

YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER POPULATION PROJECTIONS: FISCAL YEAR 2025 TO FISCAL YEAR 2029

INTRODUCTION

North Carolina General Statutes §§ 164-40(b) and 164-42.1(b) direct the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission (Sentencing Commission) to develop a computerized simulation model to be used to prepare Youth Development Center (YDC) population¹ projections and to help assess North Carolina's long-term resource needs for juvenile dispositions. The projections are prepared in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP). The computer simulation model used to project the juvenile population relies on empirical information about how juveniles are processed through the juvenile justice system (JJS) using data extracted from the North Carolina Juvenile Online Information Network (NC-JOIN), the DJJDP's juvenile management information system.

YDC POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND CAPACITY

The Sentencing Commission prepared YDC population projections for all juveniles adjudicated delinquent and disposed on or after July 1, 2024 (new population) and for all juveniles committed to a YDC as of June 30, 2024 (YDC stock population), the beginning of the current projection period. The projections take into account the decline of the stock population and the buildup of the new YDC population over the projection period (new YDC commitments that occur through the imposition of a Level 3 disposition or because of a probation violation or a revocation of post-release supervision [PRS]). Starting in FY 2026, the projection excludes 16- and 17-year-olds with violent offenses (Class A – E felonies) who will be processed in the adult system.²

Table 1 shows the projected YDC population and capacity over the five-year projection period. YDC capacity was provided by the DJJDP. The total YDC population is projected to be 188 in FY 2025 and 165 in FY 2029.³ A comparison of the projections with YDC capacity indicates that the projected YDC population will be within available YDC capacity during all projection years. The YDC population was 204 on June 30, 2024, and 214 on November 15, 2024.⁴

¹ Throughout this document, any reference to the YDC population includes juveniles on-campus and off-campus (e.g., home visit, community commitment, hospitalization, escape).

² See Session Law (S.L.) 2024-17, effective for offenses committed on or after December 1, 2024.

³ Separate housing units are required for male and female juveniles. Of the projected YDC beds needed for each year of the five-year projections, 89% are for males.

⁴ NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Committed Youth Report*.

Table 1
Youth Development Center (YDC) Population Projections and Capacity

Fiscal Year	YDC Population as of June 30 ⁵		YDC Capacity ^{6,7}	Difference between Projection and Capacity ⁸
	Previous Projection	Current Projection		
2025	195	188	196	8
2026	194	176	196	20
2027	195	162	196	34
2028	194	164	196	32
2029	N/A	165	196	31

Note: Prepared in conjunction with the Department of Public Safety’s Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

⁵ Juveniles on-campus and off-campus (e.g., home visit, community commitment, hospitalization, escape) are included in the projections.

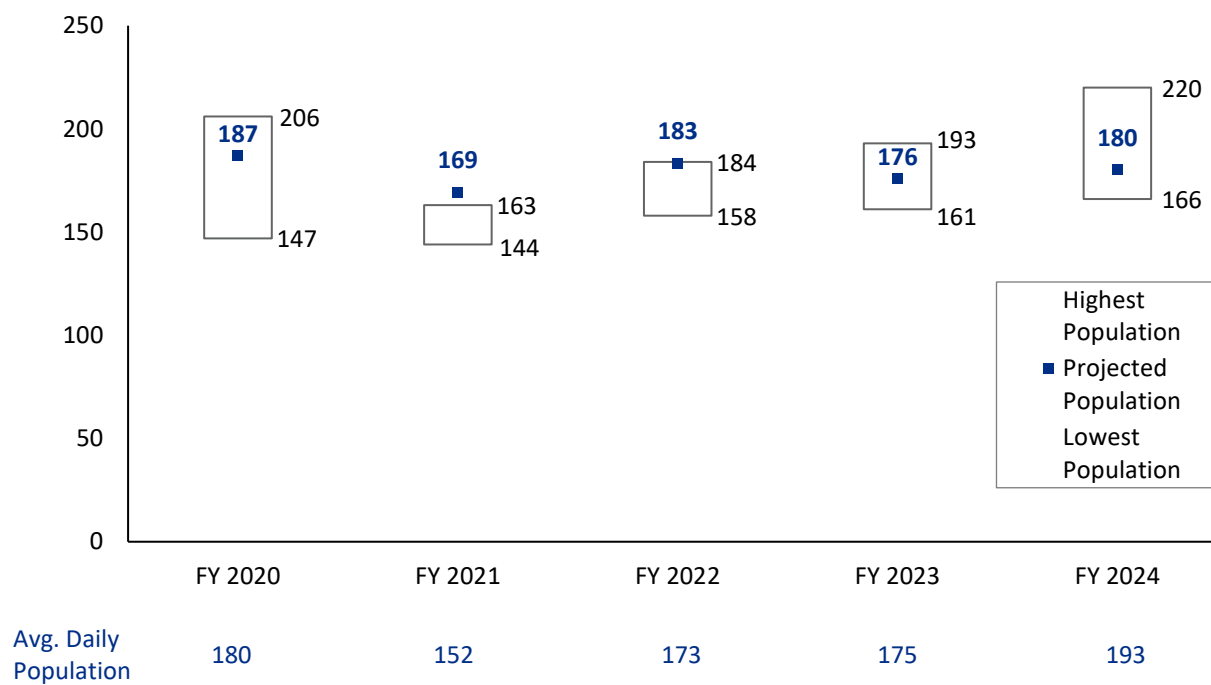
⁶ YDC capacity is contingent on staffing patterns to meet required ratios. It does not include community commitment placements or transition step-down beds, which are alternatives to YDC placement for some juveniles in this population, for all or part of commitment.

