

CALIFORNIA'S DIVISION OF JUVENILE JUSTICE REPORTS HIGH RECIDIVISM DESPITE SURGING COSTS



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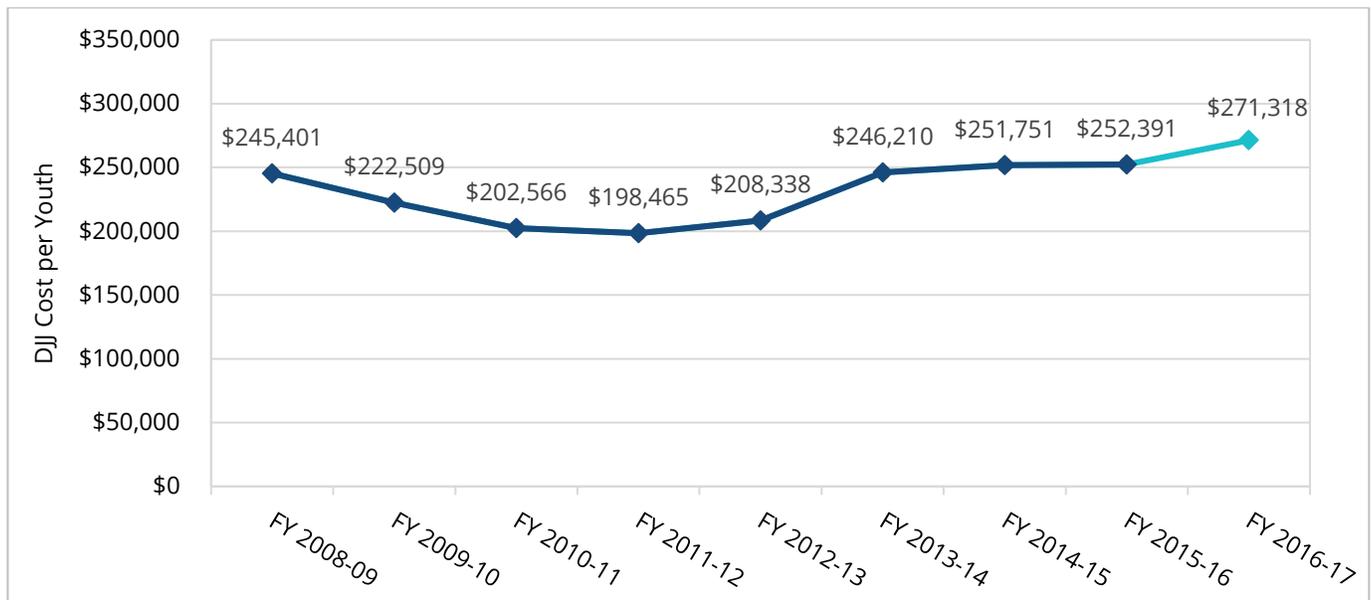
Fact Sheet

California's state youth correctional system, the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), is among the most expensive per youth in the United States (JPI, 2014). While the number of young people housed in DJJ facilities has plummeted, its burden on California taxpayers and substantial human toll continue to rise. In fiscal year (FY) 2016-17, the cost per youth for one year at DJJ could reach a record high of more than \$270,000 (DOF, 2017). Despite increased per capita spending, the most recent report from the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) reveals that young people leaving DJJ maintained persistently high rates of re-arrest, reconviction, and return to state custody within three years (CDCR, 2017). These high recidivism rates indicate deficiencies in DJJ's programming model and a failure to fulfill its rehabilitative mandate.

- **State juvenile justice facilities may cost taxpayers over \$270,000 per youth in FY 2016-17.**

In FY 2016-17, California is poised to spend an estimated \$271,318 per youth at DJJ (DOF, 2017). This spending exceeds earlier budget estimates, which predicted costs of \$258,348 per youth for the current fiscal year—a discrepancy that is attributable to lower-than-predicted youth populations (DOF, 2016).¹ In FY 2017-18, the California Department of Finance (DOF) anticipates a 10 percent increase in the youth population of DJJ and a resulting per youth cost of \$252,041 (DOF, 2017).

Figure 1. DJJ cost per youth, actual (FY 2008-09—FY 2015-16), and expected (FY 2016-17)



