secure detention. Youth facing adult charges are significantly more likely to be involved in behavior events than youth facing juvenile charges. Over 90 percent of youth facing adult charges had at least one behavior incident, compared to only 43 percent of those facing juvenile charges (see exhibit K).

²⁰ We tabulated behavior incident reports made by juvenile detention officers since May 2019. Many were entered by hand into the old data system from written forms; entries since mid-2021 were pulled from the new data system.

EXHIBIT K: Youth with adult charges were more likely to have behavior incidents in detention.

Note: This graphic does not include youth who are not charged in either juvenile or adult crimes, who typically only spend a few days in secure detention before being released or transferred to a different jurisdiction.

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention and Department of Judicial Administration data, May 2019 to June 2023

Our findings align with those included in a report published in August 2023 by the County Council-appointed Independent Monitoring Team reviewing data on the amount of time youth spend in their cells at CCFJC.²¹ The monitoring team suggested that DAJD explore assigning similarly aged youth to the same living unit, especially younger youth facing charges that may result in longer lengths of stay, as this may prevent them from being exposed to challenging behavior of some older youth in detention. The behavior incident data comports with the observations of the monitoring team: because older youth, particularly adult-charged youth, are more likely to have behavior incidents than those under 16 years old, co-location of adult-charged youth may increase the negative experiences in detention for younger youth.

²¹ Independent Monitoring Team Implementation of Ordinance 18673 Restrictive Housing; Reporting Period April 1, 2022 – June 30, 2023, published August 21, 2023.

Recommendation 4

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should explore options to house youth facing adult charges separately from youth under age 16 charged solely with juvenile offenses and document how to incorporate this in its housing classification system.

Data indicates many youth experience extended periods without in-person visitors

Most youth in secure detention met with their defense attorney regularly. We reviewed anonymized visitation records of in-person visits with youth in secure detention by their family, attorney, or other professionals between mid-August 2021 and the end of July 2023.²² We compared the time elapsed between visits by family members and attorneys for these youth. Over 75 percent of youth in secure detention during the period met with an attorney. Of the youth who met with an attorney, 60 percent met with them twice or more, averaging a little over 7 days between meetings. This generally aligns with guidance from DPD, which encourages attorneys to meet in person with clients at least every three weeks (21 days).

Some youth in secure detention, however, rarely met with family or defense counsel in person, resulting in increased uncertainty, stress, and anxiety for the youth. In contrast with the youth described above, many youth experienced longer durations between visits. At least 15 youth averaged more than 21 days between attorney visits. We also identified at least four additional instances where youth were not visited by an attorney at all, despite being in secure detention over 21 days. We found over 100 instances among at least 58 youth where those youth went more than 30 days without meeting with their attorney in person at CCFJC — and 10 instances of over 90 days.

More youth also had long durations between family visits. Just a third of youth were visited by family between mid-August 2021 and the end of July 2023. These youth were visited a little more often by their family than by their attorney — slightly under a week, on average. However, among those youth, we identified at least 38 that, together, had a total of 63 instances where they went over 30 days without a family visit; and 12 of those youth went more than 90 days without a visit. In addition, another 44 youth were in secure detention for more than 30 days with no family visit at all.

²² We reviewed visitation records for over 600 youth with a total of over 5,500 visits in secure detention over the period.

During our interviews with securely detained youth, some felt their attorneys communicated often and kept them updated on the status of their case. Others, however, relayed concerns that their attorney did not. These instances validate both perspectives. Of the latter, several youth shared their frustration that their attorneys neither visit nor are available by phone. Some youth also stated that their probation counselors similarly do not answer phone calls. These youth shared that the lack of information makes them feel anxious and stressed. Similarly, academic studies identify the importance of family engagement for youth wellbeing and avoiding future institutionalization. Juvenile Division staff noted that youth stress can spread to other youth in the unit due to the amount of time they spend in close proximity with one another, increasing the risk of violent interactions among youth, either with one another or with Juvenile Division staff at CCFJC.

Recommendation 5

As part of its publicly available detention population data reporting, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should track, document, and report the number of youth who are not visited in person by their attorney for 30 days or more.



Section 3: Impacts of Staffing Challenges

SECTION SUMMARY

JDO positions are consistently unfilled, and shifts are understaffed, resulting in operational changes that adversely impact youth in detention and contribute to staff burnout. The Juvenile Division regularly operates secure detention at CCFJC below the planned number of JDOs per shift. When a shift is understaffed, youth may be confined to their cells, and DAJD may shorten school periods and cancel enrichment programs. This can lead to increased stress among youth and violent incidents. DAJD leadership has made several hiring pushes and retention programs over the last two years with some success, but a pervasively negative workplace culture, insufficient opportunities for performance management, and low morale make retention and continuous improvement difficult. In addition, DAJD does not have a plan that would project resource needs as recommendations as King County's Care and Closure plan begins to be implemented, limiting the information staff and decision-makers have to deliver consistent, adequate services for youth in detention within CCFJC and in external continuity of care alternatives.

METHODS

- Interviewed Juvenile Division leadership and staff, including interviews with JDOs, supervisors, kitchen staff, nursing staff, mental health staff, schoolteachers, and staff specializing in enrichment, restorative justice, alternatives to secure detention, and training.
- Analyzed Juvenile Division staffing and tenure data on budgeted and occupied JDOs and supervisor positions, from January 2018 to May 2023.
- Reviewed data from DAJD and the Independent Monitor Report on Restrictive Housing related to time youth spent in-cell as a result of staffing shortages and modified day schedules between January 2023 and July 2023.

