

University of Nebraska at Kearney &  
Nebraska Juvenile Probation  
Services Division

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# Environmental Scan: Probation Districts 11 and 12

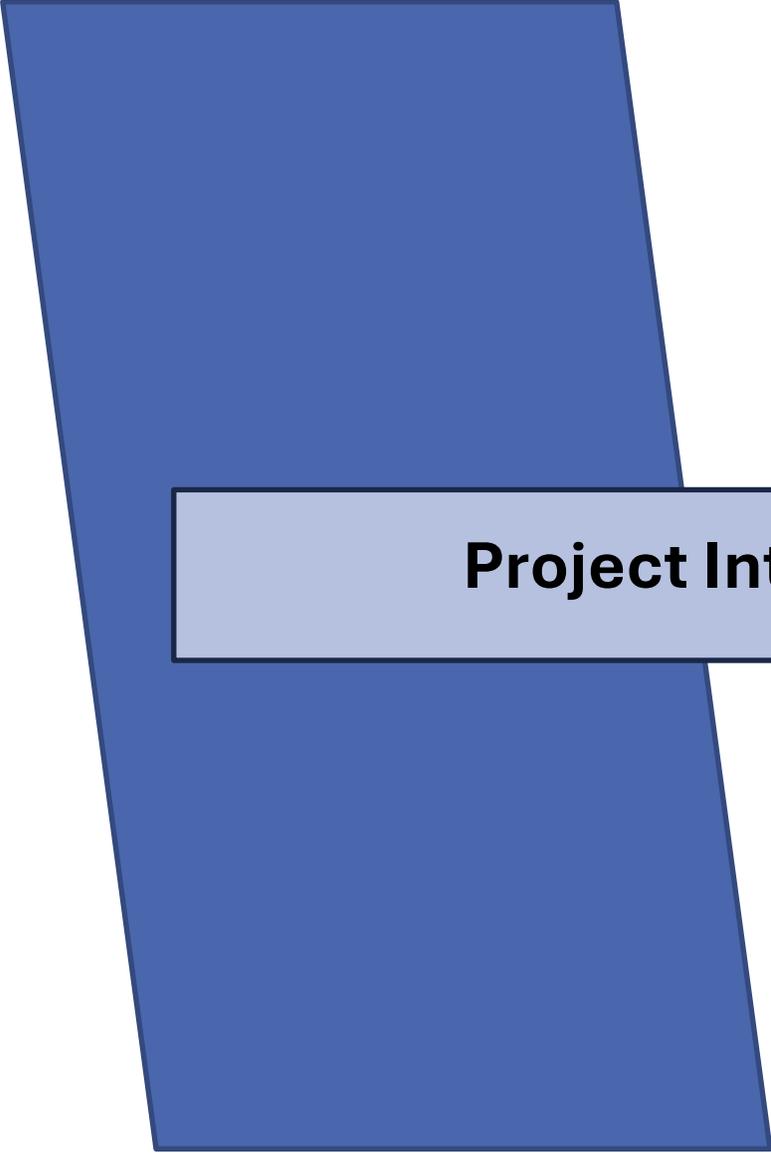
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# **Project Introduction**

The Juvenile Probation Services Division of the Administrative Office of Courts and Probation (AOCP) is responsible for the administration of juvenile probation across the state of Nebraska, overseeing all youth who are system-involved through a delinquency or status youth filing.

In the state of Nebraska, more than 5,200 youth were arrested (taken into custody) in 2022 (Kids Count Nebraska, 2023). The largest portion of those juvenile arrests were for persons crimes (29.9%); however, youth were also taken into custody for property offenses (25.5%), violent offenses (1.9%), drug-related offenses (14.9%), alcohol offenses (6.8%) and weapons offenses (1%), among other crimes. The number of youth arrested in Nebraska has steadily declined since 2009, indicating the success of prevention and early intervention efforts. Of those youth who entered the system, 1,334 were placed in out-of-home care, including crisis stabilization care, juvenile detention, jail, and Youth Rehabilitation and Treatment Center. In rural, Western Nebraska, youth with out-of-home placements may be transported far from their home communities, and even those who are treated in the community, experience a deficit of accessible resources. In addition, caseloads are generally higher for probation officers working directly with youth in rural areas.

The scope of the Juvenile Probation Services Division is comprehensive and includes juvenile intake, investigations, probation supervision, and the provision of services, all with the goal of successful rehabilitation for youth. Nebraska continues to work to improve its juvenile justice system, collaborating with external organizations to evaluate the strengths of its system and services and to target areas of improvement.

With this framework in mind, this project was initiated as a request for research by the Juvenile Probation Services Division of the AOCP. The Division seeks a more comprehensive understanding of the services available to Nebraska's rural youth, along with any barriers that may exist in accessing those services. This project focuses on two of Nebraska's most rural judicial districts (District 11 and District 12).

This project utilized two methodologies: the analysis of archival data and in-person survey interviews with stakeholders. In the first part of the project, researchers examined the data provided by the Juvenile Probation Services Division, which was used to develop a general overview of the youth being served in each of the counties in Districts 11 and 12. The overview includes **how many youth** are being served in each county, the **profile** of the youth in each county and the **risks and needs** for the youth being served in each county. The **detention needs** for each county in

Districts 11 and 12, the **profile of youth going through intake** in each county, **whether juvenile intake decisions are being overridden**, and the **driving factors** of those decisions, were also assessed.

In the second methodology, judges, county attorneys, and probation officers in Districts 11 and 12 were interviewed to capture their perceptions regarding which **services in the juvenile justice continuum are the best fit** for the youth in Districts 11 and 12. Stakeholders were also asked to reflect on whether **service gaps** exist in their counties and if **barriers to service** access might impact their respective youth populations. Stakeholders considered the sustainability of current services and the feasibility of service expansion. Finally, judges, county attorneys, and probation officers were also asked about whether they perceive **that intake decisions are being overridden**, and if so, to identify the **driving factors** of those decisions. Interviews were largely conducted in person, in the professional spaces of stakeholders in

their judicial districts. As part of these research trips to Districts 11 and 12, the researchers had the opportunity to observe juvenile court proceedings in multiple counties.

The goals of the project also included assessing:

- **Stakeholder perceptions about the ideal purpose of the juvenile justice system (compliance-based/treatment-oriented/rehabilitation-oriented/punitive).**
- **What stakeholders believe complete service access looks like.**
- **Stakeholder receptiveness to system change.**
- **Stakeholder views regarding youth and family participation in the juvenile justice system.**

The researchers wish to thank all of their system partners for participating in this important work and for providing their time, their insights, and their energies to this project.



## **Part I – System-Involved Youth in District 11 and District 12**

- Number of Youth by District and County
- Gender
- Age
- Years in System
- Race and Ethnicity
- Education
- Youth Offense Patterns
- Risk Assessment
- Youth Out-of-Home Placements
- Juvenile Intake

## Number of Youth by District and County – 2022/2023

UNK researchers received Districts 11 and 12 youth profile data for 2022 and 2023 from AOCB on June 30, 2024 and additional statewide secondary data on July 3, 2024. A final, more detailed data set was provided on May 17, 2025. The AOCB data set included the number of youth served in each county in Districts 11 and 12, demographic data, YLS/CMI 2.0 scores generated by probation, intake data, and data on out-of-home placements. Select findings are presented in this report.

