



TACIR INSIGHT

TENNESSEE ADVISORY COMMISSION ON INTERGOVERNMENTAL RELATIONS
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ASSESSING JUVENILE DETENTION CAPACITY IN TENNESSEE (PUBLIC CHAPTER 418, ACTS OF 2025)

Background

Although juvenile crime has decreased overall in Tennessee during the last decade, increases in certain types of offenses for juveniles—specifically, murder, aggravated assault, motor vehicle theft, and crimes in which firearms were used—has raised concerns among state and local officials about whether there are enough facilities for housing and providing rehabilitative services to youth who have been accused or convicted of serious crimes. In response to these concerns, Public Chapter 418, Acts of 2025, directed the commission to study the availability of pre- and post-adjudication detention capacity in the state and whether there is need for additional housing, detention, and treatment facilities.

Findings and Recommendations

- For post-adjudication capacity, the commission finds that currently funded projects, when completed, will likely meet the state’s capacity needs. The General Assembly has appropriated more than \$333 million for three new facilities.
- For pre-adjudication capacity, **the commission recommends that the state help fund a new juvenile detention center for West Tennessee, provided that a share of beds in the facility is reserved for temporary placements for juvenile offenders in DCS custody.**
- Beyond these capacity improvements, the commission finds it would be beneficial to build more oversight into the juvenile justice system, and **it recommends that the General Assembly (1) require juvenile detention centers operated by local governments to be licensed by DCS and (2) authorize the Tennessee Commission on Children and Youth and/or DCS to levy financial penalties on pre- and post-adjudication facilities that violate state or federal requirements.**
- Research has shown that alternatives to detention can be cost-effective and reduce recidivism. **The commission recommends that (1) the General Assembly further increase recurring funding for the Juvenile Justice Reform grant program and (2) juvenile courts that don’t already use formal detention risk assessments consider using them to guide their decisions about detaining children prior to adjudication.**

See TACIR’s full report at the following link for additional information: <https://www.tn.gov/tacir/tacir-publications.html>.