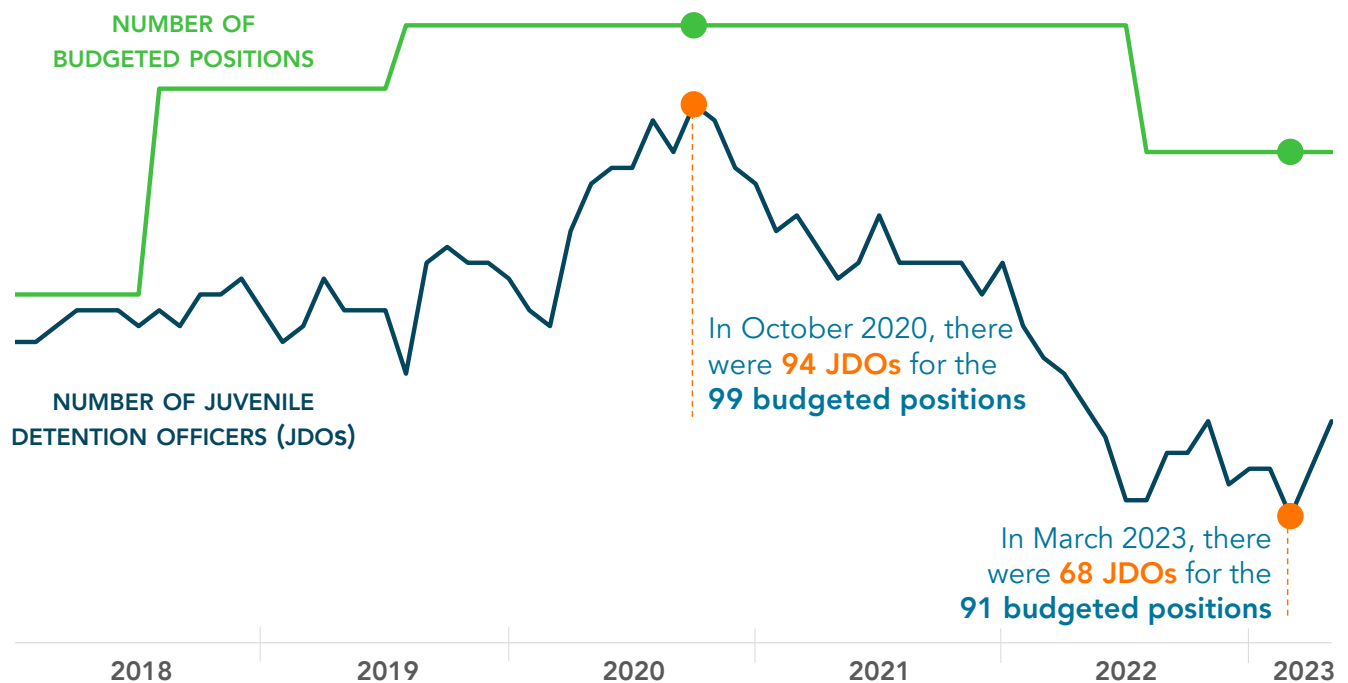
For more information on our methods, please see appendix C.

Low staffing results in youth spending additional time in cells

The Juvenile Division has not been fully staffed with JDOs at any point since 2018, as shown in exhibit L. Staffing challenges were most significant throughout 2022, when the number of unfilled positions ranged between 15–30 officers, a vacancy rate ranging between 15–30 percent. Periods of significant staffing shortages

make it difficult for the Juvenile Division to fill all posts in a given eight-hour secure detention shift. This can lead to staff working 16-hour shifts to cover gaps. Within a given shift, JDOs have two 15-minute breaks and one 30-minute meal break during each shift. When staffing levels are sufficient, a “rover” officer or a supervisor will cover any staff member in need of their break. However, when staffing levels are low, the Juvenile Division may not fill the rover position. Without a rover to cover in-unit rotations, youth are returned to their cells while all detention officers take their breaks at the same time. Under these circumstances, the youth in the facility are on a “modified” schedule, spending more time in their cells than normal.

EXHIBIT L: The Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center was not fully staffed between January 2018 and June 2023.



Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention staffing data, January 2018 to May 2023

Youth spend time confined to cells due to staffing limitations

Youth still spend more hours than planned confined to their cells due to staffing limitations, which has adverse effects on youth wellbeing. A report published in August 2023, by the Independent Restrictive Housing Monitor, showed that youth held in secure detention at CCFJC spent an average of 55 additional hours confined in their cells per month, or just under an additional two hours per day in-cell, because of staffing shortages in the first half of 2023. These hours are in addition

to the standard 12-hour sleeping period. Based on Juvenile Division data from the first quarter of 2023, there were two instances where the time that youth spent in their cells in a day reached a high of four-and-half hours more than planned, with a portion of that time occurring to allow for staff breaks. Exhibit M provides an example day schedule that includes the periods that youth spend in their cells because of staffing shortages and staff breaks.

Limiting time that youth in detention spend in their cells as a form of punishment — sometimes referred to as restrictive housing — is a primary area of focus for staff and policy-makers, particularly over the last three years. In December 2017, King County Ordinance 18637 increased requirements to limit juvenile isolation and cell confinement, and State House Bill 2277 reinforced those limitations in July 2020.

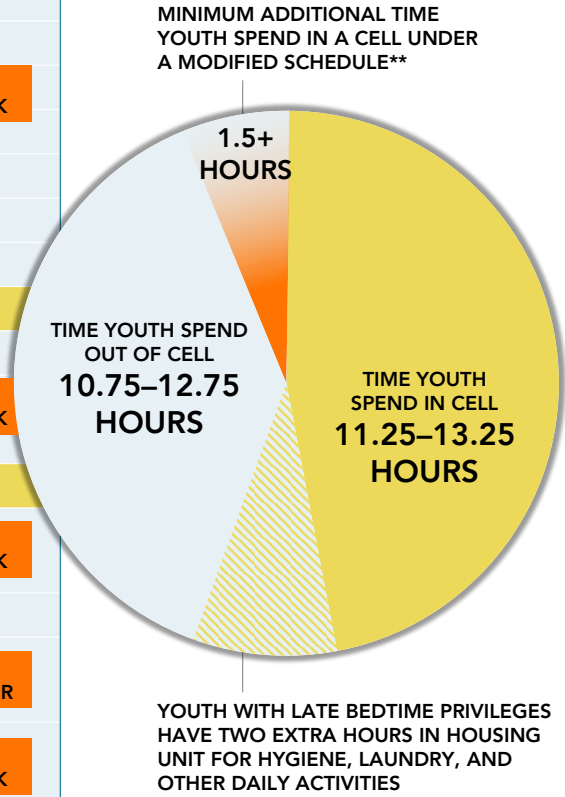
While the time youth spend in cells due to staffing limitations is not intended to be a punishment, the significant amount of time spent in cells due to staffing shortages and modified schedules has multiple adverse impacts on the wellbeing of youth. In the paragraphs that follow, we describe the negative impacts of staff shortages on youth:

1. Canceled or shortened school
2. Canceled or shortened mental health services
3. Canceled or shortened enrichment activities.

One result of these impacts is an increase in behavior incidents, which is discussed both below and in section 2 of the report.

EXHIBIT M: Some youth spend 13 hours a day in their cells, and at least 14.5 hours when staffing is low.