The number of youth served per year, per district, during 2022 and 2023 were roughly equivalent; there were approximately 375 youth per year in District 11 and 290 youth per year in District 12 (see Table 1). In District 11, 11 of 17 counties (65%) served youth on probation in 2023 (see Table 2). When considering only those District 11 counties with youth on probation, caseloads varied from one youth (Chase, Dundy, Gosper, Logan, Thomas) to 156 youth (Lincoln County), depending on the year. In District 12, 9 of 12 counties (75%) served youth on probation in 2023 (see Table 2). Of counties with youth on probation, the number of youth ranged from a low of one youth (Banner) to a high of 203 (Scotts Bluff County).

**The number of youth served each calendar year in each district was largely consistent; thus, moving forward, data for calendar year 2023 will be presented.**

**Table 1. Youth on Probation by District  
(2022 and 2023)**

District	Number of Youth - 2022	Number of Youth - 2023
D11	374	376
D12	289	292
<b>Total</b>	663	668



**Table 2. Youth Served on Probation by District & County  
(2022 and 2023)**

District	County	Number of Youth 2022	Percent of Youth 2022 (%)	Number of Youth 2023	Percent of Youth 2023 (%)
<i>District 11</i>	Arthur	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Chase	1	0.26	2	0.53
	Dawson	94	25.13	96	25.53
	Dundy	1	0.26	1	0.27
	Frontier	6	1.60	8	2.13
	Furnas	7	1.87	8	2.13
	Gosper	1	0.26	0	0.00
	Hayes	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Hitchcock	6	1.60	3	0.80
	Hooker	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Keith	42	11.23	28	7.45
	Lincoln	148	39.57	156	41.49
	Logan	1	0.26	0	0.00
	McPherson	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Perkins	4	1.07	8	2.13
	Red Willow	53	14.17	54	14.36
	Thomas	0	0.0	1	0.27
	*Other	5	1.34	6	1.6
**Out-of-state	5	1.34	5	1.33	
<b>District 11 Total</b>		<b>374</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<i>District 12</i>	Banner	0	0.00	1	0.34
	Box Butte	20	6.92	26	8.90
	Cheyenne	7	2.42	14	4.79
	Dawes	25	8.65	18	6.16
	Deuel	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Garden	3	1.04	2	0.68
	Grant	0	0.00	0	0.00
	Kimball	6	2.08	6	2.05
	Morrill	7	2.42	9	3.08
	Scotts Bluff	206	71.28	203	69.52
	Sheridan	7	2.42	6	2.05
	Sioux	0	0.00	0	0.00
	*Other	5	1.73	4	1.37
**Out-of-state	3	1.04	3	1.03	
<b>District 12 Total</b>		<b>289</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.00</b>
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>663</b>		<b>668</b>	
	*Youth listed in District 11 or 12 but taken into custody in another District.				
	**Youth listed in District 11 or 12 but identified as out of state.				

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## Gender

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Both Districts 11 and 12 have a gender distribution that is consistent with the state of Nebraska as a whole (see Figure 1 on page 16); female youth account for approximately 1/3 of the youth probation population, while male youth account for 2/3 of the youth probation population.

In District 11, 248 (66%) of youth served by probation were male, while 128 (34%) were female. Lincoln County had the largest number of male youth on probation (100), accounting for approximately 40% of all males served by probation in District 11. Dawson County had the second highest number of males on probation (63) which accounted for approximately 25% of males served by probation in District 11. With regard to female youth in District 11, Lincoln County had the largest number of female youth on probation (56), accounting for approximately 44% of all females served by probation in District 11. Similar to the results for males, Dawson County had the second highest number of female youth on probation (33) which is approximately 26% of females served by probation in District 11 (see Table 3 and Figure 1).

In District 12, 189 (65%) youth served by probation were male, while 103 (35%) were female. Scotts Bluff County had the largest number of male youth on probation (130), and this accounted for approximately 69% of all males served by probation in District 12. Box Butte County had the second highest number of males on probation (14) which accounted for approximately 7% of males served by probation in District 12. Within specific counties in District 12, Scotts Bluff County had the largest number of female youth on probation (73) accounting for approximately 71% of all females served by probation in District 12. Box Butte County had the second highest number of females on probation (12) which accounted for approximately 12% of females served by probation in District 12 (see Table 3 and Figure 1).



**Table 3. Youth on Probation by Gender by District & County (2023)**

District	County	Number of Males	Percent of Males	Number of Females	Percent of Females
<b>D11</b>	Chase	2	.81	0	0.00
	Dawson	63	25.40	33	25.78
	Dundy	1	0.40	0	0.00
	Frontier	4	1.61	4	3.13
	Furnas	6	2.42	2	1.56
	Hitchcock	3	1.21	0	0.00
	Keith	17	6.85	11	8.59
	Lincoln	100	40.32	56	43.75
	Perkins	7	2.82	1	0.78
	Red Willow	35	14.11	19	14.84
	Thomas	1	0.40	0	0.00
	Other/Out of state	9	3.63	2	1.56
<b>D11 Total</b>		<b>248</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>128</b>	<b>100.00</b>
<b>D12</b>	Banner	1	.53	0	0.00
	Box Butte	14	7.41	12	11.65
	Cheyenne	11	5.82	3	2.91
	Dawes	12	6.35	6	5.83
	Garden	2	1.06	0	0.00
	Kimball	3	1.59	3	2.91
	Morrill	7	3.70	2	1.94
	Scotts Bluff	130	68.78	73	70.87
	Sheridan	3	1.59	3	2.91
	Other/Out of state	6	3.17	1	.97
<b>D12 Total</b>		<b>189</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>100.00</b>
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>437</b>		<b>231</b>	

**D11 Counties with no youth to report:**

- Arthur
- Gosper
- Hayes
- Hooker
- Logan
- McPherson

**D12 Counties with no youth to report:**

- Deuel
- Grant
- Sioux

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## Age

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Data reveals that youth being supervised by probation in Districts 11 and 12 during 2023 first came into contact with law enforcement at ages ranging from 10 years old to 18 years old. The mean age of all youth who first came into contact with probation in Districts 11 and 12 for 2023 was 14.31 years old. In District 11, the most prevalent age range for at first contact with probation was 15 to 16 years old; while in District 12, the most prevalent age range was 14 and 15 years old (see Table 4). This data indicates that youth in Western Nebraska are entering the system at a younger age than what is reflected at the state level, where the largest percentage of youth placed on probation were aged 15 to 17 in 2023 (see Figure 1).

There were no significant differences in age when youth first came into contact with law enforcement based on gender (see Table 5). The mean age of first law enforcement contact for male youth was 14.24 and the mean age for female youth was 14.45. There were also no significant differences in the age youth first came into contact with law enforcement based on race or ethnicity.



