



Create a formalized partnership between Tennessee Department of Children’s Services and the Department of Correction to track long-term recidivism outcomes for juvenile justice placements through deidentified data sharing with a public annual report.

Quick Facts

Youth Placements

In FY2025,
118
youth were placed at Wilder
Youth Development Center and
217
were at a Hardware Secure
facility. Additionally,
607
youth were placed in a Staff
Secure facility.¹

Cost Per Child Annually

Wilder Youth Development
Center:¹

\$511,365

Other Hardware Secure
Facilities:^{*2}

\$214,255

Example Scenarios

If a teen was in DCS custody at a hardware secure facility, released 17 years old and re-offends after their 18th birthday, there is not currently a way for that to be reflected in our juvenile justice recidivism data.

Or youth who remain in DCS custody until their 19th birthday are out of the jurisdiction of juvenile court and DCS immediately upon discharge, leaving the state unable to measure the effectiveness of our investment.

The Problem

Having reliable recidivism data and being able to evaluate how successfully our juvenile justice placements and programming intervene and prevent youth from engaging in future criminal behavior is a foundational piece of a juvenile justice system that keeps communities safe, kids accountable and leaves them more equipped to be productive members of society than when they left. Currently available DCS recidivism data only captures involvement with the department and is limited to delinquent youth known to DCS via DCS’s own data system.¹ While improvements to recidivism data will become available through a statewide centralized case management system for juvenile courts, it will not answer the question of how successful our programs transition youth into adulthood and out of criminal behavior.

Why this Matters

A child or teen’s interaction with our juvenile justice system, particularly if it escalates to a placement with the Department of Children’s Services, is a critical juncture in that child’s life. The treatment, care, services and education a child receives while in the custody of the State can substantially impact that child’s trajectory in life. The prevalence of criminal behavior tends to peak in the late teen years and taper off into the early 20s, this well-researched pattern is often called the age-crime curve. With Tennessee’s current system, we lose the ability to effectively measure the success of our programs, right at their peak pressure point (18 to 19 years old). Without a deidentified recidivism tracking process, we are not able to effectively evaluate our investments to measure success 3 or 5 years out. In FY2025, Wilder cost \$1,401 per day, per-child or \$511,365 per year. FY2025 cost per day was not published for other hardware secure providers, but in FY2024 it was \$587 or \$214,255 annually. This level of investment should leave children better equipped for adulthood than when they entered and as responsible stewards of tax dollars, the State should be gathering the information to answer if that is the case.

How we can fix it

Establishing a data sharing agreement using deidentified, unique IDs to evaluate whether an individual who was previously in DCS’s Juvenile Justice custodial population re-offends and enters into the custody of Department of Corrections will allow for the state to track the success of our Juvenile Justice interventions 3 to 5 years out. This two agency partnership can also be a launching pad for a broader statewide longitudinal data system.

* FY2024 data used due to FY2025 not being published.

References

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1. Department of Children's Services, Office of Juvenile Justice. (2026). Annual Report FY2025
2. Department of Children's Services, Office of Juvenile Justice. (2025). Annual Report FY2024