⁷ Per S.L. 2017-57 (Section 36.2 (d)), a new facility was constructed: Rockingham YDC. The facility is designed to allow for flexible use by housing unit, either for detention or commitment purposes. On January 8, 2024, twelve (12) beds were reverted from detention to YDC beds at Lenoir YDC, bringing Lenoir YDC total bed capacity to 44 commitment beds. On June 12, 2024, twelve (12) commitment beds opened at Rockingham YDC. The Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention implements flexible usage of housing units to transition between YDC and detention center use in response to population demands.

⁸ Positive numbers indicate that the current projected population is lower than capacity, while negative numbers indicate that the current projected population is higher than capacity.

Figure 1 illustrates the historical accuracy of the first year of the YDC projections for the previous five projections in relation to the actual lowest and highest YDC populations for each fiscal year. Given the small number of juveniles in YDCs and the substantial fluctuations in the population over the course of the year, the accuracy of the juvenile projections is assessed by examining the projected population within the context of the lowest and highest YDC populations over the fiscal year. Ideally, the projection should be closer to the highest population of the fiscal year. Since FY 2020, the projected YDC population has typically been within the range of the lowest and highest YDC populations for any given fiscal year.

Figure 1
A Comparison of the Actual and Projected YDC Population
FY 2020 to FY 2024 Projections



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

ASSUMPTIONS

This section details the assumptions that were used to develop the YDC projections for FY 2025 through FY 2029 (see Table 2). The growth rates were determined after reviewing census projections for North Carolina’s youth population⁹ and juvenile justice indicators.¹⁰ Assumptions related to the composition of YDC admissions, lag-time to YDC admission following revocation of probation or PRS, the percentage of Level 3 dispositions, and length of stay were determined using empirical data from the most recent fiscal year (FY 2024).

⁹ Population growth for North Carolina’s youth aged 10-15 years is expected to increase slightly over the projection period, while youth aged 16-17 years are expected to decline over the projection period, www.demog.state.nc.us (2024).

¹⁰ The rate of delinquent complaints was 26 per 1,000 juveniles in FY 2024 (DJJDP). Overall arrests for index crimes committed by juveniles under 18 increased 35% from CY 2022 to CY 2023. (*Crime in North Carolina – 2023*, State Bureau of Investigation, <http://crimereporting.ncsbi.gov>).

The projections also take into account new legislation (House Bill [HB] 834¹¹) passed in 2024 that redefined the delinquent juvenile to exclude youth aged 16- and 17-years who commit a Violent offense (i.e., Class A – E felony).¹² These youth will be charged as adults effective December 1, 2024. The projections assume minimal impact from this change; once empirical information is available under this new law, the assumptions will be modified if necessary.

**Table 2
Assumptions for the FY 2025 to FY 2029 Projections**

<p>Growth Rates</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •0% in FY 2025 through FY 2028 •1% in FY 2029
<p>YDC Admission Type</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •66% from a delinquent complaint •28% from a probation violation •6% from a revocation of PRS
<p>Lag-time to YDC Admission</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •10 months for probation violations •4 months for revocation of PRS
<p>Level 3 Dispositions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •4%
<p>YDC Length of Stay</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •13 months
<p>Impact of HB 834 on 16-and 17-Year-Olds with Violent Offenses</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> •FY 2025: No adjustment due to effective date (12/01/2024) and lag time for court processing •FY 2026: Partial adjustment due to lag time for court processing •FY 2027 through FY 2029: Excluded from JJS

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Outside of the aforementioned legislative change, the five-year projections assume no additional changes in judicial or prosecutorial behavior. The projections do not incorporate any potential increases or decreases in the YDC population due to budgetary or policy-driven changes implemented by the DJJDP and/or other agencies that provide services for juveniles.

