

Maryland Department of Juvenile Services: Report on Shootings

Department of Juvenile Services

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Maryland

DEPARTMENT OF
JUVENILE SERVICES

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Introduction

During the 2024 Legislative Session, the Maryland General Assembly passed and Governor Wes Moore signed in to law SB 652, Chapter 736 “ Department of Juvenile Services - Report on Shooting” The legislation requires the Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) report on the number of youth who were nonfatally shot, shot another individual or were victims of a homicide. The reports must also include the youths' age and the county of residence. DJS must provide information about the actions the agency took.

DJS approaches incidents involving youth who are victims or perpetrators of homicides or shootings with the utmost seriousness and urgency. Each case is treated as a critical event requiring immediate action to ensure the safety and well-being of the youth, their families, and the community. DJS prioritizes swift responses, including convening safety plan meetings, coordinating with law enforcement and community partners, and providing trauma-informed support services. Comprehensive case management reviews are conducted to assess risks, address underlying issues, and adjust supervision or intervention plans as needed. Additionally, DJS works diligently to understand and mitigate the root causes of violence through collaboration with community organizations and strengthened partnerships with law enforcement. These measures reflect the department’s commitment to protecting and rehabilitating youth while promoting public safety.

Data

To provide context, Table 1 summarizes the statewide total of non-fatally shot victims and homicide victims from January 1 to November 30, 2024¹. As shown, youth constitute a very small percentage of the total in each category. Moreover, youth known to the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) represent an even smaller proportion.

Table 1						
Category	Statewide Total	Adults	Youth	DJS* youth	Percent youth comprise of total statewide victims	Percent DJS youth comprise of total statewide victims
Non-fatal Shooting Victims	825	739	86	16	10.42%	1.95%
Homicide Victims	420	385	35	4	8.33%	0.95%
Suspected of Shooting another Individual	N/A**	N/A**	N/A**	31	N/A	N/A

*DJS Youth" includes youth over 18 still under supervision

** These data are not available at this time

¹ Maryland Department of State Police, Criminal Intelligence Section | MCAC

Table 2 shows the change in DJS' caseload from last year to this year, as well as the change in non-fatal shooting and homicide victimizations and shooting suspects among DJS-supervised youth. While the number of youth under DJS supervision increased 11% this year compared to 2023, there has been a 25% decline in DJS youth who were the victims of non-fatal shootings (16 in 2024, down from 20 in 2023), a 50% decrease in DJS youth who were homicide victims (4 in 2024, down from 8 in 2023), and a relatively stable rate of arrests for gun violence, with 2% of our youth suspected in a shooting in 2023 (n=29) and 1.9% suspected in a shooting in 2024 (n=31).

Despite the increase in youth under DJS supervision, a tiny and declining percentage of these youth were involved in gun violence – either as victims or as suspects – in 2023 and 2024.

Table 2					
Category	2024	2023	Change from 2023-2024	% category youth of total Supervised 2024	% category youth of total Supervised 2023
Non-fatal Shooting Victims	16	20	-25%	1%	1.4%
Homicide Victims	4	8	-50%	0.25%	0.6%
Suspected of Shooting another Individual**	31	29	+6.5%	1.9%	2%
Total Supervised Youth	1,611	1,452	+11%		

Table 3 outlines the age distribution of juveniles involved in firearm-related incidents and homicides. The data is categorized by age groups ranging from 10–12 years to 19–21 years, providing insights into the prevalence of these incidents within different age brackets.

Table 3				
Category	Ages 10-12	Ages 13-15	Ages 16-18	Ages 19-21
Non-fatal Shooting Victims	0	9	6	1
Homicide Victims	0	1	3	0
Shot Another Individual	0	3	22	6

Table 4 breaks down firearm-related incidents and homicides by the counties of residence for the juveniles involved. The data highlights where these incidents occurred most frequently, with Baltimore City and Prince George's County showing the highest numbers.

Table 4			
County	Non- fatal Shooting Victims	Homicide Victims	Shot Another Individual
Anne Arundel	0	0	1
Dorchester	2	0	0
Baltimore City	3	1	12
Baltimore	1	1	2
Cecil	1	0	1
Howard	0	0	1
Frederick	0	0	1
St. Mary's	1	0	0
Montgomery	3	0	5
Prince George's	5	2	7
Washington	0	0	1

Actions Taken by the Department

The Thrive Academy:

During Secretary Schiraldi's first year at the Department of Juvenile Services, there were 42 youth known to DJS who were victims or perpetrators of gun violence. This tragic number of youth involved in gun violence concerned the agency for many reasons, one of which was that there was no specific programming targeted to address gun violence. DJS quickly took action to create a program called the Thrive Academy to address gun violence.

