

Juvenile Crime in Alaska

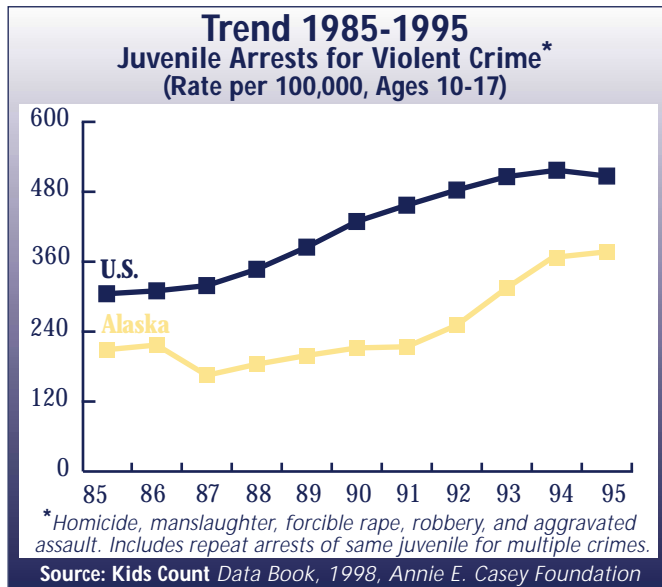




*Crime is an equal-opportunity employer. It never discriminates.
Anybody can enter the field.*

*Ice-T,
American rapper*

Juvenile Crime in Alaska



Significance of Indicator

Teenagers committing crimes seem to make headlines almost daily. And violent teenagers are using guns more often. In 1994, 8 in 10 juveniles who committed murders used guns, compared with 5 in 10 in 1983.¹

But it's useful to keep in mind that adults, not teenagers, still commit most violent crimes. One source estimated in the mid-1990s that juveniles committed about 13 percent of violent crimes nationwide.² Also, in Alaska and nationwide, most juvenile arrests

are for crimes against property rather than against persons.³

Finding ways to keep juveniles from committing crimes would pay off in many ways—only one of which is that it would save taxpayers money. The average cost of incarcerating a juvenile for one year is an estimated \$35,000 to \$64,000. For comparison, the current cost of Head Start's intervention program is \$4,300 per child per year.⁴

Violent Juvenile Crime in Alaska and U.S.

In 1995, Alaska's rate of violent juvenile crime was 377 per 100,000 juveniles (ages 10-17). That was considerably below the national rate of 507 per 100,000 juveniles.

But the rate of violent crime by juveniles in Alaska rose very sharply in the early 1990s, as the trend graph to the left shows. In 1995, the rate was 80 percent higher than in 1985. The rate in both Alaska and the U.S. as a whole did appear to level off between 1994 and 1995. However, because of problems getting consistent data throughout the country, the national Kids Count program has now dropped this indicator. So we can't compare how the rates of violent crime by juveniles nationwide and in Alaska changed in the most recent years.

Alaska's Juvenile Corrections System

The Division of Juvenile Justice in the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services administers Alaska's juvenile justice system. (This is a new division. Until recently, the Division of Family and Youth Services administered the juvenile justice system.)

The division tries to reduce or prevent delinquency through "restorative justice." This means it tries to hold juveniles accountable for their crimes; to protect the public; to restore victims and communities; and to provide juvenile offenders with services (like treatment for drug use) that will make them more responsible and less likely to commit crimes in the future. The flow chart on the next page shows how Alaska's juvenile justice system works and how many cases it handled in fiscal year 1999.