**Table 4. Age at First Contact with Law Enforcement by District & County (2023)**

District	County	10 yrs	11 yrs	12 yrs	13 yrs	14 yrs	15 yrs	16 yrs	17 yrs	18 yrs	Total
<b>D11</b>	Chase						1		1		2
	Dawson	1	3	10	17	20	17	18	8	2	96
	Dundy			1							1
	Frontier			1	2	3		2			8
	Furnas				1	2	2	2	1		8
	Hitchcock			1	1			1			3
	Keith			1	7	5	6	4	4	1	28
	Lincoln		6	23	24	30	37	25	11		156
	Perkins			1			1	4	1	1	8
	Red Willow		5	4	8	7	10	12	7	1	54
	Thomas						1				1
	Other counties				2	2		1	1		6
Out of state				1	1		1	1		1	5
<b>D11 Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>376</b>
<b>D12</b>	Banner							1			1
	Box Butte		1	2	7	5	5	5	1		26
	Cheyenne			1	3	1	4	3	2		14
	Dawes	1		2	3	5	4	2	1		18
	Garden			1		1					2
	Kimball					4		2			6
	Morrill	1	1			1	2	1	3		9
	Scotts Bluff		14	21	33	38	45	31	19	2	203
	Sheridan			1	2	1	1	1			6
	Other counties			1		2	1				4
	Out of state				2		1				3
<b>D12 Total</b>		<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>50</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>46</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>292</b>
	<b>TOTAL of D11 &amp; D12</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>74</b>	<b>113</b>	<b>126</b>	<b>139</b>	<b>116</b>	<b>59</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>668</b>

Table 5. Current Age by Gender and District (2023)

District	County	12 yrs	13 yrs	14 yrs	15 yrs	16 yrs	17 yrs	18 yrs	19 yrs	20 yrs	21 yrs	22 yrs	Total
<b>D11</b>	Male youth		2	10	18	26	42	65	49	30	4	2	248
	Female youth	1		4	10	12	30	32	28	8	3		128
<b>D11 Total</b>		<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>28</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>97</b>	<b>77</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>376</b>
<b>D12</b>	Male youth		3	6	17	29	38	36	30	26	4		26
	Female youth			3	4	9	14	28	33	9	3		14
<b>D12 Total</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>52</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>63</b>	<b>35</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>292</b>
	<b>TOTAL D11 &amp; D12</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>49</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>161</b>	<b>140</b>	<b>73</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>668</b>



## Years in System

Data revealed that youth on probation in Districts 11 and 12 during 2023 had been supervised by probation for as little as one year to as long as 12 years (see Table 6). The age of the youth at first contact with law enforcement was significantly correlated with the number of years a youth was supervised on probation, with younger youth remaining on probation longer than those who were older at the point of first contact with law enforcement. There were no significant differences in number of years in the system based on gender. The mean number of years in the system for male youth was 3.39 and the mean number of years in the system for female youth was 3.34. Finally, while there were no significant differences in the number of years spent in the system based on race and ethnicity in District 11, race was significantly related to the number of years on probation supervision in District 12. In District 12, American Indian or Alaskan Native youth were significantly more likely to spend more years under supervision.

**Table 6. Years in the Juvenile Justice System by Gender & District (2023)**

District	County	1 yr	2 yrs	3 yrs	4 yrs	5 yrs	6 yrs	7 yrs	8 yrs	9 yrs	10 yrs	12 yrs	Total
	Male youth	13	82	64	33	24	19	4	5	4	0	0	248
	Female youth	5	42	43	20	9	4	4	1	0	0	0	128
<b>D11 Total</b>		<b>18</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>107</b>	<b>53</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>376</b>
	Male youth	5	63	59	26	14	8	8	3	0	2	1	1
	Female youth	0	29	37	14	8	7	3	4	1	0	0	26
<b>D12 Total</b>		<b>5</b>	<b>92</b>	<b>96</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>22</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>292</b>
	<b>TOTAL of D11 &amp; D12</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>216</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>93</b>	<b>55</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>668</b>



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## Race and Ethnicity

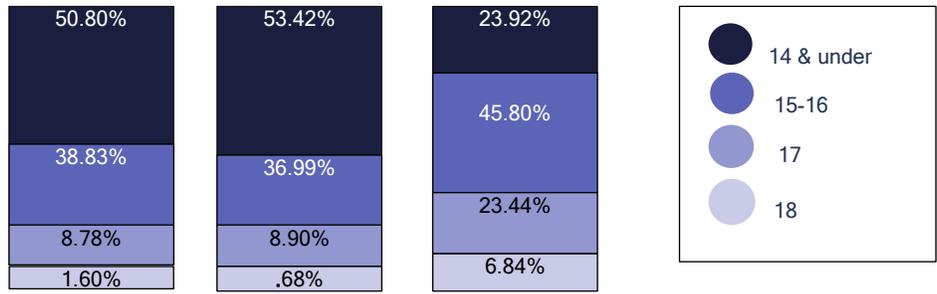
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In terms of race, White youth comprise the largest percentage of the youth probation population at the state level (62.00%) and in Districts 11 (80.05%) and 12 (59.93%). That said, Districts 11 and 12 differ from the rest of the Nebraska in several regards. District 11 has a much larger percentage of White youth on probation (80.05%) than is reported at the state level (62.00%). District 12 has an American Indian/Alaskan Native youth probation population of 16.78%, compared to a state probation population of 7.00% at the state level. The Snow-Redfern Foundation (2022), using data from the Nebraska Department of Education, estimates the American Indian/Alaska Native youth population in the Panhandle (11 counties in District 12) at 3.30%, suggesting they may be overrepresented by nearly 5-times in the District 12 probation population. Black youth comprised a lower percentage of the probation population when compared to the rest of the state; 5.59% in District 11 and 0.34% in District 12. The Snow-Redfern Foundation estimates that Black/African American youth comprise at 0.70% of the youth in the Panhandle; thus, they are underrepresented in District 12 youth probation population.

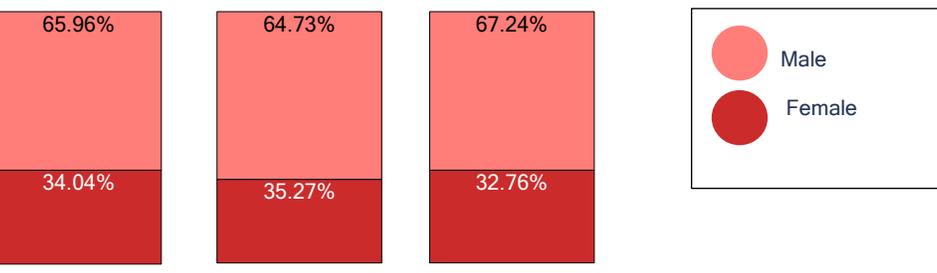
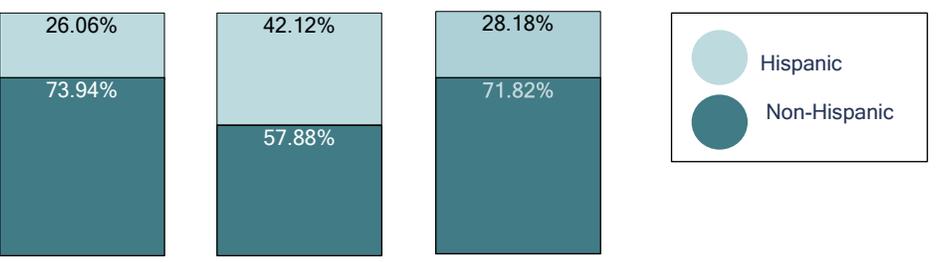
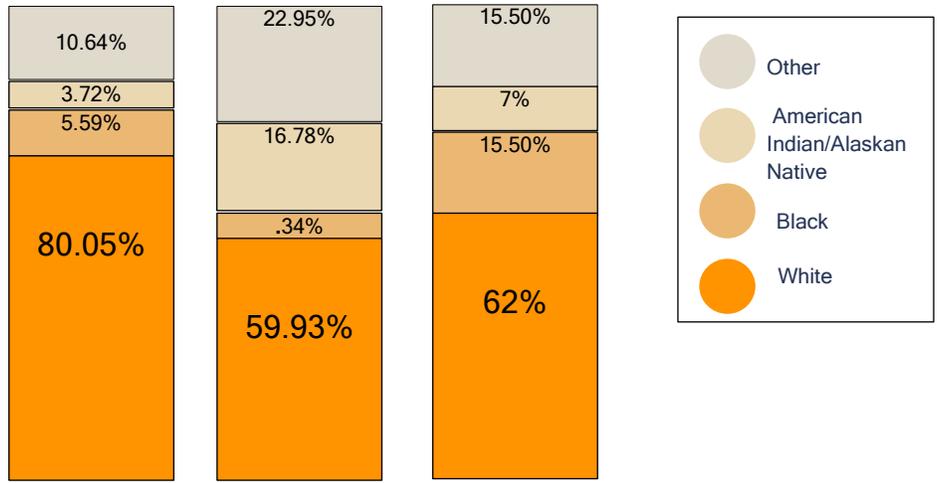
While the majority of youth on probation in Districts 11 and 12 were not Hispanic (73.94% and 57.88%), District 11 reports that one in four youth (26.06%) on probation were Hispanic in 2023 and in District 12, 42.12% of youth on probation identified as Hispanic. District 12 exhibited a higher percentage of system-involved Hispanic youth than reported at the state level (28.18%). According to the Snow-Redfern Foundation (2022), using data from the Nebraska Department of Education, 24.00% of youth in the Nebraska Panhandle were Hispanic. In comparison to their representation in the general population, Hispanic youth in District 12 are overrepresented in the probation population.



