



Administrative Office of the Courts

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Report for Juvenile Justice Oversight Council
Submitted by Jason McGinnis, AOC Director
September 24, 2026

The Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC) is pleased to share an update on the continued progress of several key juvenile justice initiatives aimed at improving outcomes for youth across the Commonwealth. This report provides updates on the following:

- Legislative Impact 2026
- Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment
- Choices Matter Curriculum
- Court Designated Worker: Data and Trends

Legislative Impact 2026

The 2026 Regular Session brought legislative changes affecting the work of Kentucky's Court Designated Worker (CDW) Program, particularly in the areas of truancy, diversion, information sharing, and status offenses. Senate Bill 170 made substantial changes to the truancy process, including the repeal of the Family Accountability, Intervention, and Response (FAIR) Team structure and the addition of new requirements for diversion planning, which expanded from assessment of youths to assessment of the youth and his/her family. An additional change for CDWs was the increase in the number of unexcused absences that constitute an unsuccessful truancy diversion. Under the amended KRS 610.030(9)(b)(1)(d), a youth on diversion for habitual truancy is now considered to have failed diversion after accumulating eight unexcused absences during the school term following establishment of the diversion agreement, an increase from the previous threshold of four unexcused absences.

Senate Bill 170 also further emphasized the CDW's role in early intervention and diversion through additional requirements for screening, family engagement, and diversion planning prior to formal court involvement. House Bill 778 also created



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additional information-sharing responsibilities for CDWs related to diversion agreements. Upon developing a diversion agreement, the CDW is required to provide summary information regarding the youth, including the youth's name, underlying charge, date placed on diversion, and anticipated end date. This summary information is accessible to the county attorney and to the superintendent of the public school district in which the youth is enrolled, and the superintendent authorized to share the information with the director of pupil personnel and school resource officer or other designated school security personnel. Collectively, these legislative changes required significant updates to CDW policies, procedures, forms, training, and partnerships with schools and other juvenile justice stakeholders with the overall goal of continuing to emphasize early intervention, family engagement, and diversion prior to formal court involvement.

In preparation for implementation of the legislative changes, virtual training sessions were conducted on June 16, 17, 22, 23, and 29. During these sessions, staff reviewed and navigated legislative updates, with a focus on the legislation that would impact CDW program forms, processes, and policies.

Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths Assessment

The CDW program has collaborated with the Department for Behavioral Health, Developmental, and Intellectual Disability (DBHDID), Kentucky Community Mental Health Centers (CMHC), and other KY-SIX members to develop a process for accessing the Kentucky Child and Adolescent Needs and Strengths (CANS) assessment. The process will allow staff to refer youth who have habitual truancy or beyond-control complaints or who exhibit other risk factors indicating that a CANS assessment may be beneficial.

CANS will be conducted by certified administrators, including staff from CMHCs and certified private providers. Once the CANS is completed, staff receive a copy of the report and incorporate relevant findings and recommendations into the youth's diversion agreement.

One invaluable aspect of utilizing the CANS is that both the Department for Community Based Services and the Department of Juvenile Justice are also accessing the assessment. The goal is to create a more comprehensive view of a youth's needs and



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experiences as they move through early, informal interventions, family involvement, diversion, and, when necessary, future court involvement. By utilizing a shared assessment across systems, we hope to support a more coordinated, multi-disciplinary approach to understanding each youth and identifying the factors that may be contributing to their challenges.

This approach may also help us better understand when and where interventions or systems may have fallen short, identify opportunities for earlier intervention, and determine where processes and services can be strengthened. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that youth and families receive the appropriate support at the right time while also using what we learn to improve the system.

Choices Matter Curriculum-Youth Conversations with the Courts

Chief Justice Debra Hembree Lambert has released Choices Matter-Youth Conversations with the Courts to judges statewide. It is a curriculum developed for judges who wish to partner with middle schools in their judicial districts. Created as a preventive and educational outreach tool, it provides an opportunity for judges to engage directly with young people and help them better understand the impact of their choices, the role of the courts, and the importance of responsible decision-making. The curriculum promotes early intervention, strengthens school and community partnerships, and encourages positive engagement with youth before court involvement becomes necessary.

The curriculum includes 10 lesson plans that provide a structured, trauma-informed framework for meaningful conversations with middle school students. Through discussions centered on choices, consequences, accountability, and decision-making, judges can promote positive youth development while fostering trust, understanding, and connection between the judiciary and the communities we serve.