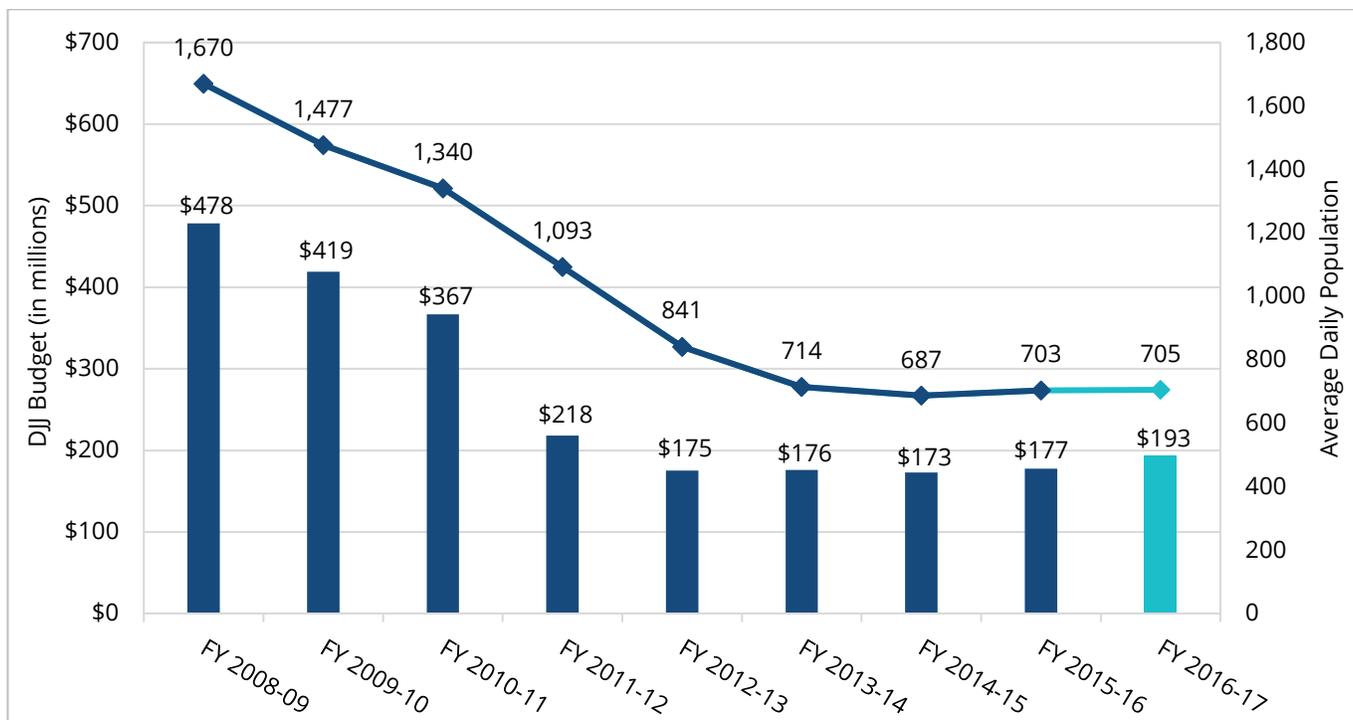
Sources: DOF, 2010-2017. Note: Per capita costs for FY 2016-17 were estimated by the California Department of Finance based on population and cost information from the first half of the fiscal year.

¹ When initially budgeting for FY 2016-17, the California Department of Finance (DOF) expected DJJ's average daily population to be 719 youth (DOF, 2016). However, midway through the fiscal year, in January 2017, DOF reduced this estimate to 705 youth (DOF, 2017).

- **DJJ's cost per youth has increased annually, reaching historically high levels.**

In 2007, California passed Senate Bill (SB) 81, which limited the offenses for which youth could be committed to DJJ (SB 81, 2007). This reform, combined with declines in youth crime, led to a sustained reduction in the population of DJJ (CJCJ, 2016). In 2011, in response to these declines, the state closed one of its four youth correctional facilities, the Southern Youth Reception Center and Clinic in Norwalk (CDCR, 2011). Since then, California has maintained operations at its three remaining facilities and experienced a 35 percent population decrease from January 2012 to January 2017 (Figure 2)(CDCR, 2012; 2017a). Per capita costs at DJJ have climbed each year since FY 2011-12 and are estimated to reach another record high in FY 2016-17 (Figure 1).

Figure 2. DJJ budget and population, actual (FY 2008-09—FY 2015-16), and expected (FY 2016-17)



Sources: DOF, 2010-2017. Notes: The total DJJ budget was determined by totaling expenditures for “Juvenile Operations and Juvenile Offender Programs,” “Juvenile Academic and Vocational Education,” and “Juvenile Health Care Services.” “Juvenile Parole Operations” costs are excluded from the budget total because the responsibility for supervising youth released from DJJ shifted from the state to the counties in 2011. Average daily population and the DJJ budget for FY 2016-17 were estimated by the California Department of Finance based on population and cost information from the first half of the fiscal year.

- **Counties reimburse the state for a small share of DJJ costs, leaving the remainder to taxpayers.**

Senate Bill 1021 requires counties to pay \$24,000 annually for each youth placed in DJJ by juvenile courts (SB 1021, 2012). This cost-sharing arrangement provides for approximately 9 percent of the current total cost of confinement. However, when counties prosecute youth as adults and commit them to DJJ through criminal court, the county is not required to reimburse the state for any share of the costs. The result is a lopsided fiscal burden: taxpayers from counties with low DJJ commitment rates subsidize the costs of counties with high DJJ commitment rates.

- **Recidivism rates remain high and are reported infrequently and inconsistently.**

DJJ fails to provide consistent information about the outcomes of youth in its facilities, which limits the state’s ability to assess the impact of taxpayer investment or determine DJJ’s effect on public safety. In early 2017, DJJ released a report that presented three-year recidivism statistics for youth released from its facilities in FY 2011-12. The analysis showed high rates of re-arrest (74.2 percent), reconviction (53.8 percent), and return to DJJ or state prison custody (37.3 percent)(CDCR, 2017). Prior to the 2017 report, DJJ had not published recidivism data since

2012, when it reported that 84.2 percent of youth were re-arrested, 60.1 percent reconvicted, and 53.8 percent returned to state custody (CDCR, 2012a). However, the methods used to compute these rates differed across the two publications, invalidating comparisons over time (CDCR, 2017).

Recent recidivism data reveal that DJJ's rehabilitative programming is not producing satisfactory results. Moreover, research indicates that youth at DJJ are regularly subjected to high rates of violence and inadequate services (CJCJ, 2016a). In this fiscal year, California will spend more than a quarter of a million dollars, per youth, on a system that cannot demonstrate consistent or satisfactory outcomes for the youth in its care (DOF, 2017).

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