¹¹ S.L. 2024-17, effective for offenses committed on or after December 1, 2024.

¹² See N.C. Gen. Stat. (hereinafter G.S.) 7B-1501(7).

COMPONENTS OF YDC POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The Juvenile Disposition Chart (see Table 3), the empirical data from the latest available fiscal year, and the YDC stock population on June 30, 2024, form the basis of the five-year projections and are detailed in the following sections.

Table 3
Juvenile Disposition Chart

Offense Classification	Delinquency History Level		
	Low 0-1 Points	Medium 2-3 Points	High 4 or More Points
Violent Class A-E Felonies	Level 2 or 3	Level 3	Level 3
Serious Class F-I Felonies Class A1 Misdemeanors	Level 1 or 2	Level 2	Level 2 or 3
Minor Class 1, 2, 3 Misdemeanors	Level 1	Level 1 or 2	Level 2

FY 2024 Juvenile Delinquent Dispositions

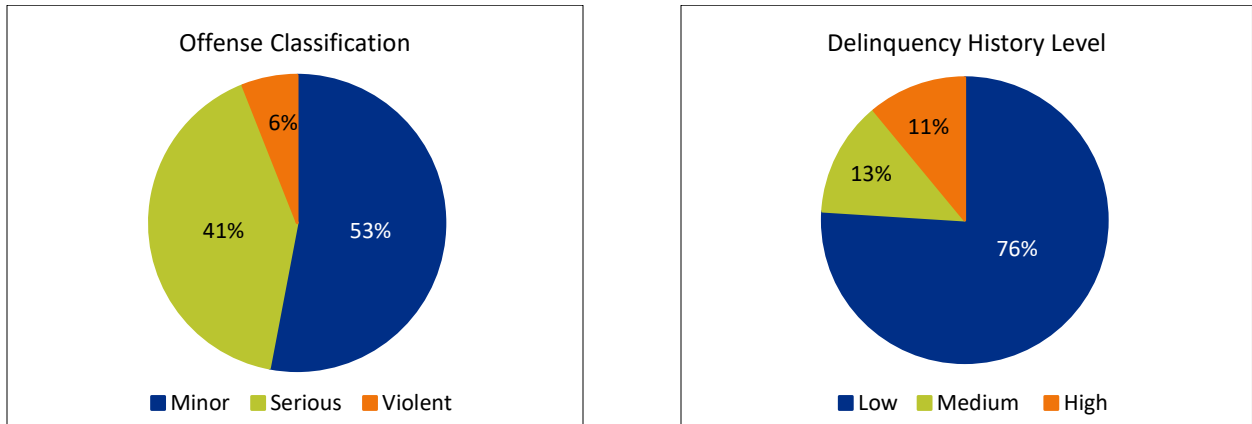
This section highlights information on the 3,237 delinquent dispositions in FY 2024, including offense classification, delinquency history level, and disposition level.¹³ The court's selection of dispositional alternatives is governed by statute through a graduated sanctions chart that classifies adjudicated juveniles according to the seriousness of their offense (i.e., offense classification) and the degree and extent of their delinquent history (i.e., delinquency history level). A Level 1 or community disposition offers the court less restrictive dispositional alternatives (e.g., probation, community-based programs). A Level 2 or intermediate disposition is generally more restrictive than a Level 1 disposition and includes options such as intensive probation, group home placements (e.g., multipurpose group homes), regimented training programs, and house arrest. A Level 3 or commitment disposition provides the most restrictive sanction available to be imposed by a juvenile court judge – commitment to the DJJDP for placement in a YDC.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the 3,237 delinquent dispositions by offense classification and delinquency history level. Of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent in FY 2024, 6% were adjudicated of a Violent offense, 41% of a Serious offense, and 53% of a Minor offense.¹⁴ Over three-fourths (76%) of dispositions involved a juvenile with a Low delinquency history level, 13% involved a juvenile with a Medium delinquency history level, and 11% involved a juvenile with a High delinquency history level.