**Figure 1. Districts 11 and 12 and State Demographic Summary for 2023**



**Note:** Statewide age represents youth placed on probation for delinquent and status-related offenses. D11 and D12 age represents age at first contact with law enforcement.



**District 11      District 12      Statewide**

Statewide data taken from Rumbaugh et al. (2024)

## Education

Based on the data provided by AOCP, the majority of youth being served by probation in Western Nebraska are on track academically based on grade-level placement, meaning the last grade they completed is appropriate based on their current age. That said, twenty-two percent of youth on probation in Districts 11 and 12 are behind in completing the grade level they should be in according to their age (see Figure 2 and Figure 3). Most of those being supervised on probation have completed middle school and are enrolled in high school as 9<sup>th</sup> or 10<sup>th</sup> graders (see Table 7).

**Table 7. Last Grade Completed by District  
(2023)**

<b>Grade Completed</b>	<b>District 11</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>	<b>District 12</b>	<b>Percent (%)</b>	<b>Total</b>
<b>5th Grade</b>	0	0.00	4	1.37	<b>4</b>
<b>6th Grade</b>	8	2.13	10	3.42	<b>18</b>
<b>7th Grade</b>	28	7.45	12	4.11	<b>40</b>
<b>8th Grade</b>	29	7.71	27	9.25	<b>56</b>
<b>9th Grade</b>	69	18.35	48	16.44	<b>117</b>
<b>10th Grade</b>	86	22.87	73	25.00	<b>159</b>
<b>11th Grade</b>	95	25.27	59	20.20	<b>154</b>
<b>12th Grade</b>	43	11.44	48	16.44	<b>91</b>
<b>High School Graduate/Freshman College /Vocational/Associates Degree</b>	13	3.46	7	2.40	<b>20</b>
<b>GED</b>	3	.80	1	.34	<b>4</b>
<b>No formal education/Exclude Home School</b>	2	.53	3	1.03	<b>5</b>
<b>Total</b>	<b>376</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>292</b>	<b>100.00</b>	<b>668</b>

Figure 2. On-Time Completion of Grades in District 11  
(n = 376)

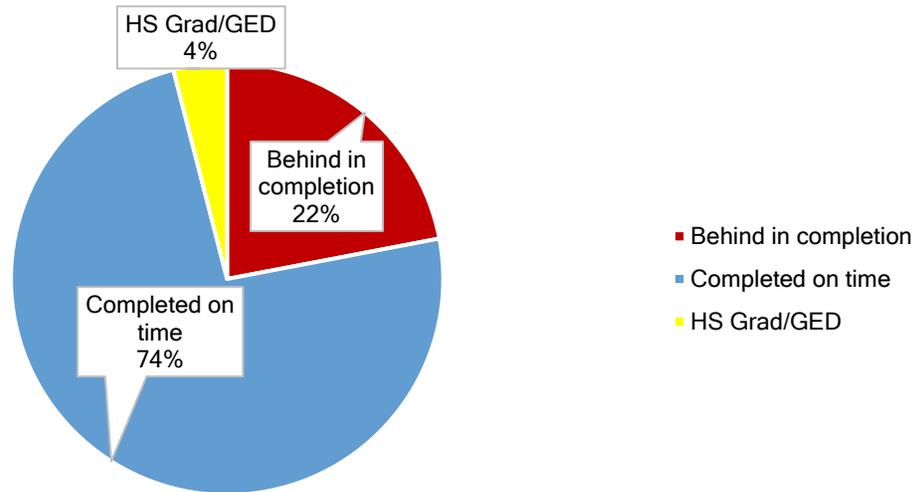
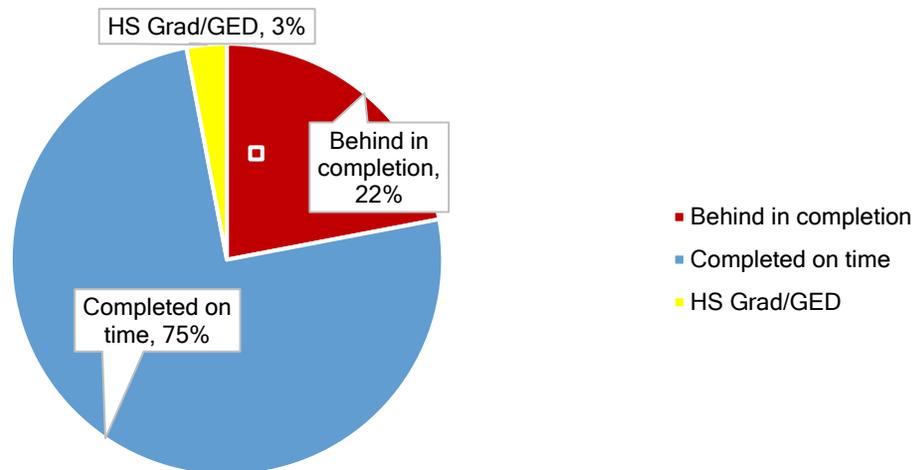


Figure 3. On-Time Completion of Grades in District 12  
(n = 292)



## Youth Offense Patterns

Juvenile offense patterns in Districts 11 and 12 were compared to offense patterns across the state in 2023. To facilitate the comparison to statewide data, the classifications of infractions and misdemeanors were combined into a single category.

In 2023, there were 376 youth on probation in District 11. Most of those youth were male, white, and fifteen years of age or younger. The majority of adjudicated youth were charged with misdemeanors (48%) or infractions (32%) followed by status offenses (19%). Only 1% of youth were being supervised due to felony offenses (see Figure 4).