Definition

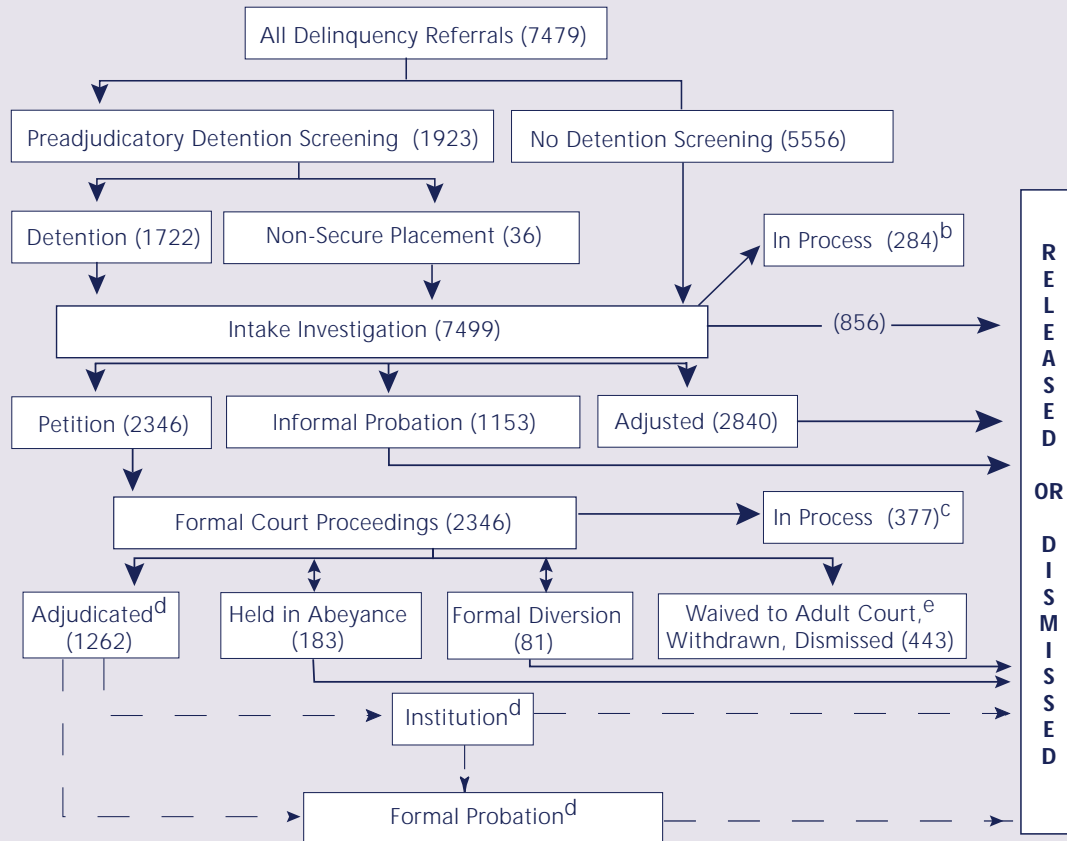
The rate of crimes committed by persons under 18 who go through the juvenile justice system. The overwhelming majority of juveniles who commit crimes are between ages 10 and 17. A few juveniles who commit specific violent crimes are, under Alaska law, tried in adult court. Also, in some other instances, judges can order juveniles to be tried in adult court. Juvenile crimes range from shoplifting to vandalism to murder.

Data for Alaska provided by Roger Withington of the Division of Juvenile Justice, Alaska Department of Health and Social Services



Juvenile Crime in Alaska (continued)

Referrals To Juvenile Justice, Fiscal Year 1999 (Duplicated Cases^a)



^a Includes multiple referrals of same juvenile.

^b Intake investigation not yet complete at end of fiscal year.

^c Formal court proceedings pending at end of fiscal year.

^d Numbers of juveniles who are placed in youth correctional facilities or are put on formal probation in a given year typically exceed the number who go through adjudication in that year. That's because the juvenile justice system's records also include many juveniles on "informal" probation and because some juveniles who went through adjudication in an earlier year are recorded every year they are on probation.

^e These are juveniles judicially waived to adult court—that is, sent to adult court at the discretion of judges. Other juveniles of specific ages who commit specific crimes are automatically waived to adult court under Alaska law. In either case, few juveniles are tried in adult court.

Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice

Police Referrals

Juveniles suspected of committing crimes come into the system when police send "delinquency referrals" to the juvenile justice division. There were about 7,500 delinquency referrals in fiscal 1999. Most juveniles referred to the system go directly to the intake investigation stage. But police can ask that juveniles who have been arrested for more serious crimes be detained immediately, while their cases are pending. Such juveniles—about one quarter of the referrals in 1999—go through detention screenings.

The division uses several criteria—including severity of the crime, risk to the public, and a juvenile's history of violence—to decide whether immediate detention is warranted. Juveniles who go through such screenings can be placed in youth corrections facilities, foster homes, or attendant care shelters while their cases are pending. They can also be released to parents or relatives. In some cases, the division decides no immediate detention is required.



Juvenile Crime in Alaska (continued)

Investigation and Resolution

During the intake investigation, division personnel decide if they have sufficient legal grounds to go forward. Some cases—about 10 percent in 1999—are dismissed at this point. Cases that go forward—roughly 90 percent in 1999—can take several routes.

For the most serious cases, the division files a petition for court proceedings. About 31 percent of referrals in 1999 went to formal court proceedings. Most juveniles who go to court are either placed in youth corrections facilities or put on formal probation. Juveniles on probation are supervised and are typically required to pay restitution to victims, do community service, or meet other conditions.

Other cases, involving lesser offenses, can stop short of court proceedings. Such cases can be “adjusted” in various ways, if the division determines that it can hold the juvenile accountable and protect the community without going to court. About 38 percent of referrals were adjusted in 1999.

Adjustments can include warning letters, conferences with parents, or requirements that the juvenile get academic tutoring or treatment for substance abuse. Another adjustment is informal probation. This is less structured than the formal probation that comes out of court proceedings, but still involves keeping track of juveniles and imposes conditions (like community service) or referrals to Youth Court (see box on page 68).