The curriculum is a voluntary resource and is not intended as an extension of court authority or for use with students involved in active court proceedings. Whether incorporated into an existing school partnership or used to establish a new outreach initiative, Choices Matter-Youth Conversations with the Courts provides judges with practical tools to support prevention-focused engagement, strengthen relationships with local schools, and encourage young people to make positive and informed choices.



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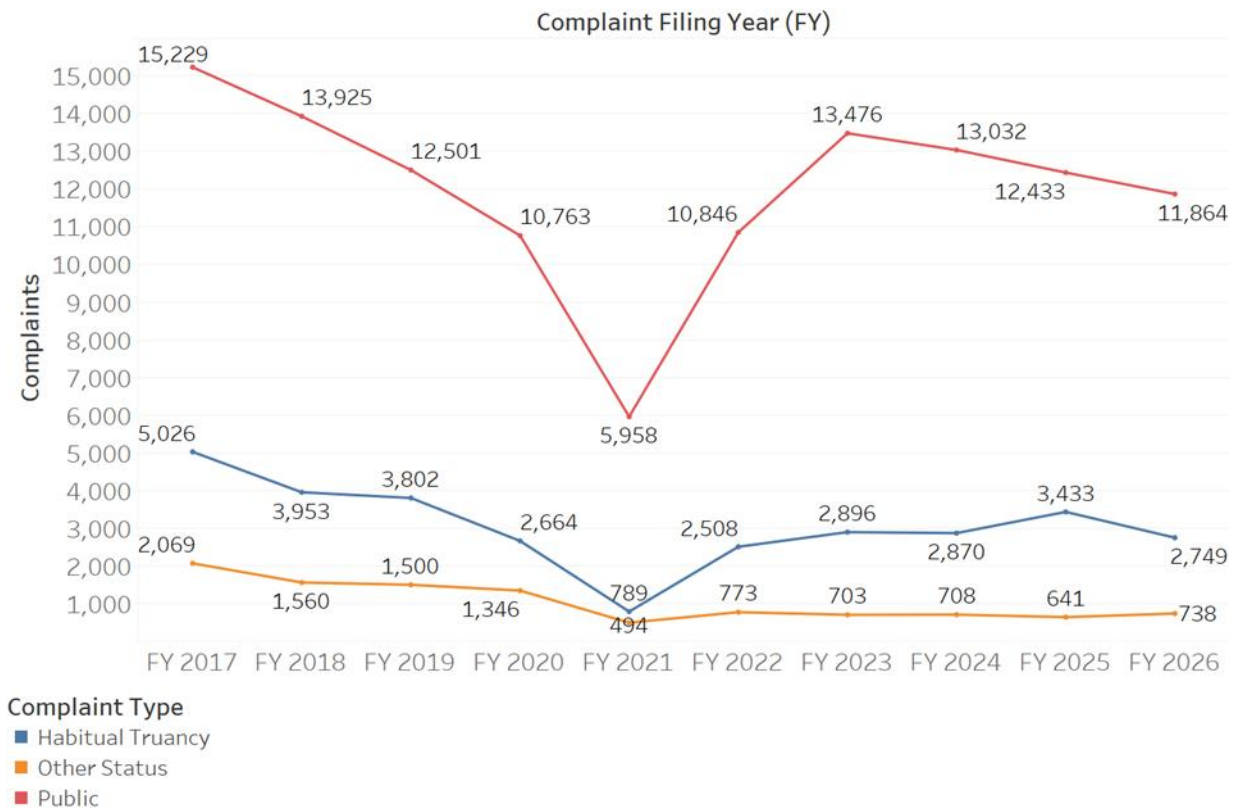
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Court Designated Worker Program: Data and Current Trends

Complaints Filed by Complaint Type, FY 17-26



Fiscal year 2026 saw a continuation in the downward trend of complaints, with public complaints and habitual truancy complaints both decreasing compared to FY 25. There was a small increase in non-truancy status complaints, mostly attributable to habitual runaway complaints. Although truancy increased in FY 25, the number of truancy complaints normalized during FY 26 dropped nearly 20% at the statewide level. This decrease was driven by a decrease of 45% or more in a number of counties, including some of the state's more populated counties like Daviess and Campbell.



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While fewer complaints were filed in FY 26, more of those complaints are ending up in detention at intake. There were 1,948 complaints that resulted in detention at intake in FY 26, an increase of 7%. FY 25 had already seen an increase of 18% compared to FY 24, so FY 26 continued this upward trend. The increase is most likely driven by the introduction of mandatory detention. In FY 24, 342 youths were detained based on complaints that potentially met mandatory detention criteria compared to 471 in FY 25 and 507 in FY 26.