In District 12, there were 292 juveniles supervised on probation in 2023. As in District 11, most of the youth on probation were male, white, and under the age of 15. Approximately half of adjudicated youths were charged with misdemeanors (50%) or infractions (35%), followed by status offenses (14%). Again, only 1% of youth were being supervised as a result of felony offenses (see Figure 5).

Both Districts are relatively consistent with state level for 2023 (see Figure 6).

Figure 4. Percentage of Crime Type for District 11- 2023

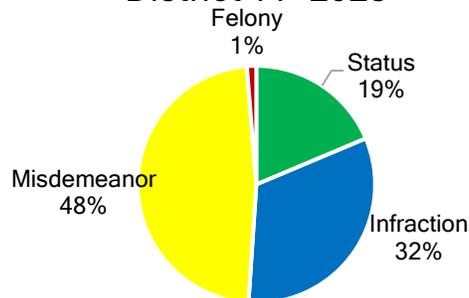
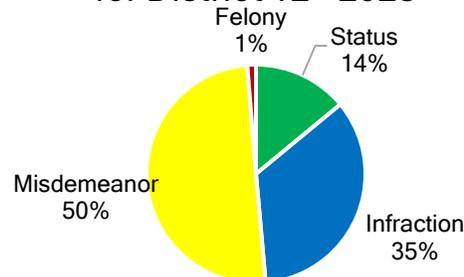
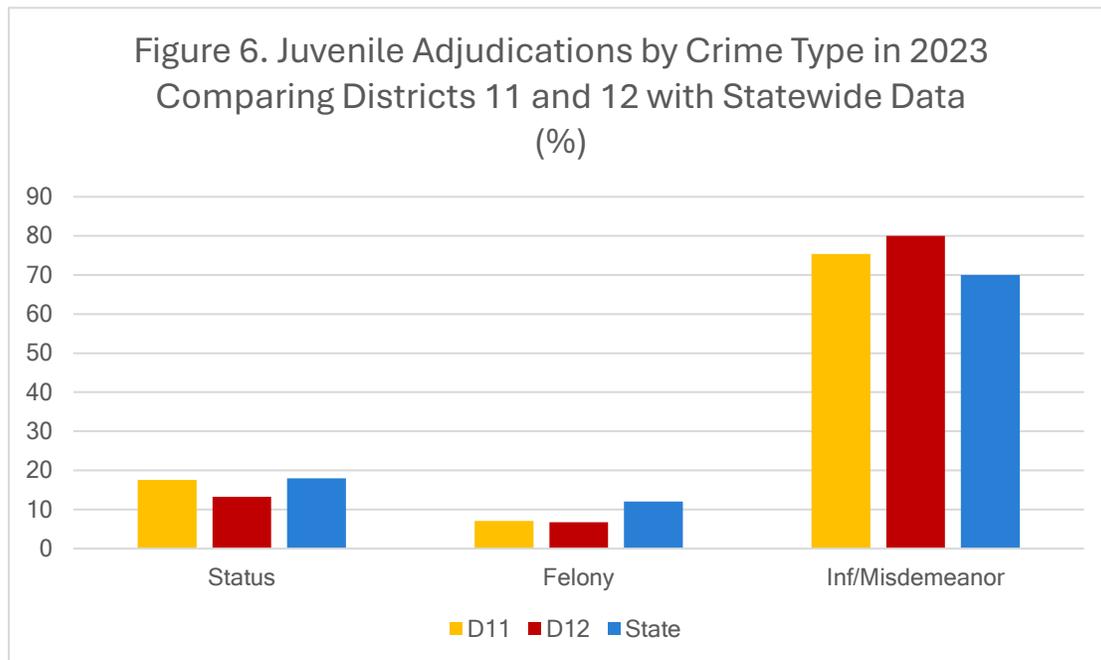


Figure 5. Percentage of Crime Type for District 12 - 2023



To compare with statewide data, infractions and misdemeanors are collapsed.



Statistical analysis revealed a significant difference between male and female youth in status offending. Female youth were more likely to be on probation for status offending than male youth in Districts 11 and 12. There was also a significant difference between male and female youth for misdemeanor offenses. Male youth were significantly more likely to be supervised for misdemeanors than female youth. There were no significant differences in infractions or felony offending based on gender.

The number of offenses committed by individual youth in Districts 11 and 12 ranged from a low of 1 offense to a high of 21 offenses. There was a significant difference in the number of offenses by district; youth in District 12 have a higher number of offenses per youth ( $m = 2.33$ ) than youth in District 11 ( $m = 1.83$ ). Statistical analysis revealed no significant relationship between gender and the number of offenses committed. There is a significant difference in race in District 11 and 12, however, due to the small population of minoritized youth (more than 71% of the probation population identifies as White), it is extremely difficult to draw meaningful inferences from this data. There was no significant difference in the number of offenses by youth based on their ethnicity.



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## Risk Assessment Scores

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The Juvenile Probation Services Division adheres to the Risk-Needs-Responsivity (RNR) Model when case planning for juveniles on probation. This model involves assessing juveniles to determine their risk of continued offending and their criminogenic needs, as well as their potential responsivity to treatment. The RNR Model promotes matching the type of treatment, the amount of treatment, and the delivery of treatment in an individualized manner suited for the particular juvenile (Andrews et al., 1990).

In alignment with the RNR Model, male and female juveniles are assessed by probation officers during the predisposition investigation at the initiation of the case and may be reassessed as part of ongoing case management. In Nebraska, youth are assessed using a standardized tool called the Youth Level of Service/Case Management Inventory (YLS/CMI 2.0). This tool is broadly used across the United States and is considered a valid and reliable measure of criminogenic needs and risks in youth, ages 12 to 18. The tool contains 42 data points and is noted for being both gender and culturally informed (Pusch & Holtfreter, 2017).

An analysis was conducted of the initial YLS/CMI 2.0 scores for each youth in Districts 11 and 12 for which the screening was done. Those findings were then broken down by district and county. For youth who were assessed more than once, the change in scores over time was also captured.

Figure 7 below presents the Probation Officer Service Recommendation Matrix, which was created by the Nebraska Probation Services Division in 2017 for probation officers using YLS/CMI 2.0 scores to inform correctional treatment. One function of the matrix is to ensure that probation officers always begin treatment with the least restrictive disposition. The purpose of this instrument is to guide probation officers when making recommendations to the court. The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice (2022) stated they support continued use of the matrix because it aligns with best practice standards.