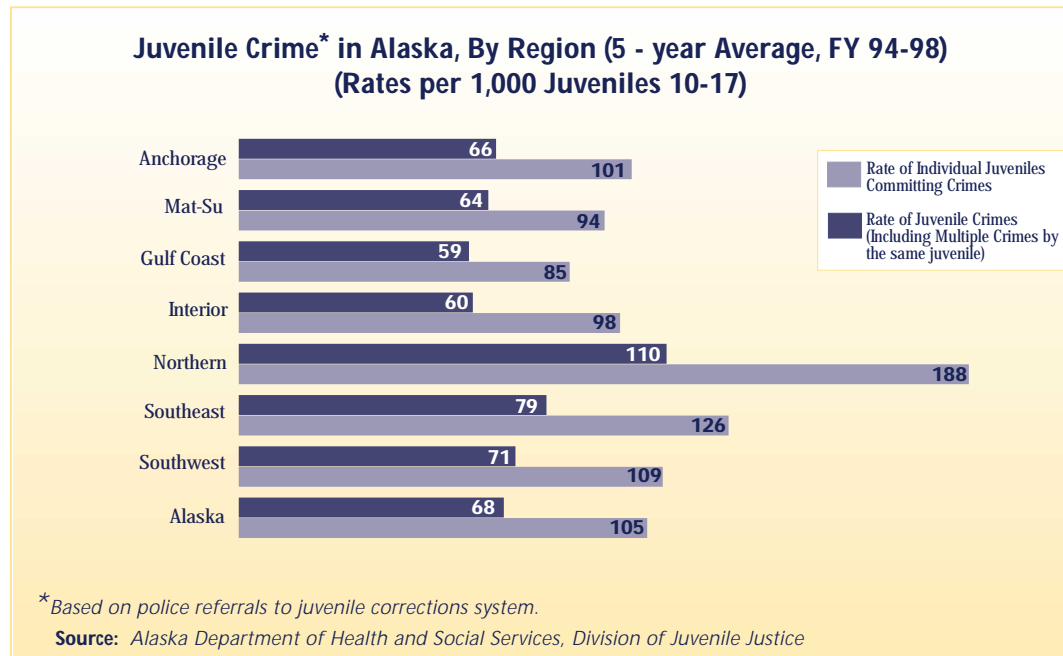
Juvenile Crime Rates

We use police referrals to the juvenile corrections system as a measure of juvenile crime in Alaska. Referrals are a reasonable measure of overall juvenile crime—but it’s important to keep in mind that some referrals are dismissed for lack of evidence.

The bar chart shows average rates of juvenile crime in Alaska, by region, for the period from 1994 through 1998. It reports two rates: (1) the number of *individual* juveniles who committed crimes per 1,000 juveniles ages 10-17, and (2) the number of *crimes* per 1,000 juveniles, including multiple offenses committed by the same juvenile.

On average, 68 per 1,000 Alaska juveniles (ages 10-17) committed crimes from 1994 through 1998, and there were 105 crimes per 1,000 juveniles. Juvenile crime was lowest in the Gulf Coast region and highest in the Northern region.

Crimes against property made up more than half the juvenile crime in all regions of Alaska, except the Southwest, from 1994 through 1998. Crimes against persons made up from 14 to 18 percent in all regions except the Southwest, where 24 percent of crimes were against persons. Juveniles in Southeast Alaska were most likely to violate drug or alcohol laws.



Juvenile Crime in Alaska (continued)

**Annual Police Reports^a of Juvenile (10-17) Crime, By Region and Type of Crime
(5 - Year Average, FY 1994-1998)**

Region	Type of Crime									
	Crimes Against Persons		Crimes Against Property		Violation of Drug and Alcohol Laws		Others ^b		Total ^c	
	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	Number / Percent	
Anchorage	454	14%	1,810	57%	265	8%	651	21%	3,180	100%
Mat-Su	127	16%	463	58%	101	12%	111	14%	801	100%
Gulf Coast	162	18%	486	54%	145	16%	103	12%	896	100%
Interior	221	18%	681	54%	168	13%	187	15%	1,257	100%
Northern	117	17%	363	53%	103	15%	99	15%	681	100%
Southeast	213	17%	652	52%	242	19%	148	12%	1,256	100%
Southwest	141	24%	275	46%	102	17%	78	13%	597	100%
Alaska	1,435	17%	4,731	54%	1,125	13%	1,376	16%	8,668	100%

^a Reports police send to probation officers, who then investigate. These are duplicate counts—meaning they include more than one crime by the same juvenile; duplicated counts show the overall level of juvenile crime.

^b Includes violations of public order laws, weapons laws, and miscellaneous other offenses.

^c Average annual number of crimes.

Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, divisions of Family and Youth Services and Juvenile Justice.

In Alaska, as in the rest of the nation, boys are far more likely than girls to commit crimes—by a margin of about three to one in recent years.

The share of crimes Alaska Native and Black juveniles committed in the 1990s was significantly higher than their share of the Alaska juvenile population.

The Alaska Department of Labor estimates that Alaska's juvenile population (ages 10-17) from 1994-1998 was more than 70 percent White, approximately 20 percent Alaska Native, 5 percent Black, and 4 percent Asian or Pacific Islander.

Statewide, Natives committed about 28 percent of juvenile crime and Blacks about 7 percent. The top table on the facing page shows juvenile crime by race and region from 1994 through 1998.

Reliable figures on the share of juveniles by race in various regions of the state are not available right now. But the bottom table on the facing page shows the percentage breakdown of the entire population by race and region. This table lets us make a very rough comparison of how the share of juvenile crime by race and region compares with the regional population breakdown by

race. So, for example, in the Southwest, Native juveniles commit the overwhelming share of juvenile crime—but they also make up most of the juvenile population.



