



Kentucky can...

Address misbehavior by children under 12 through community-based services instead of the court system

Kids are kids, and we do not expect them to act like tiny adults. Young children, such as elementary school students, who get in trouble need responses and interventions that address the root causes of their behavior; the juvenile court system is not the place to do that. The formal court process can be traumatic, negatively impact a child’s development, and trap children in an increasingly difficult maze of problems.

Kentucky can **continue to make commonsense shifts in how we respond when young children get in trouble** to ensure safer communities and brighter futures for all kids.

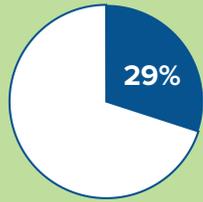
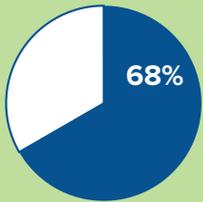
The best solutions address the root causes of the child’s behavior because:

- Parents and other caring adults play a critical role in healthy development and positive behaviors
- When children and their families have access to community-based services, such as mental health treatment and mentoring, they can develop healthy coping skills and build stronger family connections

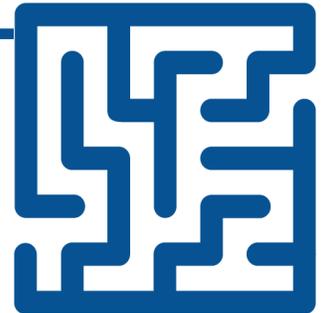
Advancing Equity in the Commonwealth

Perceptions that youth of color are older than their actual age, or are more culpable, contribute to more young Black children than White peers having complaints filed against them – the first step into the juvenile justice system maze. Even when young Black children receive diversion or have the case handled out of formal court, early charges can impact how a future case is handled.

In Jefferson County – home to almost half of Kentucky’s Black youth – Black children are disproportionately represented in complaints filed against children ages 12 and younger.



Currently, the juvenile justice system operates like a **complex maze with many points of entry**, making it easy to get in but very difficult to get out.



Entering the juvenile court system can:

- Expose kids to trauma
- Disrupt their development and education
- Create roadblocks into adulthood through reduced employment opportunities and increased likelihood of future incarceration

Blueprint for Kentucky’s Children Solution:

Establish a minimum age – at least 12 years old – that a child can be charged with an offense, and connect the child and family to community-based services instead of sending them through the juvenile justice system.