**Figure 7. YLS/CMI 2.0 Risk Level and High Domains**

Low Risk Score of 0-8	Low Moderate Risk Score of 9-15	High Moderate Risk Score of 16-22	High and Very High Risk Score of 23-42
Level 1	Level 2	Level 2 → 3-	Level 3- → 3+
Level 1	Level 2 → 3-	Level 3- → 3+	Level 3- → 3+ → 4
Level 2	Level 2 → 3- → 3+	Level 3- → 3+ → 4	Level 3+ → 4 → 5
Level 2	Level 3- → 3+	Level 3+ → 4	Level 3+ → 4 → 5

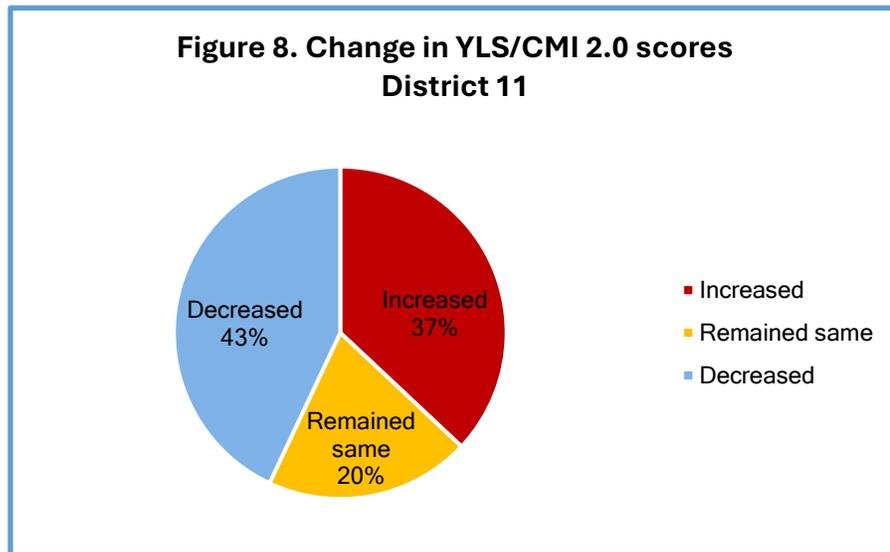
	Probation Supported	Provider Supported
Level 1	Probation active supervision by monitoring conditions / Probation programming	No service utilization
Level 2	Probation supervision focused on targeted services / Probation programming. RISE	Limited service utilization i.e., education and skill building classes
Level 3	3- Probation supervision includes active case management: team meetings, home visits, RISE, and cognitive groups 3+ indicates increased intensity and frequency of level 3- strategies	3- Community-based services*  3+ intensive community-based services and/or home-based services*
Level 4	Probation intensive supervision includes supervision strategies from level 3+ with a focus on transition planning	Out-of-home placement and residential treatment services*
Level 5	Probation enhanced intensive supervision with focus on reentry planning	YRTC

\*Therapeutic service must be supported by an evaluation or clinician recommendation

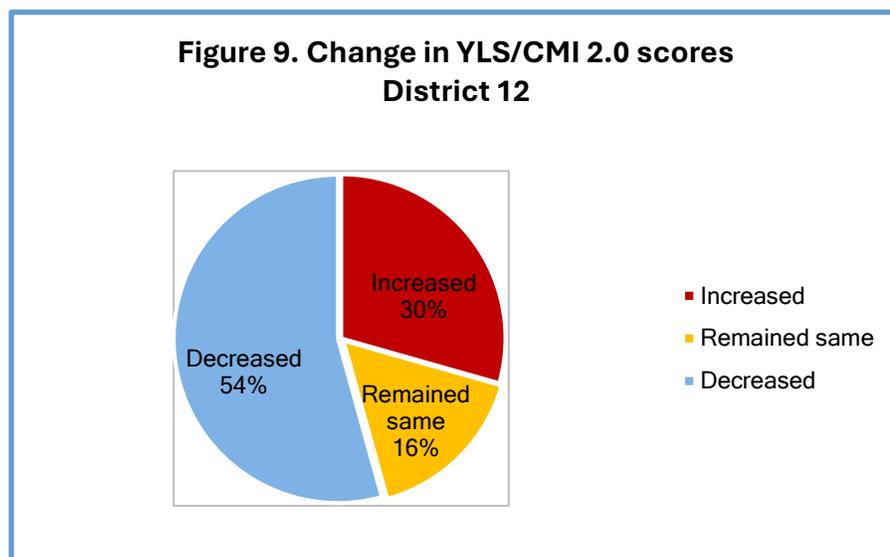
Youth on probation in Districts 11 and 12 have similar initial risk level assessments, with the majority of youth presenting at the Moderate Risk level. It should be noted that 16% of youth on probation across the two districts presented with High Risk levels indicating that immediate specialized, focused services would be necessary for the safety of the youth, and potentially the safety of the community. Overall, YLS/CMI 2.0 scores seem to indicate that the service needs in Districts 11 and 12 did not differ significantly from one another, or from the rest of the state (see Table 8).

Risk Level	D11	D12	Statewide
Low (0-8)	30	29	28
Moderate (9-22)	59	66	57
High (23-34) Very High (35-42)	11	5	15
Total	100%	100%	100%

In District 11, 354 youth had an initial YLS/CMI 2.0 score on file while 22 youth did not have a score. One hundred seven (30%) of those youth scored as low risk, while the majority (n = 210, 59%) scored at the moderate risk level. Thirty-seven youth (11%) scored as high risk, while no youth were categorized as being extremely high risk (see Table 8). For those District 11 youth with an initial YLS/CMI 2.0 score and an additional, current YLS/CMI 2.0 score, 37% of the YLS/CMI 2.0 score increased, 20% of the YLS/CMI 2.0 score remained the same, and 43% of the YLS/CMI 2.0 score decreased (see Figure 8).



In District 12, 291 youth had an initial YLS/CMI 2.0 score on file; one youth did not have a score. Eighty-three (29%) of those youth scored as low risk, while the majority (n = 193, 66%) scored at the moderate risk level. Fifteen youth (5%) scored as high risk, while no youth were categorized as being extremely high risk (see Table 8). For those District 12 youth with an initial YLS/CMI 2.0 score and an additional, current YLS/CMI 2.0 score, 29.4% of the YLS/CMI 2.0 scores increased, 16.3% of the YLS/CMI 2.0 scores remained the same, and 54.3% of the number of YLS/CMI 2.0 scores decreased (see Figure 9).



Statistical analysis for both Districts 11 and 12 revealed that YLS/CMI 2.0 scores were not more or less likely to increase or decrease based on gender, race, or ethnicity.

*Please note that the scores identified in Table 8 varied based on the probation officer's discretion. Approximately 11% of risk levels were reported at a different risk level than was indicated by the YLS/CMI 2.0 score. For example, in one case a youth with a score of 20 (moderate risk) was reported as being at high risk. The most likely explanation for this is that the probation officer noted the presence of a significant factor not captured by the YLS/CMI 2.0 tool and perceived that the presence of that factor merited an override. That decision must be reviewed and confirmed by a supervisor.*

*Also, 13% of the risk levels assigned were inconsistent with risk levels of the same score. For example, in the moderate category, sometimes a description was listed as moderate low or moderate high but not consistently for the same score. One intake officer might assign a YLS/CMI 2.0 score of 16 as moderate low, while another might select moderate high or moderate. During the assessment period, Nebraska updated to the YLS/CMI 2.0 2.0, which collapsed the risk levels, into Low, Moderate, High and Very High Risk. For data analysis in this project, the label "moderate" included scores reported as moderate, moderate low, and moderate high.*



## Youth Out-of-Home Placements

Among the District 11 and 12 probation population, the number of out-of-home placements ranged from 0 to 29. The demographics for youth with out-of-home placements in 2023 are presented in Table 9. More than one-third ( $n = 244$ ) of supervised youth in Districts 11 and 12 (37%) had at least one out-of-home placement. Table 10 below identifies the number of out-of-home placements in each county. Youth were not any more or less likely to be placed outside the home based on district.