EXAMPLE WEEKDAY SCHEDULE		MODIFIED SCHEDULE
8:00–8:25 AM	Youth breakfast	
8:25–9:25 AM	School: 1 st period	
9:25–9:35 AM	Passing period	9:25–9:40 AM 15-MINUTE STAFF BREAK
9:35–10:35 AM	School: 2 nd period	
10:35–10:45 AM	Passing period	
10:45–11:45 AM	School: 3 rd period	
11:45 AM–12:05 PM	Youth lunch	
12:05–12:35 PM	Youth rest period and staff lunch	
12:35–1:35 PM	School: 4 th period	
1:35–1:45 PM	Passing period	1:35–1:50 PM 15-MINUTE STAFF BREAK
1:45–2:45 PM	School: 5 th period	
2:45–3:30 PM	Shift change and staff briefings	
3:30–5:00 PM	Programming*	4:45–5:00 PM 15-MINUTE STAFF BREAK
5:00–5:30 PM	Youth dinner	
5:30–8:00 PM	Programming*	6:30–7:00 PM 30-MINUTE STAFF DINNER
8:00–10:00 PM	Youth in cells, except those with late bedtime privileges	9:00–9:15 PM 15-MINUTE STAFF BREAK
10:00 PM–8:00 AM	All youth in cells	



*"Programming" refers to any time a youth spends outside of their cell and can include free time in the living unit for hygiene, phone calls, or for arranged enrichment activities.

**Hour totals in pie chart exceed 24 hours because modified schedule times (in orange) are subtracted from the times youth would spend out of their cell during a standard day schedule (in light blue).

Source: King County Auditor's Office analysis of programming information.

Low staffing limits teachers' ability to provide education

Detention officer and Seattle Public Schools staffing levels impact schooling, with classes cut short or canceled when staffing levels are low. As discussed earlier in this section, when JDO staffing levels are too low to allow for backfill, youth return to their individual cells during required staff breaks. Teachers indicated that in 2022, JDO staffing levels were so low that classes were canceled or otherwise shortened to such an extent that teachers (provided by Seattle Public Schools) were concerned about the ability to meet state education requirements. In response to the concerns, Juvenile Division management, detention officers, and other staff made

operational changes to help ensure classes were not cut short, but teachers and management noted that staff and supervisors were stretching themselves thin to prioritize education, sometimes at the expense of other administrative duties. Teachers and staff shared that this contributes to high levels of burnout, which can exacerbate turnover. It also creates greater inconsistency in the facility as new staff are onboarded and work to learn rules and acceptable boundaries in periods of fluctuating operational circumstances. During this onboarding period for new staff, youth may test boundaries more often, contributing to increased behavior incidents, which can add to stress levels for the young people and further exacerbate burnout for staff. These operational adjustments and inconsistent schooling times also exacerbate teachers' difficulties in ensuring adequate teacher ratios and curriculum development due to fluctuating student counts, ages, and long lengths of stay, as mentioned in section 2 of the report.

Mental health staff concerned about high demands on their capacity

Periods of low staffing have impacted mental health staff, contributing to mental health staff burnout and a risk of gaps in service. The Juvenile Division hosts mental health counseling and a psychiatrist at CCFJC, but the facility did not have a consistently fully staffed mental health team for at least a year, spanning from June 2022 until at least June 2023. Between February and May of 2023, there had only been one mental health counselor for an average daily population, ranging between 35–41 youth in detention. In addition to the mental health counselor, a psychiatrist is available twice a week for youth housed in secure detention, but psychiatric services can be made more difficult if a staffing shortage requires youth to remain in their cells while meeting with psychiatric staff, further highlighting the impact that staffing challenges have on youth wellbeing within the facility. In response to the staffing challenges facing the mental health team, DAJD issued a request for proposal with the aim of increasing the number of staff on the mental health team and expanding the range of mental health services provided to youth in secure detention.

The Juvenile Division entered into a contract to expand mental health counseling and support services in March 2023. However, some staff remain concerned that the planned services may not be achievable. As average daily population or service needs expands, the increasing workload raises the risk that the quality of mental health care would diminish due to burnout and insufficient time for staff to devote to the youth. Under a March 2023 contract, the Juvenile Division expanded the mental health team to include three full-time mental health team

members and one part-time staff member. The contract also calls for expanded services, individualized treatment plans, and greater inclusion of youth families. Staff expressed that these services would be an improvement and beneficial to youth in custody; however, staff were concerned that it may not be feasible to simultaneously expand service provision and the operating schedule with the proposed staffing levels.

Enrichment activities canceled due to low staffing

Young people in custody said they enjoy the enrichment activities offered in secure detention at CCFJC, but the Juvenile Division may cancel activities if not enough staff or facilitators are present for a shift. This increases stress among youth and the risk of violent incidents. During interviews with the audit staff, youth in custody expressed that while they would like a greater number of program options to be offered, the current enrichment activities provided in secure detention at CCFJC are generally enjoyable and of good quality. Program activities may be canceled due to the facilitating organization’s staff being unavailable or due to low JDO staffing, which would limit the ability of JDOs to support enrichment. Programs may also be canceled if the facility is operating on a modified schedule and there are not enough staff available to facilitate programs.

Youth shared with the audit team that they feel sad, angry, or anxious when programming is canceled. This can cause them to act out due to frustration, potentially contributing to the increase in violent incidents over a youth’s length of stay (as noted in section 2). In its analysis of DAJD Juvenile Detention safety and security, a consultant hired by DAJD stated that a lack of programming can contribute to “aggressive and assaultive behaviors” because youth are deprived of healthy ways to release emotional and physical tensions, to build relationships with staff, and to learn and grow as individuals. The consultant recommended that DAJD make youth programming a priority, stating that programming must be implemented consistently and predictably, and that modified programming is “too common.”²³

DAJD struggles to maintain staffing levels despite concerted efforts

DAJD has implemented several recruitment efforts since 2021, including hiring incentives, retention bonuses, and referral programs, but it still struggles to retain staff. During these efforts, DAJD successfully hired 43 new officers between January 2021 and May 2023. However, the Juvenile Division also faces high turnover. Forty-nine staff members left employment with the agency over the same period,

²³ Spinney, E., et al. (2023). *King County, Washington Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention, Juvenile Division Juvenile Detention Safety and Security Analysis Final Report*. Seattle, WA: Development Services Group, Inc.

hindering the Juvenile Division's ability to maintain stable staffing levels. DAJD plans to expand its hiring efforts in 2024, with increased advertising, job fairs, and hiring events. DAJD management and JDOs suggested that some of the turnover is a result of staff leaving employment with the County to pursue positions with long-term career potential that they feel does not exist within DAJD, given the plan to close the secure detention facility at CCFJC.

Plan can improve transparency and help ensure adequate staffing for future service delivery

The Juvenile Division does not have a plan to project future staffing needs for youth secure detention, limiting the information staff and decision-makers have to ensure consistent, adequate service provision for youth in detention.