¹³ A delinquent disposition is identified from NC-JOIN records as the disposition imposed for the most serious adjudicated offense for a given disposition hearing date during a fiscal year.

¹⁴ Overall, 63% (or 2,035) of the 3,237 dispositions were for misdemeanor offenses. Of the 1,321 adjudications for a Serious offense, 24% (or 314) were for Class A1 misdemeanor offenses. The remainder were for Class F – I felony offenses.

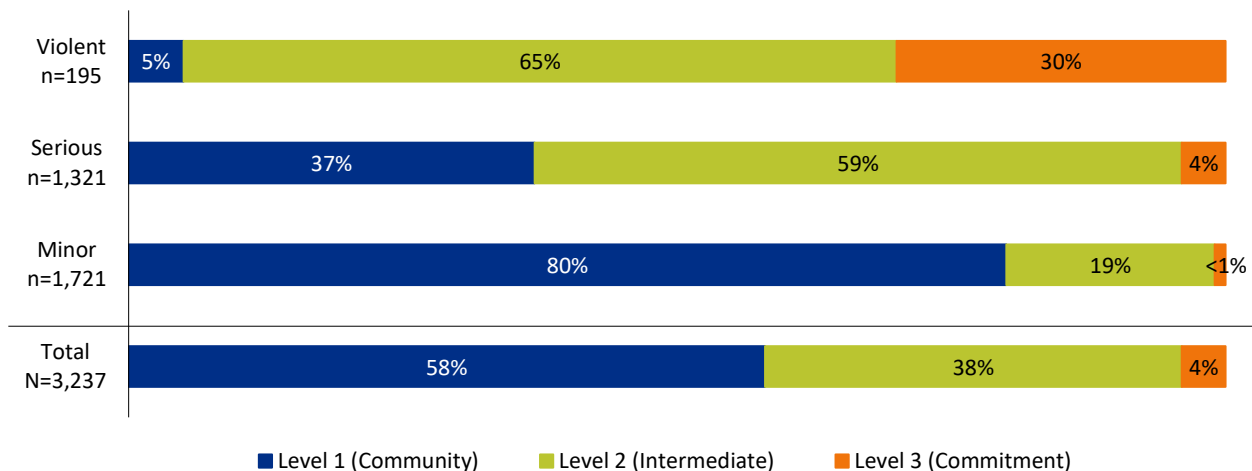
Figure 2
Dispositions by Offense Classification and Delinquency History Level
Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2024 Disposition Simulation Data

Figure 3 summarizes dispositions imposed in FY 2024 by offense classification and disposition level. Overall, the court ordered Level 1 dispositions for 58% of juveniles adjudicated delinquent, Level 2 dispositions for 38% of juveniles adjudicated delinquent, and Level 3 dispositions for 4% of juveniles adjudicated delinquent. Juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense were most likely to receive a Level 1 disposition (80%). Juveniles adjudicated delinquent of a Violent or Serious offense were more likely to receive a Level 2 disposition (65% and 59% respectively). Of the 123 Level 3 dispositions, 47% were the result of an adjudication of a Violent offense, 47% of a Serious offense, and 6% of a Minor offense.

Figure 3
Dispositions by Offense Classification and Disposition Level
Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2024 Disposition Simulation Data

Table 4 shows how judges used dispositional resources given each combination of offense classification and delinquency history level. As indicated by the vertical “Total” column, the likelihood of the imposition of a Level 3 disposition increased as the seriousness of the offense classification increased (also see Figure 3). Similarly, the likelihood of the imposition of a Level 3 disposition increased as the delinquency history level increased. Dispositions for juveniles with Low delinquency history levels who were adjudicated of Minor offenses (Class 1-3 misdemeanors) comprised the largest group – 1,390 (or 43%) of the 3,237.

Table 4
Dispositions by the Dispositional Chart for Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent

Offense Classification	Delinquency History Level			Total
	Low 0-1 Point	Medium 2-3 Points	High 4+ Points	
Violent A-E Felonies	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 10 (7%) Level 2: 106 (75%) Level 3: 26 (18%) n = 142	Level 3 Level 2: 10 (59%) Level 3: 7 (41%) n = 17	Level 3 Level 2: 11 (31%) Level 3: 25 (69%) n = 36	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 10 (5%) Level 2: 127 (65%) Level 3: 58 (30%) n = 195 (6%)
Serious F-I Felonies A1 Misd.	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 466 (51%) Level 2: 453 (49%) n = 919	Level 2 Level 1: 16 (8%) Level 2: 190 (91%) Level 3: 2 (1%) n = 208	Level 2/Level 3 Level 2: 138 (71%) Level 3: 56 (29%) n = 194	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 482 (37%) Level 2: 781 (59%) Level 3: 58 (4%) n = 1,321 (41%)
Minor 1-3 Misd.	Level 1 Level 1: 1,348 (97%) Level 2: 42 (3%) n = 1,390	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 31 (16%) Level 2: 166 (83%) Level 3: 2 (1%) n = 199	Level 2 Level 1: 6 (4%) Level 2: 121 (92%) Level 3: 5 (4%) n = 132	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 1,385 (81%) Level 2: 329 (19%) Level 3: 7 (<1%) n = 1,721 (53%)
Total	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 1,824 (74%) Level 2: 601 (25%) Level 3: 26 (1%) n = 2,451 (76%)	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 47 (11%) Level 2: 366 (86%) Level 3: 11 (3%) n = 424 (13%)	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 6 (2%) Level 2: 270 (74%) Level 3: 86 (24%) n = 362 (11%)	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 1,877 (58%) Level 2: 1,237 (38%) Level 3: 123 (4%) N = 3,237 (100%)

Note: In FY 2024, there were 104 dispositions (or 3%) with a disposition not specified by the dispositional chart. However, certain provisions of the juvenile code allow a judge to impose a disposition other than those specified by the chart. Under G.S. 7B-2508(e), judges may find “extraordinary needs” and impose a lower level disposition. Under G.S. 7B-2508(d), juveniles adjudicated delinquent for an offense with a previous Level 3 disposition may be committed to a YDC. Under G.S. 7B-2508(g), juveniles adjudicated delinquent for a Minor offense with four or more prior adjudications may be committed to a YDC. Finally, under G.S. 7B-2508(g1), juveniles adjudicated of an offense that the court finds beyond a reasonable doubt was committed as part of criminal gang activity as defined in G.S. 7B-2508.1 shall receive a disposition one level higher than would otherwise be provided for the class of offense and delinquency history level.¹⁵

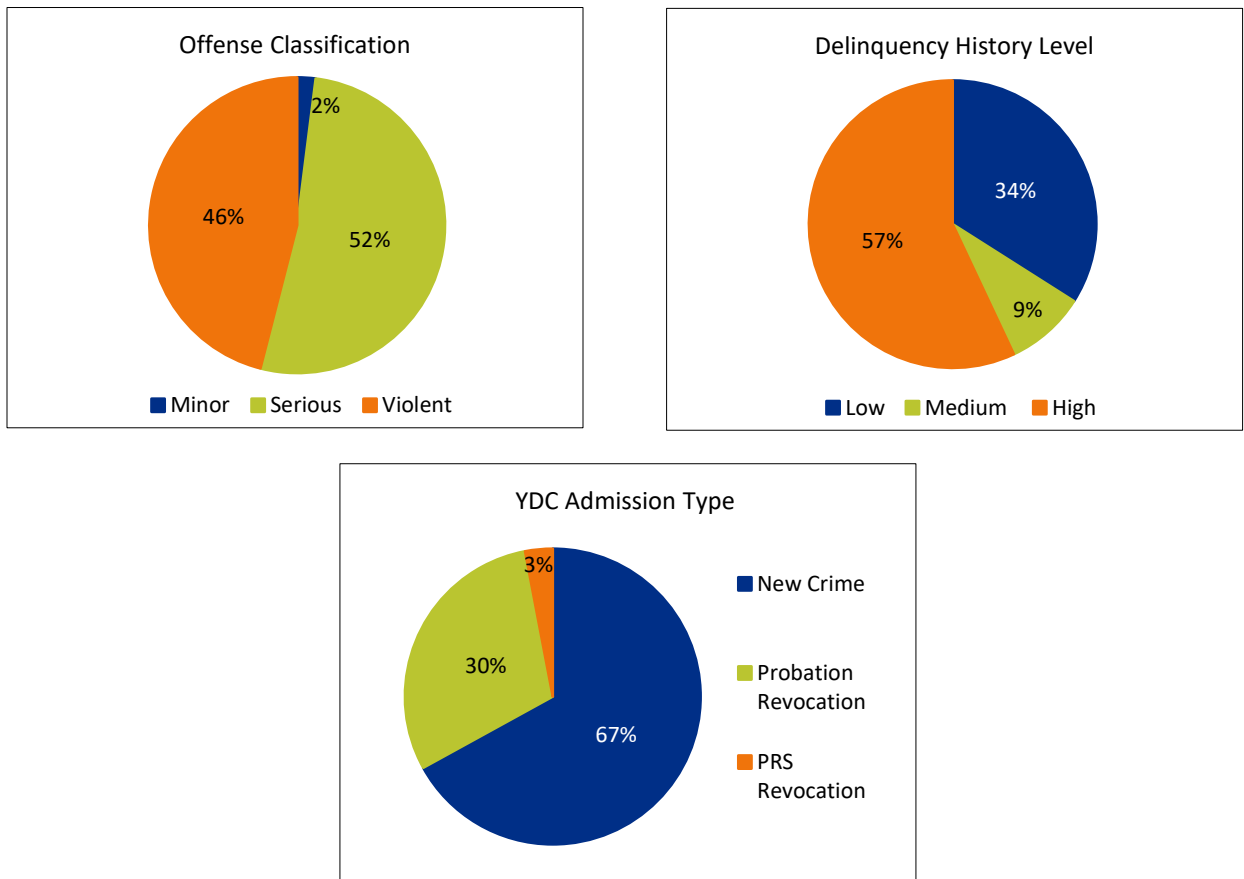
SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2024 Disposition Simulation Data