Juvenile Crime in Alaska (continued)

Police Reports of Juveniles* (ages 10-17) Committing Crimes, by Race and Region

Region	(Percentages based on 5 - year average, FY 94-98)					Total Number Juveniles Committing Crimes, 1994-98*
	Native	Black	White	Asian/Pacific Isl.	Hispanic and Other	
Anchorage	14%	14%	61%	5%	7%	10,500
Mat-Su	7	2	89	0.3	2	2,731
Gulf Coast	12	1	77	5	5	3,100
Interior	28	10	56	1	5	3,838
Northern	90	0.2	5	1	4	1,991
Southeast	32	1	50	2	16	3,928
Southwest	89	1	9	0.2	2	1,945
Alaska	28%	7%	56%	3%	7%	28,033

* Unduplicated reports of juvenile crime—which means juveniles who commit more than one crime show up only once in the numbers.

Note: Percentages may total slightly more or less than 100 because of rounding.

Source: Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Division of Juvenile Justice

Alaska Population^a by Race^b and Region, 1997

	White	Alaska Native	Black	Asian/Pacific Islander
Anchorage	78%	8%	7%	7%
Mat-Su	93	5	1	1
Gulf Coast	84	10	1	5
Interior	79	12	7	2
Northern	20	75	1	4
Southeast	75	20	1	4
Southwest	22	75	0.5	3
Alaska	74%	17%	5%	5%

^a These are percentage breakdowns of the total Alaska population. The proportions of juveniles by region would be somewhat different, especially in the Northern and Southwest regions, where most residents are Alaska Natives. That's because the proportion of children and teenagers is higher among Natives.

^b "Hispanic" is considered an ethnic rather than a racial group, and the Alaska Department of Labor includes Hispanic persons in other racial groups. The department estimated that in 1997 about 5 percent of Alaskans were of Hispanic origin.

Source: Alaska Department of Labor, Research and Analysis Section



Juvenile Crime in Alaska (continued)

Snapshot of Juvenile Crime

- Most American schools report little crime. During the 1996-97 school year, 80 percent of American schools reported five or fewer crimes of any kind (serious or petty) on school grounds.⁵
- Still, three in ten teenagers say violence in their own schools is a serious problem.⁶
- One of every five violent crimes committed by juveniles occur in the four hours after the end of the school day—between 2 and 6 p.m.⁷
- In most American communities, juveniles are neither murdering people nor being murdered. In 1995, 85 percent of U.S. communities reported no murders of juveniles, and 93 percent recorded either one or no juvenile arrests for murder.⁸
- After increasing for more than a decade, homicides committed by juveniles dropped 17 percent in 1995. Specifically, boys committed fewer homicides, while girls committed about the same number (which is a small fraction of the number boys commit).⁹
- Murders committed by juveniles with guns soared 182 percent between 1987 and 1993. Murders with other weapons increased only 15 percent during the same period.¹⁰
- Twenty states (including Alaska) try juveniles in adult courts for certain felonies.¹¹
- A University of Florida study found that juveniles sentenced to adult prisons go back to crime more quickly after they are released—and commit more crimes and more serious crimes—than those held in juvenile institutions.¹²
- A study looking at juvenile crimes and subsequent punishment found that if juvenile crime was treated too leniently—if juveniles perceived they wouldn't be held accountable for their crimes—rates of juvenile crime went up.¹³



Notes for Juvenile Crime Section

¹ U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1996 Update on Violence*. Available online at: <http://www.public-policy.org/~ncpa/hotlines/juvcrm/eocp1.html>

² Gallop Poll Monthly, September 1994, cited in American Civil Liberties Union, *ACLU Fact Sheet on Juvenile Crime*, 1996. Available online at: <http://www.aclu.org/congress/juvenile.htm>

³ Justice Center, University of Alaska Anchorage, "Alaska juvenile arrests: Basic figures," *Alaska Justice Forum*, 14(4), 1998.