Table 9. Juvenile Out-of-Home Placement							
Demographic	Cohort	Out-of-Home Placement District 11		Out-of-Home Placement District 12		Out-of-Home Placement Statewide	
		# of Youth	% of Total	# of Youth	% of Total	# of Youth	% of Total
Age Group	11-13	2	6%	8	19%	54	8%
	14-15	17	55%	13	30%	236	36%
	16	5	16%	9	21%	169	26%
	17	5	16%	12	28%	155	24%
	18	2	6%	1	2%	43	7%
Sex	Female	13	42%	16	37%	183	28%
	Male	18	58%	27	63%	474	72%
Race	Am. Indian	3	10%	9	21%	57	9%
	Asian/P.I.	0	0%	0	0%	10	2%
	Black	1	3%	3	7%	194	30%
	White	25	81%	24	56%	311	47%
	Other	2	6%	7	16%	85	13%
Ethnicity	Hispanic	7	23%	16	37%	158	24%
	Not Hispanic	24	77%	27	63%	499	76%
	<b>Total Youth</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>657</b>	<b>100%</b>

Source: Nebraska Juvenile Justice System Statistical Annual Report 2023

Gender was not significantly related to whether a youth experienced out-of-home placement, however the average number of placements was slightly higher for female youth ( $m = 1.87$ ) when compared to male youth ( $m = 1.43$ )

Ethnicity was not correlated with the likelihood that a youth would be placed outside the home in either District 11 or District 12, however race was significant. In District 11, Native American youth were three times more likely to be placed out of home when compared to youth identifying with other races. In District 12, Native American youth were more likely to be placed outside the home, but not at a level of statistical significance.

Table 10. Out of Home Placements by District &amp; County (2023)

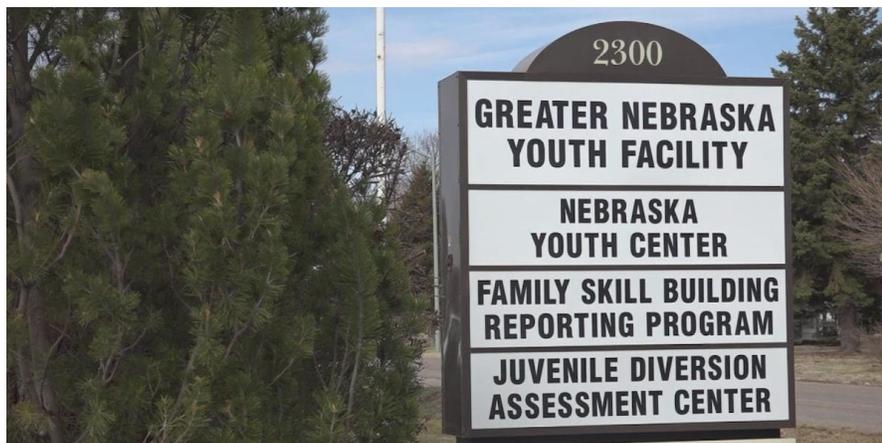
District	County	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8+	Total
D11	Chase	1					1				2
	Dawson	63	11	10	1	7	2	1		1	96
	Dundy				1						1
	Frontier	4	1			1				1	8
	Furnas	6					1		1		8
	Hitchcock	2		1							3
	Keith	22	2	1	2		1				28
	Lincoln	89	13	8	10	6	6	3	7	14	156
	Perkins	7		1							8
	Red Willow	36	9	3	2			1		3	54
	Thomas		1				1				1
	Other counties	5	1								6
	Out of state	5									5
<b>D11 Total</b>		<b>240</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>376</b>
	Banner	1									1
D12	Box Butte	15	3	2	1	1		1		3	26
	Cheyenne	7	3		1		1		2		14
	Dawes	12	1	2	1			1		1	18
	Garden	2									2
	Kimball	5	1								6
	Morrill	7				1		1			9
	Scotts Bluff	129	23	8	11	3	6	2	5	16	203
	Sheridan	3		1			1		1		6
	Other counties		1	1	1		1				4
	Out-of-state	3									3
<b>D12 Total</b>		<b>184</b>	<b>32</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>292</b>
	<b>TOTAL of D11 &amp; D12</b>	<b>424</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>668</b>

## Juvenile Intake

In Nebraska, a juvenile who is taken into custody by a law enforcement officer must be assessed to determine whether placement in a detention facility is appropriate. Nebraska Revised Statute 43-250 requires that the assessment be conducted by a probation officer through a process called juvenile intake. The process is designed to identify youth risk, as defined by statute, and allow probation officers to make decisions about placement based on the results.

Nebraska Juvenile Probation utilizes a juvenile intake Risk Assessment Instrument (RAI) as required in Nebraska Revised Statute 43-260. The RAI is a standardized tool that guides the probation officer in determining whether a youth should be released without restriction, be placed in an alternative to detention, or be detained within a juvenile detention center. In Nebraska, youth should not be detained unless:

1. The physical safety of persons in the community would be seriously threatened;
2. Detention is necessary to secure the presence of the juvenile at the next hearing, as evidenced by a demonstrable record of willful failure to appear at a scheduled court hearing within the last twelve months; or
3. Detention is a matter of immediate and urgent necessity for the protection of such juvenile, as evidenced by a demonstrable record of fleeing from law enforcement, absconding from a court-ordered placement, absconding from home, committing a violent offense, committing multiple property crimes, or threatening to cause harm to others (Neb. Rev. Stat. 43-251.01)



In 2023, District 12 (n = 226) processed a significantly higher number of intakes than District 11 (n = 104). Table 11 shows the frequency of intakes done in 2023 by County based on what the intake was triggered by (new law violation, probation violation, warrant, in-state runaway, or out-of-state runaway). In both districts, new law violations were the primary cause for intake screening.

<b>Table 11. Intake Frequencies based on Reason by District &amp; County (2023)</b>						
<b>District</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>New law violation</b>	<b>Probation violation</b>	<b>Warrant</b>	<b>In-state runaway</b>	<b>Out-of-state runaway</b>
<b>D11</b>	Chase	2	0	0	0	0
	Dawson	11	2	1	0	1
	Frontier	2	1	0	0	0
	Furnas	3	0	0	0	0
	Hitchcock	1	0	0	0	0
	Keith	9	0	4	2	0
	Lincoln	30	0	1	3	0
	Red Willow	5	0	0	1	0
	County not D11	20	0	2	3	0
<b>D11 Total</b>		<b>83</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>D12</b>	Box Butte	16	0	3	0	0
	Cheyenne	15	0	2	0	0
	Dawes	6	0	2	1	1
	Garden	2	0	0	0	0
	Morrill	6	0	0	0	0
	Scotts Bluff	81	40	16	9	0
	Sheridan	5	0	3	0	0
	County not D12	13	0	3	2	0
<b>D12 Total</b>		<b>144</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>1</b>
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>227</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>21</b>	<b>2</b>

**D11 Counties with no youth intake in 2023:**

- Arthur
- Dundy
- Gosper
- Hayes
- Hooker
- Logan
- McPherson
- Perkins
- Thomas