¹⁵ In FY 2024, no juveniles had their disposition level enhanced due to gang activity.

YDC Stock Population on June 30, 2024

The committed (or stock) population is the number of juveniles committed to a YDC on June 30, 2024, the beginning of the current projection period. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the 204 juveniles committed to a YDC on June 30, 2024, by offense classification, delinquency history level, and YDC admission type. Forty percent (40% or 82) of the YDC population on June 30, 2024, were Raise the Age (RtA) juveniles.¹⁶ Most committed juveniles (95%) were adjudicated with a felony as their most serious offense; 46% were adjudicated of a Violent offense, 52% of a Serious offense, and 2% of a Minor offense. More than half (57%) of juveniles had a High delinquency history level, 9% had a Medium delinquency history level, and 34% had a Low delinquency history level. Overall, 67% were committed to a YDC due to a new crime (i.e., new delinquent complaint), 30% for a probation revocation, and 3% for a revocation of PRS.

Figure 4
YDC Stock Population



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2024 Disposition Simulation Data

¹⁶ Part of the “Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Act,” S.L. 2017-57, s. 16D.4, effective for offenses committed on or after December 1, 2019.

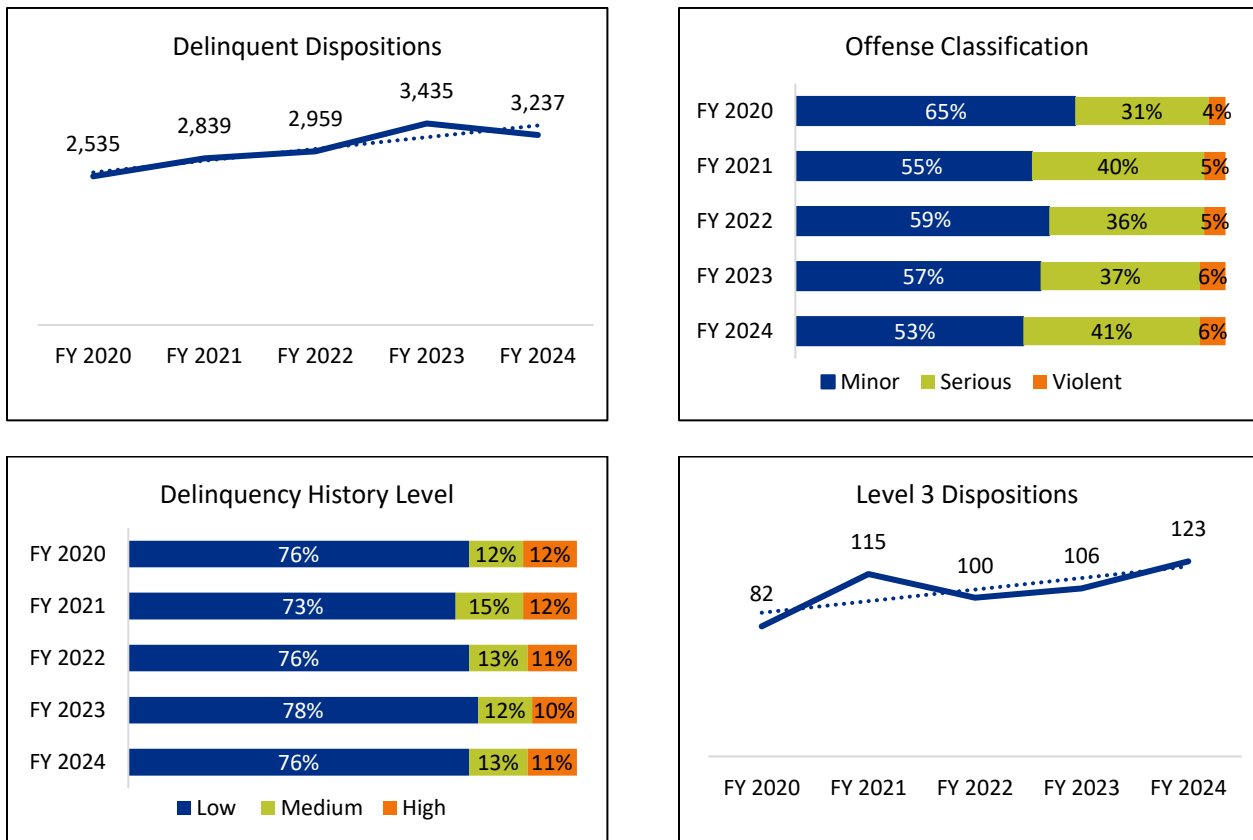
Juvenile Justice Trends

Changes in the juvenile justice system that affect the number of YDC admissions, the number of YDC releases, and/or the YDC length of stay (LOS) directly impact the accuracy of the projections. This section highlights juvenile justice statistics showing the year-to-year variations in key components used to produce the projections.