The Juvenile Division works annually to develop a staffing plan that lists the positions required to meet the operational needs of the secure detention facility at CCFJC. As stated above, DAJD continues to work to hire new staff but has not filled all of its budgeted staff positions at CCFJC secure detention. Looking ahead, the Juvenile Division's operating environment and staffing needs are likely to change. For instance, staffing needs will likely change as recommendations from the Care and Closure Advisory Committee are implemented, the number of youth in secure detention decreases, and a network of continuous care facilities is created. Additionally, as DAJD and the County Executive conduct an assessment to identify the needs of youth with longer lengths of stay, as detailed in section 2, they may identify additional resource and staffing needs. As the County Executive, in partnership with DAJD and DCHS, continue their work to prepare for the closure of the facility, the Juvenile Division can combine its current and historical information about the number and needs of youth in detention with the information from the needs analysis from Recommendation 1, to project future staff needs. A plan that includes future staffing levels, potential staff placements, and ongoing resource decisions will also provide Juvenile Division staff with more transparency about their employment moving forward.

Recommendation 6

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should develop, document, and communicate a plan that defines the appropriate level of staffing to meet the needs of youth in secure detention. The staffing plan should be informed by the needs assessment developed in response to Recommendation 1 and, in turn, should inform ongoing and future recruitment efforts.

At a minimum, the plan should account for the number and types of staff needed to ensure that:

- youth do not spend time confined in their cells due to staffing limitations
- school periods are not missed nor shortened
- mental health services can be provided effectively
- enrichment activities can be provided consistently.

Work culture in secure detention facility impacts ability to hire and retain staff

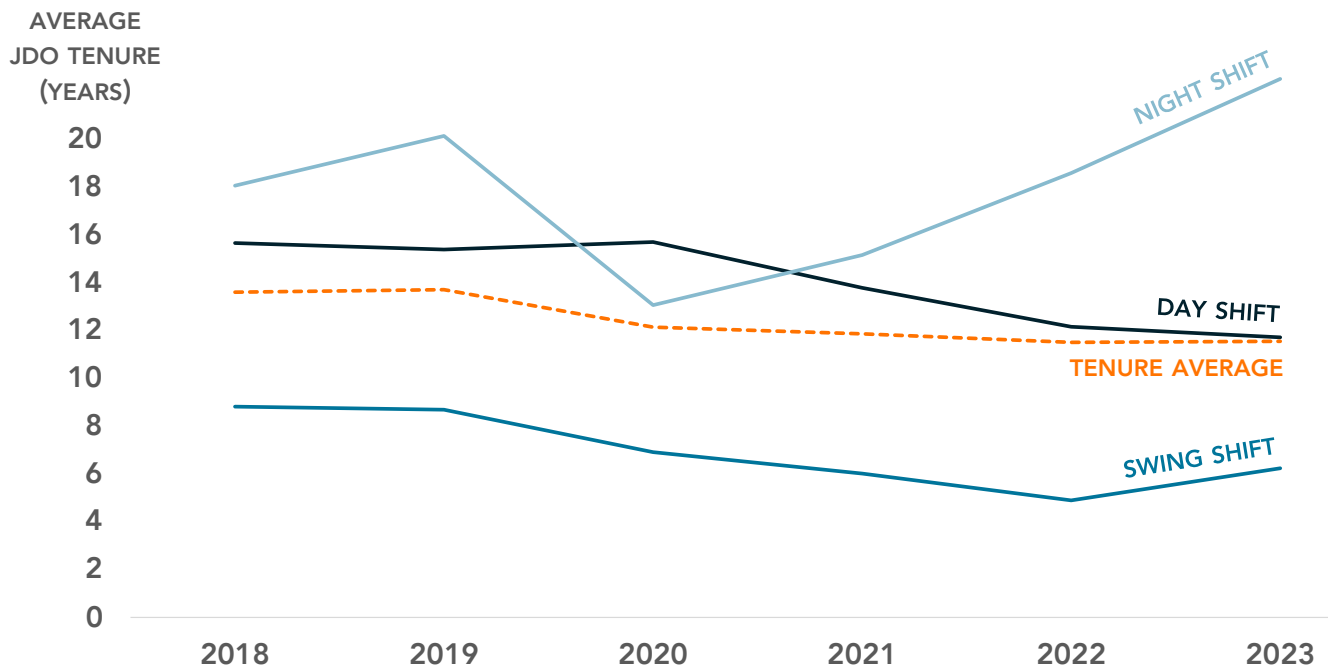
The work culture at CCFJC secure detention is described by both management and staff as negative, impacting DAJD’s ability to hire, retain, and continuously improve. Leaders and staff have suggested multiple root causes for morale issues and barriers to collaborative improvement but had limited suggestions on how to improve relations. Many expressed that positive change was unlikely. Employee turnover was a consistent concern for staff, and it may be a factor that both impacts morale and is impacted by morale. As discussed above, DAJD has attempted several hiring and retention efforts in the past, but the Juvenile Division continues to lose both experienced and new staff to attrition. Multiple staff observed that this contributes to a vicious cycle: reduced staffing results in mandatory overtime, which leads to staff burnout and absenteeism, which then further reduces staffing levels.

One result of turnover is that there is a higher number of newer JDOs on some shifts. JDOs bid on their preferred shift and post, with preference given to more senior staff. As a result, newer JDOs often work shifts not bid on by more experienced staff. This is particularly notable for the second shift, also referred to as “swing” shift, which spans from 3 p.m. until 11 p.m. As of May 2023, 6 out of 17 JDOs, and zero supervisors on the second shift, had more than five years of experience in their roles. Limited interaction with more senior staff means that newer staff have limited opportunities to learn from more experienced officers on the job. Exhibit N shows the average tenure of staff by shift.

Amid employee turnover, both management and staff noted frustration with the inability to address operational concerns based on belief that the other party will

either ignore or grieve the proposed change. In its analysis of safety and security at CCFJC secure detention, a consultant also noted that a culture of “us versus them” exists between management and staff, which hinders administration’s ability to respond to problems, further damaging staff morale. Together, these issues limit the ability of management and staff at all levels of the Juvenile Division to work together toward common goals.

EXHIBIT N: Juvenile detention officers (JDO) who work during second, or “swing,” shift have less experience, on average, than officers on other shifts.



Source: King County Auditor’s Office analysis of Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention data, January 2018 to March 2023

Staff have limited opportunities for positive feedback and do not receive performance evaluations

Many Juvenile Division staff do not receive yearly performance evaluations, limiting opportunities to highlight positive performance, career growth potential, and areas of improvement.