DJS created the program by first partnering with national experts to examine three and a half years of data to forecast which youth would be likely to be involved in gun violence. Then DJS created Thrive Academy, applying the evidence-informed gun violence reduction strategy (GVRS) to those youth.

The Thrive Academy pairs each youth with a specialized DJS case manager and a life coach. Life coaches are people who have often walked in the young people's shoes, who meet with them and their parents or guardians to very clearly explain to them the ramifications of gun violence, including possibly going to prison, harming others or themselves, or their families coming to harm. The life coach assists the youth in developing a life plan that moves them away from gun violence and toward success. Once that plan is developed and agreed upon, the life coach is in contact with them frequently, sometimes multiple times a day and is available 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

Thrive Academy youth are provided with a "Suitcase of Supports" that is individualized for each youth's needs, and may include:

- Stipended employment with local employers or paid service opportunities along with employment support and coaching
- Assistance with attending college or vocational training
- Confidential relocation assistance for youth and families who are in danger of gun violence
- Trauma therapy
- Opportunities for prosocial activities
- Fiscal incentives for participation and achieving agreed-upon milestones

The results so far are promising with our most at-risk youth - 4 out of 5 were not arrested for gun offenses and 1.44% fell victim of a non-fatal shooting. DJS was selected for the 2024 Council of Juvenile Justice Administrators' (CJJA) Inspiration Innovation Award. CJJA's Inspirational Innovational Award is "a prestigious recognition designed to celebrate and honor outstanding achievements in the realm of juvenile justice innovation." The University of Pennsylvania's Crime and Justice Policy Lab (CJP) is conducting an arms length evaluation of the Thrive Academy under funding from the Annie E. Casey Foundation and the Pull Up Fund. CJP is recognized as one of the leading researchers of gun violence reduction strategies (GVRs) in the country.

After Incident Actions:

After each incident where a youth was a *victim* of a non-fatal shooting, DJS undertook the following actions:

A safety plan meeting was convened immediately. This meeting included parents, the youth, local law enforcement, case managers, and community service providers. The purpose was to establish a safety plan to protect both the youth and their family. Additionally, crisis intervention and support services were made available to the youth

and their families, including immediate access to trauma-informed mental health support services.

DJS conducted a thorough case management review for each juvenile involved. This process assessed the juvenile's needs and risks, allowing for adjustments to their case plan as necessary. Enhanced monitoring and supervision strategies were implemented based on the severity of the situation. The department also prioritized community safety measures by collaborating with community-based organizations to address the root causes of violence and strengthening partnerships with law enforcement to promote safety.

DJS established a clear timeline for actions: an immediate response was initiated within 24 hours of the incident, while case reviews and updates were completed within five business days. Follow-up services were ongoing and customized to meet the specific needs of the youth and their families, ensuring comprehensive and sustained support.

After each incident where a youth was an alleged *perpetrator* of gun violence DJS works with law enforcement, to provide information DJS is legally allowed to provide. These youth, depending on age, are charged in the adult or juvenile system. DJS continues to provide information to the justice system as a youth's case progresses throughout the court system.

After each incident where a youth was tragically a victim of a homicide, DJS connects the families to resources, support groups, and depending on the needs of the family, helps families come up with funeral costs. DJS connects with the staff who were involved with the youth, both in the community and in the facility to provide mental health support. Finally, DJS conducts a full case review, to review the actions taken by DJS, to see what can be improved.

Established External Review Processes

In 2024, the DJS State Advisory Board was merged into the Commission on Juvenile Justice and Emerging Best Practices (The Commission), which is staffed by the Governor's Office of Crime Control and Policy. With the formation of this new commission, the review of cases involving youth fatalities under DJS supervision and youth in DJS supervision that caused a fatality, transitioned from the Maryland State Advisory Board to the Commission. The Commission has created a fatality review workgroup (FRW) to analyze these cases and present their findings to the full board.

The circumstances surrounding a youth's death are multidimensional, and deserve systematic, multi-agency review. The internal review process must focus on developing a comprehensive timeline regarding each interaction the youth had with the juvenile

justice system. DJS has established a Fatality Review Team (FRT), coordinated by DJS staff, which is directly notified by law enforcement when a youth under DJS supervision experiences a fatality. The FRT functions as an internal review body with the following purposes:

- To better understand the causes and circumstances of youth fatalities by identifying contributing factors and key events.
- To develop comprehensive case summaries for presentation to the Commission's FRW.
- To provide staff support and data as requested by the Commission.

The DJS FRT plays a critical role in maintaining communication with the Commission on case statuses, developing detailed case summaries, and documenting findings and recommendations. The FRT will present child fatality case summaries and make relevant case files and DJS resources available to the FRW. Through these processes, DJS continues to strive for transparency, accountability, and improved outcomes for youth under its supervision.