⁴ See note 1.

⁵ E. Donohue, V. Schiraldi, and J. Ziedenberg, "School house hype: School shootings and the real risks kids face in America," *Justice Policy Institute Policy Report*, July 1998.

⁶ I. Apfel, "Teen violence: Real or imagined?" *American Demographics*, 1995. Available online at: http://www.marketingtools.com/publications/ad/95_AD/9506_AD/AD441.htm

⁷ H. Snyder, "Time of day juveniles are most likely to commit violent crime index offenses," (1998). Adapted from M. Sickmund, H. Snyder, and E. Poe-Yamagatam, "Juvenile Offenders and Victims: 1997 Update on Violence," *OJJDP Statistical Briefing Book*. Washington D.C.: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, 1997. Available online at: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/qa053.html>

⁸ See note 5.

⁹ See note 7.

¹⁰ *Known Juvenile Offenders by Weapon Type, 1980-1995*. Available online: <http://ojjdp.ncjrs.org/ojstatbb/qa050.html>

¹¹ National Center for Policy Analysis, *NCPA Fact Sheet on Juvenile Courts*. Available online at: <http://www.ncpa.org/lines/juvcrm/tcc3a.html>

¹² *The New York Times*, "States Revamping Laws on Juvenile Crime," May 12, 1996, citing a University of Florida study.

¹³ National Center for Policy Analysis, *Crime and Gun Control: When Juvenile Criminals go Unpunished*. Available online: <http://www.ncpa.org/pi/crime/nov97f.html>



Youth Courts: Kids as Judge, Jury, Lawyer, and Defendant



Teenagers who commit petty crimes in Anchorage and about a dozen other Alaska communities have the choice of going through youth courts rather than the state juvenile justice system. In youth courts, teenagers (ages 12 to 18) act as judges, defense attorneys, prosecutors, and jurors. Juveniles who go before the youth court have to accept sentences the court hands down—but in exchange, they come away without criminal records.

The Anchorage Youth Court, established in 1989, is the state's oldest and largest youth court. It hears about 450 cases per year. Before they can serve on the Anchorage court, teenagers have to attend an eight-week training course—taught by local attorneys—and then pass the youth court bar exam. Those who pass the exam are sworn in as members of the Youth Bar Association. The Anchorage Youth Court hears cases in the state courthouse in Anchorage and uses procedures very much like those used in the adult court system.

About 350 teenagers volunteer their time—for an average of about of 30,000 hours per year—to the Anchorage Youth Court. Local attorneys also volunteer thousands of hours of their time to teaching the legal training course and acting as advisors to the youth court. Other community members also volunteer a substantial amount of their time (and goods and services) to keep the court going.

Defendants who come before the court are mostly first-time offenders, and none have committed violent crimes. The youth court can sentence defendants to pay restitution to their victims, do community service, and attend classes. All youth court defendants are also required to write essays—taking responsibility for what they did and who they hurt and discussing why they'll try to do better in the future.

In a recent fact sheet, the Anchorage Youth Court reported that nearly 90 percent of those tried in the youth court don't commit any more crimes. Juvenile defendants pay a total of about \$9,000 a year annually to victims of their crimes and perform about 9,500 hours of community service. The average case heard by the Anchorage Youth Court costs about \$450, with defendants paying \$50. That \$450 contrasts with the average \$40,000 it costs the state to keep one juvenile in McLaughlin Youth Center for a year.

The state benefits because the juvenile justice system's caseload is reduced. But the state and the community benefit in much broader ways. The youth court system teaches teenagers about the U.S. legal system and gives them first-hand experience with it. It brings adults and teenagers together to resolve problems. It makes teenagers responsible for their actions, but also gives them a chance to clear their records.

Information provided by the Anchorage Youth Court. To learn more, call 907-274-5986 or e-mail to ayc@micronet.net