JDOs do not have performance reviews beyond their probationary hire period, and written assessments are limited to documenting significant policy deviations deemed serious enough to file in permanent personnel records. Neither staff, supervisors, nor management reported any process for recording commendations or quality performance, which can contribute to low morale. In its safety and security analysis, the DAJD-contracted consultant noted that supervisors play a critical role in ensuring the safety of a facility. It recommends that supervisors should spend most of their time coaching

and supervising staff as well as providing yearly evaluations and ongoing feedback for officers. The consultant added that this may require reassigning some duties to other staff levels to permit supervisory staff capacity to complete coaching duties. These coaching and feedback activities can also serve as opportunities to increase morale by highlighting positive performance and growth at all staff levels.

Recommendation 7

To highlight positive performance and identify areas for growth, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should regularly conduct performance evaluations for juvenile detention officers at all levels.



Section 4: Living Conditions

SECTION SUMMARY

Youth in secure detention shared concerns about living conditions at CCFJC that contribute to feelings of stress and anxiety and were unaware of existing mechanisms that might help address their concerns about living conditions. Youth we interviewed expressed worries about the safety of the drinking water in their cells. They also explained how increased time confined to their cells made them feel disoriented, stressed, and unable to track time. However, youth were unaware that they could address complaints about their treatment and living conditions to an independent oversight agency, the King County Office of the Ombuds (Ombuds).

METHODS

- Conducted site visits to the secure detention areas of the CCFJC and interviewed 20 youth housed in secure detention in July 2023.
- Interviewed Facilities Management Division (FMD) and DAJD staff and leaders about water quality testing.
- Reviewed complaint data from the Ombuds, June 2021 to June 2022.

For more information on our methods, please see appendix C.

Water quality testing needed

Some youth expressed concerns about the quality of water in secure detention at CCFJC. DAJD does not have a policy to regularly test water quality in the facility, presenting health and safety risks. While youth largely did not raise concerns about the food and water at the facility, some shared concerns that they felt that the water quality was low. The youth that the audit team spoke to shared that food and snacks served in secure detention at CCFJC are good, and that they felt they have enough to eat. However, 7 of the 20 youth interviewed shared concerns that the water from the fountains within their cells was uncomfortably warm for drinking, contained dark specks, or seemed possibly unsafe to drink. Juvenile Division management reported having to adjust water temperatures in the past and suggested that temperature fluctuations could occur seasonally and should be adjusted. FMD staff and DAJD leaders indicated that the water quality in secure

detention at CCFJC is not regularly tested. FMD fulfills work requests for the CCFJC facility. FMD said that it does not regularly test the water quality in the facility. DAJD does not have a policy or procedure set up to request FMD perform regular water quality tests or to request tests in response to concerns by youth in secure detention.

While Seattle Public Utilities tests municipal water quality daily, this does not eliminate the possibility of water quality risks resulting from the facility's infrastructure. Seattle Public Schools provides an example of how other institutions mitigate this risk: to further ensure safety of drinking water within its facilities, Seattle Public Schools has developed a policy requiring that each water source is tested every three years, with the Washington State Department of Health or its contractors conducting these tests on behalf of Seattle Public Schools since 2021.²⁴ DAJD can further ensure drinking water quality and safety within CCFJC secure detention by developing policies for regular quality testing within the facility.

Recommendation 8

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should develop and implement a policy to test water quality at the CCFJC at least annually.

Youth feel disoriented when they don't know what time it is

When confined to their cells, youth do not have access to clocks, meaning they are unable to track the passage of time and report becoming disoriented. Five youth we interviewed shared that they lose track of time when confined to their cells and have little to do to help pass the time. Half of all youth we interviewed added that being confined to their cell adversely impacts their mood by increasing feelings of anxiety, uncertainty, trauma, and disorientation. As discussed in section 3, low staffing has resulted in youth spending up to 4.5 additional hours a day in their cells beyond the 12 sleeping hours a day under a normal schedule.

Youth noted that staff do not tell them when they will be confined to their cells for longer than normal due to staffing shortages. In other words, youth enter their cells at a shift change without knowing when officers will release them. Youth commented that this uncertainty increases the potential for behavior incidents. People with limited or no access to clocks or other methods to tell time can face difficulty in

²⁴ [Drinking Water Quality Program - Seattle Public Schools \(seattleschools.org\)](https://www.seattleschools.org/Drinking-Water-Quality-Program)

regulating moods and experience high levels of stress and uncertainty. This, in turn, can contribute to higher risks of depression and cognitive impairment.

Recommendation 9

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should ensure all youth can see a clock from their cells.

Youth unaware of independent process for grievances

Youth were familiar with how to submit a grievance internally with Juvenile Division staff but were unaware that they could also submit grievances to the Ombuds, indicating a potential gap in independent external oversight. Youth were aware of how to submit a grievance to shift supervisors or to facility management. Some youth stated that they feel that supervisors and management always side with staff during the grievance process. However, youth were unaware that they could also submit grievances to the independent Ombuds. When asked if they were aware of how to submit a complaint, none of the youth interviewed mentioned or were aware of the Ombuds. Instead, the youth referred to the grievance process internal to secure detention at CCFJC. Additionally, only one complaint to the Ombuds, spanning from June 2021 to June 2022, made specific mention of “juvenile custody”; and it is unclear whether any complaints during that period were submitted by youth housed in secure detention.

The process for submitting a complaint to the Ombuds is included in the handbook provided to youth when they are booked into secure detention at CCFJC; however, the content is not clearly explained as separate from the internal complaint process, possibly contributing to confusion about methods for filing grievances. Additional communication with youth on how to report items to the Ombuds may help to ensure that youth can access this resource. Given the concerns about facility conditions raised above, it is important that youth have consistent and reliable access to external contacts, such as the Ombuds, who can serve as a check on conditions.

Recommendation 10

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should work with the Office of the Ombuds to ensure that the process to submit grievances to the Ombuds is available to youth in custody and that the materials provided to youth explain the difference between grievances to the Ombuds and grievances submitted internally.

CONCLUSION

While policy changes have helped King County reduce the number of youth facing short stays in secure detention, the number of youth facing long stays has not decreased, with over 200 youth between 2017 and 2023 staying for over 100 days and nearly 30 staying in excess of a year. Since the County books fewer youth into secure detention, the ones who are held in secure detention at CCFJC often face serious charges, and their cases are taking longer to resolve. As a result, the nature of the facility has changed, from housing youth for short-term transitional periods to housing youth for well over 30 days. Secure detention at CCFJC was designed to support short-term stays and the Juvenile Division does not provide the broader range of mental health, educational, and enrichment supports that are needed to support long lengths of stay. Because these supports are time-sensitive for youth as they grow and mature, the lack of them in secure detention at CCFJC has a direct negative effect on the detained youths' potential for rehabilitation and future incarceration.

