



## Colorado Juvenile Justice Systems

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This issue brief provides an overview of how the justice system treats juveniles found guilty of a crime in Colorado. It discusses juvenile problem solving courts; detention and commitment; the facilities where juveniles are housed; available programs and services; requirements for sentencing, parole, and release; and the Youthful Offender System.

**Juvenile Problem Solving Courts** Problem solving courts take a non-adversarial approach to juvenile justice by emphasizing treatment, outcomes, and collaboration. Colorado has several types of these courts, including juvenile drug courts, which focus on substance abuse, and youth and family treatment courts that address high-risk youth. Additionally, some districts offer specialty programs such as the REST program in Denver which serves youth with trauma and behavioral health issues. A juvenile may be referred to a problem solving court by the district attorney, a judicial officer, or a probation officer. Eligibility for participation may occur before or after entering a plea, depending on the court. Juveniles who violate the terms of their probation and have it revoked by the court may also be referred to a problem solving court. Participants tend to be those at higher risk for reoffending or with significant needs related to substance use or behavioral health.

Each participant undergoes a clinical assessment to determine their risks and needs, as well as to inform treatment planning.

Problem solving courts support participants by involving family members or caregivers, often requiring them to attend weekly or bi-weekly appearances before a judge. These courts also provide various services, such as family or other types of therapy, access to and encouragement of social activities, parenting classes, educational programs, medication evaluation and assistance, workforce preparation, mentoring, housing support, and relapse prevention programs.

### Detention and Commitment

Juveniles placed in detention or commitment are held by the Division of Youth Services (DYS) within the Department of Human Services (DHS).

### Detention

Detention is the temporary and secure custody of a minor accused of a crime, typically awaiting a court hearing or placement. It starts with screening and assessment to decide the appropriate level of supervision for each youth. Most are placed in non-secure, community-based services such as day reporting, electronic home monitoring, or enhanced community supervision. Youth

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who are found to be at risk of fleeing, harming others, or violating conditions of community supervision may be detained in one of the 12 secure juvenile detention centers operated by DYS.

All youth detained or placed under supervision programs in the community receive a hearing before a magistrate within 48 hours. For the youth held in secure detention, the hearing determines whether the youth will be sent home on a community supervision and treatment plan or remain in secure detention.

## Commitment

Under Colorado law, district courts have several sentencing options when committing juveniles to DYS. These include non-mandatory sentences, allowing DHS the ability to bring youth before the juvenile parole board once treatment is completed, and mandatory sentences requiring at least one year in residential placement. Violent and repeat offenders must serve a minimum one-year mandatory sentence while aggravated juvenile offenders can receive sentences of up to seven years.

By law, DYS must complete a comprehensive assessment for all youth within the first 30 days of commitment. Following the assessment, a multi-disciplinary team meets to evaluate the youth and family's needs, placement type, and future transition plan before moving the youth to a permanent placement. DYS provides residential treatment

services to committed youth in either state-operated secure facilities or private contract placements. Individualized treatment and transition plans are developed for each youth.

## Private and State-operated Secure Treatment Programs

The DYS operates several secure youth centers for the highest-risk, highest-need committed youth, as well as multipurpose youth centers that function as both juvenile detention facilities and longer-term treatment programs. DYS also contracts with a variety of private providers for community programs that range from staff-secure treatment programs to foster homes licensed through the State. Placement alternatives include residential child care centers, group homes and foster homes. These programs act both as initial treatment programs and as transition placements for youth moving from more secure settings.

## Transition

The DYS provides an array of transition services to help youth move from state-operated secure placements or community residential placements to their home communities. Services are provided through a combination of placement staff and non-residential programs contracted through regional offices. Transition services may include: obtaining necessary documentation, family services such as multi-systemic therapy, mentoring, cognitive behavioral groups, substance abuse relapse prevention,

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supervision, employment training and job placement, independent living preparation and support, direct support, and educational support.

## Parole

Each committed youth exiting DYS must serve six months of mandatory parole. Cases that meet certain criteria may be extended by fifteen months. Independent of DYS, the Colorado Juvenile Parole Board hears the cases of each youth preparing for parole, sets terms and conditions and has the authority to modify, suspend or revoke parole. DYS provides parole supervision to each committed youth through the client manager/parole officer system located within regional offices. Parole officers are responsible for ensuring parole plans are designed in accordance with each youth's level of risk and need.

## Educational programs

Youth housed in detention facilities are educated by the local school district in which the facility is located. General education and special education services are provided for all youth in detention facilities. Juveniles committed to the DYC receive educational services through programs provided by the facility where they are housed. The DYC must meet all academic standards and mandates issued by the Colorado Department of Education (CDE), and all teachers and principals employed by DYC facilities are licensed by CDE.

## Youthful Offender System

The Youthful Offender System (YOS, part of the Colorado Department of Corrections, was established in 1993 for juveniles tried and convicted of felonies as adults. Eligible offenders are those convicted of a class 3 or class 4 violent felony who were 14 to 18 at the time of the offense and under 21 at sentencing. Sentences range between two and six years, with class 2 felonies carrying up to seven years. The YOS facility in Pueblo serves these youth exclusively. YOS provides youth with individualized plans; treatment for mental health, substance use, and sex offenses, as needed; and educational programs.