In FY 2019 (pre-pandemic and pre-RtA) there were 3,220 delinquent dispositions, which were dramatically reduced as a result of the pandemic (decreasing 27% in FY 2020). Since that time, delinquent dispositions have increased (see Figure 5). Delinquent dispositions had the greatest increase (16%) from FY 2022 to FY 2023. Delinquent dispositions declined 6% from FY 2023 to FY 2024.

From FY 2020 to FY 2024, the distribution by offense classification shifted. The percentage of juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense has decreased over the time period shown, while the percentage of juveniles adjudicated of Serious and Violent offenses has increased. Delinquency history level trends have been stable; most juveniles had a Low delinquency history level (see Figure 5). The number of Level 3 dispositions fluctuated between a low of 82 in FY 2020 and a high of 123 in FY 2024, with a 16% increase in the number of Level 3 dispositions from FY 2023 to FY 2024 (see Figure 5).

Figure 5
Juvenile Disposition Trends



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2019 - FY 2024 Disposition Simulation Data

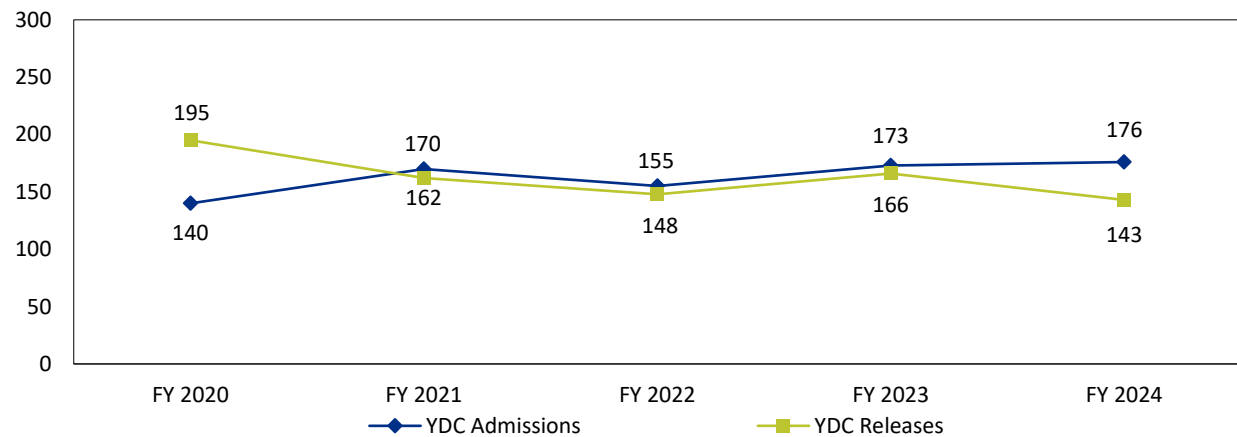
Over the past five years, YDC admissions and releases have fluctuated due to effects of the Juvenile Justice Reinvestment Act and the COVID-19 pandemic (see Table 5). From FY 2021 through FY 2023, the difference between the number of YDC admissions and YDC releases was smaller than in FY 2020 and FY 2024 (see Figure 6). In FY 2024, YDC admissions increased by 2% and YDC releases decreased by 14%; the average number of YDC admissions per month was 15 and the average number of releases per month was 12.