Within secure detention at CCFJC, youth themselves raised concerns about some living conditions and the lack of regular contact with external advocates and supports such as probation counselors and defense attorneys. Youth shared difficulties in reaching their attorneys via phone and understanding the circumstances of their cases. Youth also had a lack of knowledge about the independent grievance process available through the Ombuds. It is important that youth in secure custody have consistent and reliable interactions with their attorneys and clear mechanisms for making complaints to the Ombuds. Reducing uncertainty may lessen the potential for violent incidents, and access to advocates acts as an additional check, ensuring positive conditions within the facility. Staffing challenges compound these issues — resulting in youth spending considerable additional time in their cells, canceled enrichment programming and schooling, and poor staff morale.

The County Executive is developing alternatives to juvenile detention. As the County Executive works toward eliminating juvenile detention, it is important that services, programs, and staffing decisions also meet the needs of youth who are in secure detention at CCFJC today. As longer case durations mean that youth remain in detention for long periods, they need access to services appropriate for the duration of their time in the facility — including staffing and staff skill levels to adequately support youth and continuity of care options. Without comprehensive planning and implementation that addresses the services needed by youth in secure detention today, King County is missing a critical component of its mission to reduce and eliminate juvenile detention.

Appendix A: Ombuds Response

OFFICE OF THE OMBUDS

Jeremy Bell, Ombuds – Director

810 Third Avenue, Suite 705
Seattle, Washington 98104
Phone: (206) 477-1050 V/TDD
Fax: (206) 296-0948
ombudsmail@kingcounty.gov
www.kingcounty.gov/ombuds

April 10, 2024

KyMBER Waltmunson
King County Auditor
516 Third Ave, Room W-1033
Seattle, WA 98104

Dear Ms. Waltmunson,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the 2024 audit report on the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC) in Seattle, WA.

The King County Ombuds Office investigates complaints from the public and King County employees regarding the administrative acts of county departments. This includes complaints from residents and employees of the CCFJC. Though no report recommendations are directed at the King County Ombuds Office, we are proactively taking steps to support this recommendation.

We have already scheduled and completed a tour of the CCFJC for Ombuds Office staff to better familiarize ourselves with the facility and increase our visibility. Currently we are working on creating materials that explain the *independent* role of the Ombuds, and how to contact our office. These materials will be rolled out to CCFJC residents and employees later this year.

The Ombuds Office remains open to hearing from any interested party on this topic, and looks forward to working with the CCFJC to improve county processes. I am happy to answer any follow-up questions you may have, and greatly appreciate the work you and your staff have put into this audit report.

Sincerely,



Jeremy Bell
King County Ombuds

Appendix B: Executive Response

Dow Constantine

King County Executive

401 Fifth Avenue, Suite 800
Seattle, WA 98104

206-296-9600 Fax 206-296-0194

TTY Relay: 711

www.kingcounty.gov

April 18, 2024

KyMBER Waltmunson
King County Auditor
Room 1033
King County Courthouse

Dear Ms. Waltmunson:

Thank you for the opportunity to review and comment on the proposed audit report titled “Juvenile Detention: Many Youth Face Long Stays in Facility Designed for Short Term Support.”

The Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCJFC) was designed to house pre-adjudicated youth. And as the report notes, the youth population housed at the CCJFC has changed significantly. These changes are due in part to decades of collaboration among King County’s juvenile legal system partners to provide alternatives to secure detention for youth. This work has resulted in diverting many youth with less serious charges from secure detention. The change in population is also due in part to the fact that youth who are facing adult charges are housed at the CCJFC, rather than the Maleng Regional Justice Center (MRJC). Because of the serious nature of such charges for these youth, this population faces lengthy case processing times, resulting in longer stays at CCFJC.

The Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD) are committed to the care of the youth housed in our secure detention facility. DAJD has already begun working on some of the audit recommendations and DAJD and the Executive will continue to make every effort to meaningfully engage with our juvenile legal system partners to make the recommended changes. Notably, while DAJD staff and leadership maintain close, effective working relationships with staff and leadership of the Juvenile Court, the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office, and the Department of Public Defense, audit recommendations that call for policy and practice changes from these partners require the cooperation and agreement of the independently elected Superior Court and Prosecutor’s Office. The participation of these separately elected agencies to implement some of the audit recommendations is necessary and also voluntary.

DAJD is a county General Fund supported department. The General Fund is currently deeply constricted, thus implementation of audit recommendations requiring additional staffing or funding is subject to available resources. In addition, available funding, staffing, and constrained workloads may impact timing of work related to fulfilling these recommendations, particularly given the number of vacant positions in DAJD.

We appreciate the thorough work of your team and the collaborative approach taken throughout the audit.

Sincerely,

DocuSigned by:



E9A6951003E9436...

Dwight Dively
Chief Operating Officer

Enclosure

cc: Karan Gill, Chief of Staff, Office of the Executive
Jennifer Hills, Deputy Chief Operating Officer, Office of the Executive
Kelli Carroll, Director of Special Projects, Office of the Executive
Alan Nance, Director, Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD)
Steve Larsen, Deputy Director, DAJD
Jeneva Cotton, Juvenile Division Director, DAJD

Recommendation 1

The King County Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should conduct an analysis of the needs of youth who are securely detained in the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center. The analysis should consider and document:

- actual lengths of stay experienced by youth in the facility
- age-appropriate therapeutic and skill needs of youth detained for extended periods
- how services could be differentiated for longer lengths of stay.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	7/1/2025
Responsible agency	DAJD
Comment	The Department of Adult and Detention (DAJD) will review data and information regarding the youth in its custody. As part of the analysis, the department will review best practices for therapeutic and skills based programming that could be offered in a local juvenile detention facility. Available funding, staffing, and constrained workloads may impact timing of work related to fulfilling this recommendation.

