

# The Unintended Consequences of Juvenile Justice Policy Changes



**In 2020, California eliminated the Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ),** the state's only long-term, secure treatment system for the most serious and violent youth and young adults up to age 25. This policy shift transferred responsibility for these individuals to counties and reshaped system capacity, placement options, and treatment infrastructure. When combined with subsequent legislative and case-law changes, these reforms have had unintended and compounding consequences that strain local systems, complicate rehabilitation efforts, and raise risks for both youth and communities. In fact, after years of declining juvenile crime and detention rates, following the closure of DJJ, the rate of youth felony arrests for violent offenses increased by nearly 70%\*.

\*California Dept. of Justice, Crime Statistics: Arrests (Jan. 2025).

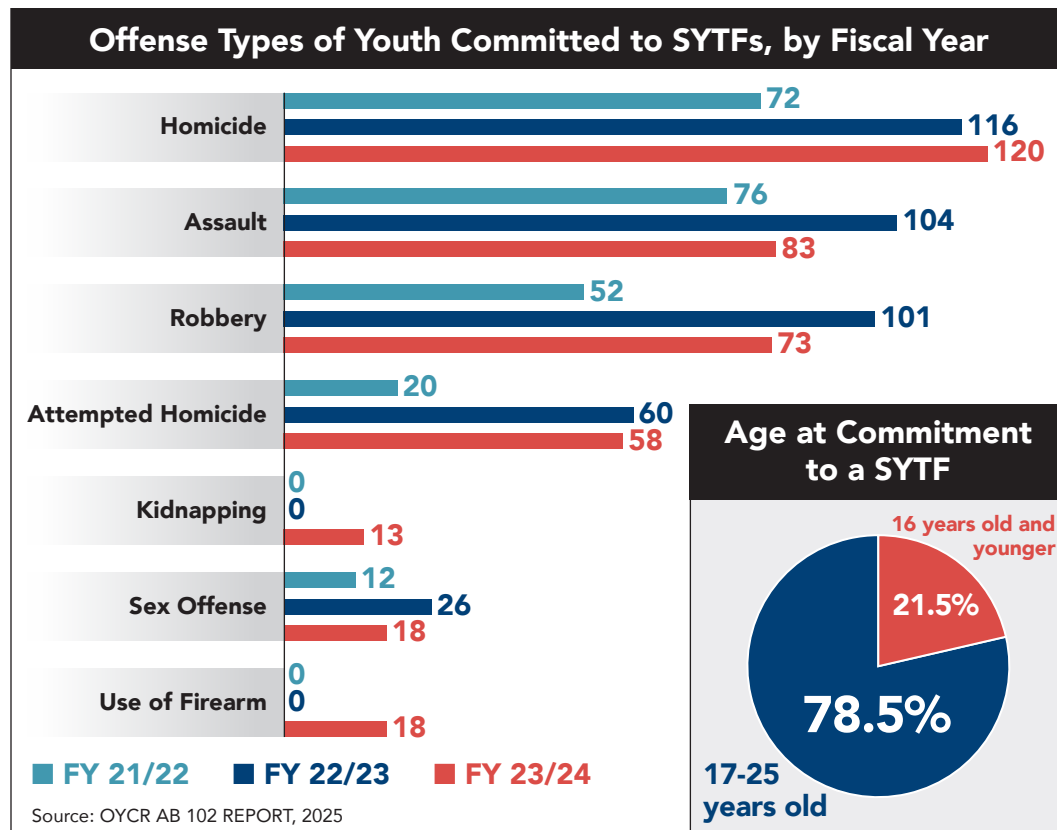
After years of declining juvenile crime and detention rates, following the closure of DJJ, the rate of youth felony arrests for **violent offenses increased by nearly 70%.**

## The Juvenile System Today: More Serious and Complex

California's juvenile system is not dealing with youth with simple minor offenses. Secure Youth Treatment Facilities (SYTFs) hold youth and young adults adjudicated for:

- Homicide
- Attempted murder
- Robbery
- Aggravated assault
- Serious sex offenses

Many are 17–25 years old, legally in the juvenile system but functionally adults, requiring intensive treatment, higher staffing demands, and longer detention and supervision periods to protect public safety and facilitate real rehabilitation.



## What Real Reform Looks Like

California can correct course by:

- Restoring professional discretion for probation and courts
- Aligning timelines with rehabilitative readiness, not arbitrary caps
- Ensuring secure, treatment-focused capacity for the most serious cases
- Balancing compassion with accountability, especially when victims are involved

### What Works:

- Individualized Treatment
- Milestones
- Trained Professional Discretion

### What Current Law Forces:

- Fixed Timelines
- Takes Away Professional Discretion
- Premature Releases
- Removes Critical Probation Support