Table 5
YDC Admissions and Releases

Fiscal Year	YDC Admissions			YDC Releases		
	Total Number	Percent Change	Average Number Per Month	Total Number	Percent Change	Average Number Per Month
2020	140	-12	12	195	11	16
2021	170	21	14	162	-17	14
2022	155	-9	13	148	-9	12
2023	173	12	14	166	12	14
2024	176	2	15	143	-14	12

SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Figure 6
YDC Admissions and Releases



SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

The overall LOS for committed juveniles has remained fairly stable despite the declines in delinquent dispositions and the fluctuations in Level 3 dispositions, YDC admissions, and YDC releases. In FY 2024, the overall average LOS was 13 months (see Table 6). The average LOS for juveniles adjudicated of a Violent offense was 15 months, the average LOS for juveniles adjudicated of a Serious offense was 12 months, and the average LOS for juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense was 6 months.

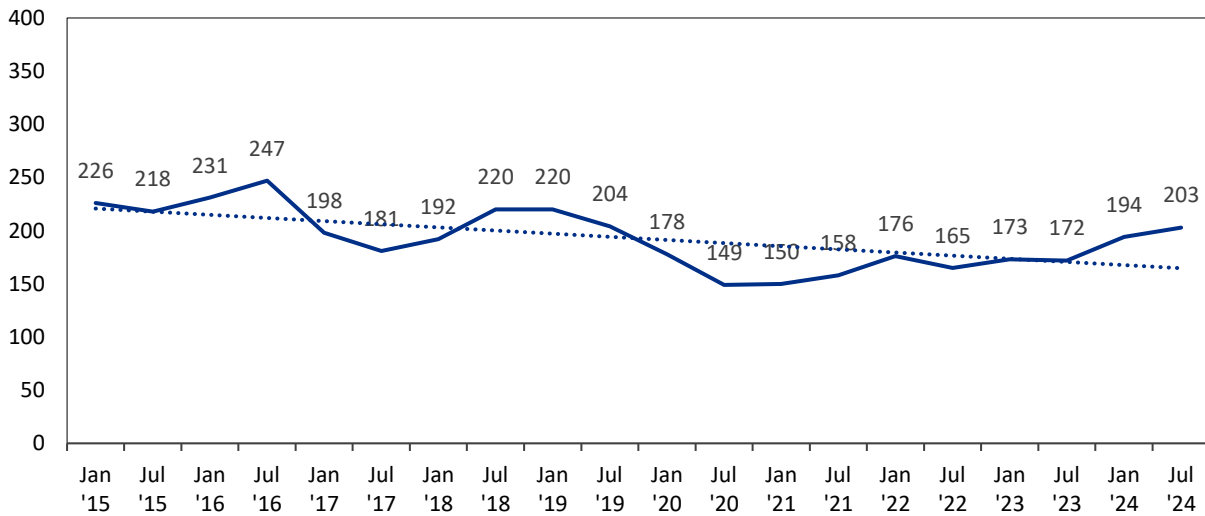
Table 6
Average Length of Stay for YDC Releases

Offense Classification	Length of Stay (in months) by Fiscal Year					% Change	
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	FY 2023 to FY 2024	FY 2020 to FY 2024
Violent Offense	17	14	13	14	15	6	-13
Serious Offense	14	12	11	13	12	8	-16
Minor Offense	9	9	5	6	6	0	-50
Overall	14	13	12	13	13	0	-8

SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Figure 7 provides an examination of the YDC population on the first day of each month over the past ten years. Overall, the YDC population has decreased 10% from January 2015 through July 2024. The highest population was in July 2016 at 247 juveniles and the lowest population was during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020) at 149 juveniles. The YDC population is currently around pre-pandemic levels, even with the inclusion of RtA juveniles beginning in FY 2020.

Figure 7
YDC Population Trends: January 2015 to July 2024



SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Committed Youth Report*