Recommendation 2

Based on the results of the analysis in Recommendation 1, the King County Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should document and implement a plan to address gaps between the programs and services that securely detained youth need and those that are being provided. In partnership with Superior Court, the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office and the Department of Public Defense, the plan could include:

- options for specific programs or services for securely detained youth
- identification of physical improvements to the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center
- identification of placement alternatives to CCFJC secure detention, including placement in a Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families-operated facility and other alternatives
- documentation of alignment with the actions included in the January 2024 Care and Closure Final Strategic Planning Report on the Future of Secure Juvenile Detention.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	7/1/2026
Responsible agency	DAJD
Comment	The Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention will conduct the analysis to document gaps between the services provided by DAJD to youth in detention and best practices identified through the analysis undertaken for Recommendation #1. With regard to implementation of a plan that addresses such gaps, DAJD is a County General Fund supported department and the General Fund is constrained. DAJD continues to struggle with limited financial and staffing resources, expanding bodies of work, including increasing requests for specific data and reporting. Thus, implementation of actions which may address the identified gaps is subject to available staffing and resources. This includes any potential physical improvements that may be identified. The Executive and DAJD will continue to extend opportunities to collaborate on matters associated with youth detained at CCFJC to the Prosecuting Attorney’s Office (PAO), the Department of Public Defense (DPD), and the Superior Court. Notably, while the cooperation and participation of separately elected-led agencies in this work is necessary, their participation is voluntary.

Recommendation 3

As part of its publicly available detention population data reporting, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should track, document, and report the number of youth in secure detention for extended periods and report that information to the Department of Public Defense, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and Superior Court for their use in addressing time to resolution and long lengths of stay.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	6/1/2024
Responsible agency	DAJD
Comment	The Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention currently reports population and length of stay data on its public facing website on a monthly basis. The department will provide this data to the agencies as called for by the recommendation.

Recommendation 4

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should explore options to house youth facing adult charges separately from youth under age 16 charged solely with juvenile offenses and document how to incorporate this in its housing classification system.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	7/1/2025
Responsible agency	DAJD
Comment	DAJD will explore its juvenile housing classification practices and document its findings. This analysis will also consider current best practices and standards, such as those identified by Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) which call for considering the behavior associated with the underlying activity rather than solely basing housing on the charge(s) filed on the youth. At CCJFC, youth to be detained are assessed based on a variety of measures to determine appropriate housing for each youth. These measures include such factors as age, history of violent behavior, level of emotional development, risk of self-harm, and history of victimization or abusiveness. Basing housing decisions solely on charge(s) adds complexity and cost to the housing of youth in detention by limiting the ability to move youth to other, more suitable housing locations. It may require the staffing of additional housing units due to this added restriction on housing decisions. As identified during the audit process, DAJD is constrained by vacant positions and the CCFJC's physical plant limitations.

Recommendation 5

As part of its publicly available detention population data reporting, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should track, document, and report the number of youth who are not visited in person by their attorney for 30 days or more.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	6/1/2024
Responsible agency	DAJD
Comment	DAJD currently shares attorney visitation data with the Department of Public Defense. DAJD will develop a monthly reporting format of this data that it will post to its public facing website.

Recommendation 6

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should develop, document, and communicate a plan that defines the appropriate level of staffing to meet the needs of youth in secure detention. The staffing plan should be informed by the needs assessment developed in response to Recommendation 1 and, in turn, should inform ongoing and future recruitment efforts.

At a minimum, the plan should account for the number and types of staff needed to ensure that:

- youth do not spend time confined in their cells due to staffing limitations
- school periods are not missed nor shortened
- mental health services can be provided effectively
- enrichment activities can be provided consistently.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	1/1/2025
Responsible agency	DAJD
Comment	DAJD currently develops, documents, and communicates semiannual staffing plans which define the appropriate level of staffing to meet the needs of youth in detention. These reports are shared with the Office of Performance, Strategy, and Budget to inform the department's budget development. The staffing plans reflect recruitment goals and efforts and programming for youth. As operational needs evolve, including needs identified through fulfilling the recommendations outlined in this audit report, the Executive's Care and Closure Initiative, or other factors as yet identified, DAJD will update its staffing plans accordingly.

Recommendation 7

To highlight positive performance and identify areas for growth, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should regularly conduct performance evaluations for juvenile detention officers at all levels.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	1/1/2025
Responsible agency	DAJD, Dept. of Human Resources, Office of Labor Relations
Comment	Since February 2024, DAJD has been pursuing its goal of building a more comprehensive performance management system for all employees, including providing annual evaluations and periodic mid-year check-ins. DAJD hopes to complete its roll-out of the system for the Juvenile Division by the end of 2024, following the development and implementation of supervisor training, policy and procedures. Timing of implementation is dependent on the Department of Human Resources acquisition of, and DAJD's access to, a new technology platform and successfully addressing concerns raised by labor partners.

Recommendation 8

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should develop and implement a policy to test water quality at the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center at least annually.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	1/1/2025
Responsible agency	DAJD, Facilities Management Division
Comment	DAJD is one tenant of the CCFJC and does not manage the physical aspects of the facility. However, the safety of the youth cared for at the facility is the paramount concern of the Executive and DAJD. DAJD will work with the Facility Management Division of the Department of Executive Services to develop and implement annual water quality testing policy for CCFJC.

Recommendation 9

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should ensure all youth can see a clock from their cells.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	6/1/2024
Responsible agency	DAJD, Facilities Management Division
Comment	DAJD will procure clocks for the living units that can be seen from individual dorms. It will work with the Facilities Management Division to install the clocks.

Recommendation 10

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should work with the Office of the Ombuds to ensure that the process to submit grievances to the Ombuds is available to youth in custody and that the materials provided to youth explain the difference between grievances to the Ombuds and grievances submitted internally.

AGENCY RESPONSE	
Concurrence	CONCUR
Implementation date	9/1/2024
Responsible agency	DAJD
Comment	DAJD met with the King County Office of the Ombuds to discuss opportunities for enhancing youth submitted grievances to the Ombuds. DAJD will continue to work with the Ombuds Office to ensure that information about reporting to the Ombuds is available in DAJD’s youth handbook, and that posters with reporting information are visible around the detention facility.



Appendix C: Statement of Compliance, Scope, Objective & Methodology

Statement of Compliance with Government Auditing Standards

We conducted this performance audit in accordance with Generally Accepted Government Auditing Standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.

Scope of Work on Internal Controls

We reviewed internal controls as they related to the extent to which the facility and facility operations meet the physical, behavioral, emotional, and enrichment needs of youth in secure detention.

Scope

This audit will examine the conditions of confinement for youth in secure detention in King County from 2017 to the end of 2022.

Objectives

1. Who is housed in youth secure detention in King County, and to what extent has that changed since 2017?
2. To what extent is the Juvenile Division of the King County Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention (DAJD) set up to meet the behavioral, emotional, and enrichment needs of youth in secure detention?
3. To what extent does the Juvenile Division meet best practices for risk management and crisis response at the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center (CCFJC)?

Methodology

To gather and present information on who is housed in youth secure detention and how that has changed over time, we analyzed data on youth demographics, length of stay, and charges and case progression from both the DAJD and the Department of Judicial Administration (DJA) for the time period of January 2017 through June 2023. We worked with full data sets provided by DAJD and DJA, as

opposed to samples. We calculated average daily population by summing the number of days each youth was in the facility during a time period (month, quarter, or year) and dividing by the number of days in that period. We included partial days in the calculation without rounding them up or down. As a result of this methodology, our average daily population calculations could differ slightly from calculations based on point-in-time headcounts. We calculated length of stay as the total time that each youth was in secure detention on the same booking number, excluding time that the youth spent in alternatives to secure detention or temporarily out of the facility (for example, a hospital visit). The length of stay does not include time held in other correctional facilities (for example, youth who are transferred to adult jail when they turn 18). We used data from DJA to determine if youth faced charges in adult or juvenile court. If youth faced at least one adult charge during their time in secure detention, we categorized them as youth facing adult charges (even if they also had juvenile charges or if the adult charges were added after the time of booking).

To assess the extent to which the Juvenile Division of DAJD is set up to meet the behavioral, emotional, and enrichment needs of youth in secure detention, we conducted interviews, document review, and data analysis. We interviewed Juvenile Division leadership and staff, including interviews with juvenile detention officers, supervisors, kitchen staff, nursing staff, mental health staff, schoolteachers, and staff specializing in enrichment, restorative justice, alternatives to secure detention, and training. We also interviewed staff from the Prosecuting Attorney's Office, Superior Court, the Department of Public Defense, and the Facilities Management Division of the Department of Executive Services. To understand external efforts for oversight and policy change, we met with the independent monitor for restrictive housing and the Care and Closure team. We reviewed documentation of policy changes in the area of youth secure detention, including Washington state laws, King County Council ordinances, and Care and Closure reports. We also reviewed Juvenile Division policies and procedures, staffing reports, collective bargaining agreements, programming schedules, and independent monitor reports on restrictive housing.

We conducted multiple site visits to the Juvenile Division office and secure detention facilities at the CCFJC in order to learn about and observe facility operations. To better understand the experiences of youth housed in secure detention, we conducted in-person interviews with 20 youth housed in secure detention in July 2023.

We also analyzed behavior, visitation, staffing, and enrichment data, working with full data sets for the specified timeframes rather than samples. We analyzed DAJD behavior data from May 2019 through June 2023 to assess the number of behavior events per youth and any correlations with length of stay or type of charges filed. We analyzed DAJD visitation data from mid-August 2021 to July 2023 to calculate the time elapsed between attorney visits for youth in detention. We analyzed Juvenile Division staffing and

tenure data on budgeted and filled juvenile detention officer and supervisor positions between January 2018 and May 2023.

DAJD hired a consultant to conduct a review of safety and security in CCFJC during the time of our review. The scope of this work overlapped substantially with the proposed third objective of our audit, so we limited our work in this area to avoid duplication of effort. We reviewed this report and incorporated relevant information into our findings.

Appendix D: List of Recommendations

Recommendation 1

The King County Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should conduct an analysis of the needs of youth who are securely detained in the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center. The analysis should consider and document:

- actual lengths of stay experienced by youth in the facility
- age-appropriate therapeutic and skill needs of youth detained for extended periods
- how services could be differentiated for longer lengths of stay.

Recommendation 2

Based on the results of the analysis in Recommendation 1, the King County Executive and the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should document and implement a plan to address gaps between the programs and services that securely detained youth need and those that are being provided.

In partnership with Superior Court, the Prosecuting Attorney's Office and the Department of Public Defense, the plan could include:

- options for specific programs or services for securely detained youth
- identification of physical improvements to the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center
- identification of placement alternatives to CCFJC secure detention, including placement in a Washington State Department of Children, Youth, and Families-operated facility and other alternatives
- documentation of alignment with the actions included in the January 2024 Care and Closure Final Strategic Planning Report on the Future of Secure Juvenile Detention.

Recommendation 3

As part of its publicly available detention population data reporting, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should track, document, and report the number of youth in secure detention for extended periods and report that information to the Department of Public Defense, Prosecuting Attorney's Office, and Superior Court for their use in addressing time to resolution and long lengths of stay.

Recommendation 4

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should explore options to house youth facing adult charges separately from youth under age 16 charged solely with juvenile offenses and document how to incorporate this in its housing classification system.

Recommendation 5

As part of its publicly available detention population data reporting, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should track, document, and report the number of youth who are not visited in person by their attorney for 30 days or more.

Recommendation 6

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should develop, document, and communicate a plan that defines the appropriate level of staffing to meet the needs of youth in secure detention. The staffing plan should be informed by the needs assessment developed in response to Recommendation 1 and, in turn, should inform ongoing and future recruitment efforts.

At a minimum, the plan should account for the number and types of staff needed to ensure that:

- youth do not spend time confined in their cells due to staffing limitations
- school periods are not missed nor shortened
- mental health services can be provided effectively
- enrichment activities can be provided consistently.

Recommendation 7

To highlight positive performance and identify areas for growth, the Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should regularly conduct performance evaluations for juvenile detention officers at all levels.

Recommendation 8

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should develop and implement a policy to test water quality at the Patricia H. Clark Children and Family Justice Center at least annually.

Recommendation 9

The Juvenile Division of the Department of Adult and Juvenile Detention should ensure all youth can see a clock from their cells.

Recommendation 10

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Appendix E: Advancing Performance & Accountability

KYMBER WALTMUNSON, KING COUNTY AUDITOR

MISSION Promote improved performance, accountability, and transparency in King County government through objective and independent audits and studies.

VALUES INDEPENDENCE • CREDIBILITY • IMPACT

The King County Auditor’s Office is committed to equity, social justice, and ensuring that King County is an accountable, inclusive, and anti-racist government. While planning our work, we develop research questions that aim to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of King County government and to identify and help dismantle systemic racism. In analysis we strive to ensure that communities referenced are seen, not erased. We promote aligning King County data collection, storage, and categorization with just practices. We endeavor to use terms that are respectful, representative, and people- and community-centered, recognizing that inclusive language continues to evolve. For more information, see the King County [Equity and Social Justice Strategic Plan](#), King County’s [statement on racial justice](#), and the King County [Auditor’s Office Strategic Plan](#).

ABOUT US The King County Auditor’s Office was created by charter in 1969 as an independent agency within the legislative branch of county government. The office conducts oversight of county government through independent audits, capital projects oversight, and other studies. The results of this work are presented to the Metropolitan King County Council and are communicated to the King County Executive and the public. The King County Auditor’s Office performs its work in accordance with Government Auditing Standards.



This audit product conforms to the GAGAS for independence, objectivity, and quality.