**D12 Counties with no youth intake in 2023:**

- Banner
- Deuel
- Grant
- Kimball
- Sioux

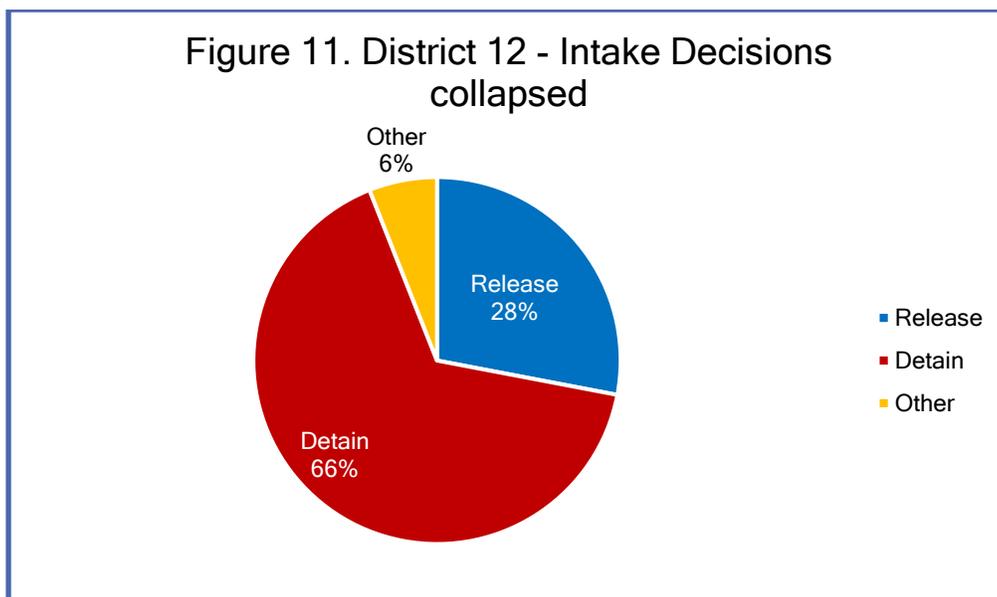
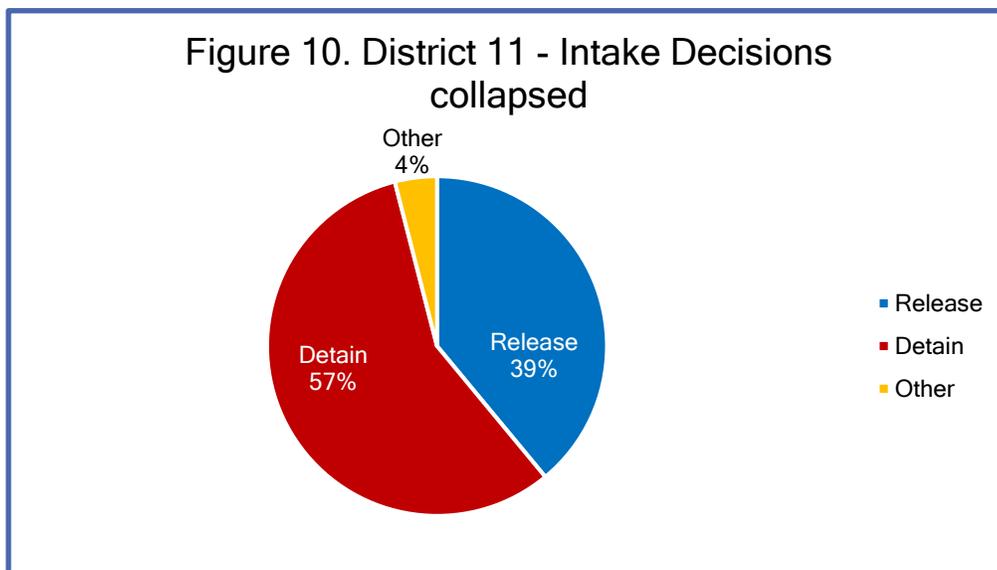
Table 12. Intake Decision by District &amp; County (2023)

District	County	Release w/out restriction	Shelter care	Detain (staff secure)	Detain (staff)	Return to parent	Return to non-custodial parent	Crisis stabilization	Placement	*Other	Emergency professional foster care	Total
<b>D11</b>	Chase	1		1								2
	Dawson	6	1	2	2	1		1	2			15
	Frontier	2					1					3
	Furnas				1	1				1		3
	Hitchcock		1									1
	Keith	1	1	3	7	2				1		15
	Lincoln	8	5	4	8	5			1	3		34
	Red Willow	5						1				6
	County outside District 11	5		4	9	2			4		1	25
<b>D11 Total</b>		<b>28</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>104</b>
<b>D12</b>	Box Butte	1	1	7	3	4		1	1	1		19
	Cheyenne	3		6	5	3						17
	Dawes	1	1		4			2	1	1		10
	Garden	1				1						2
	Morrill			2	3	1						6
	Scotts Bluff	27	13	33	23	17		11	14	8		146
	Sheridan	1		2	3	1				1		8
	County outside District 12	2		7	4		1		2	2		18
<b>D12 Total</b>		<b>36</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>57</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>27</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>14</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>226</b>
	<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>64</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>71</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>330</b>

\*Release to parent with curfew or other restrictions, Community Youth Coach, Day/Evening Reporting, Electronic Monitor, Non-custodial parent placement, Reception Center, Relative/kinship placement, Foster Care placement, Emergency Professional Foster Care (no eject/no reject for 5 days), Emergency Youth Shelter or Crisis Stabilization

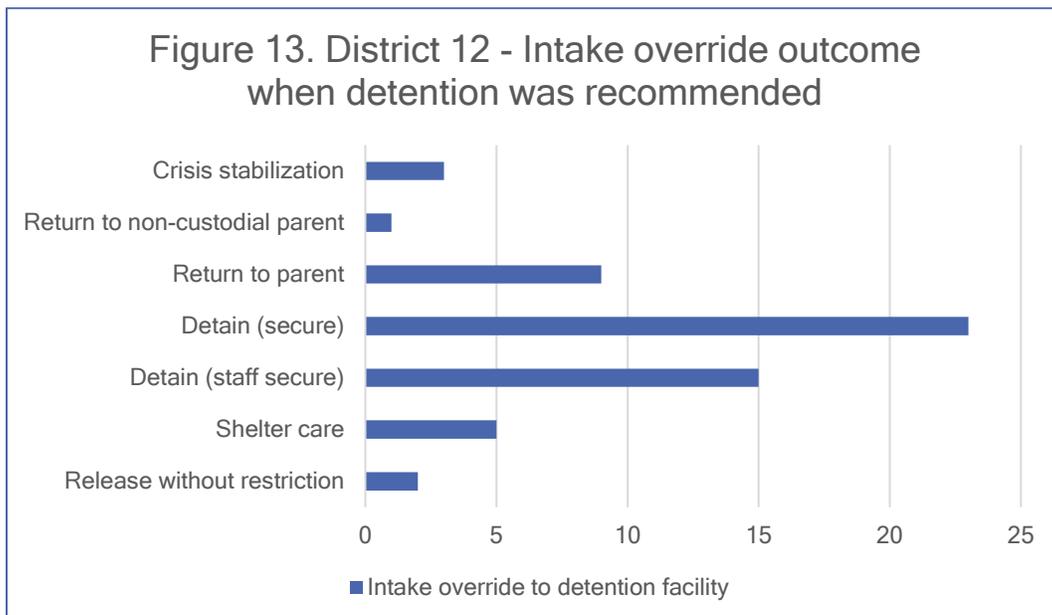
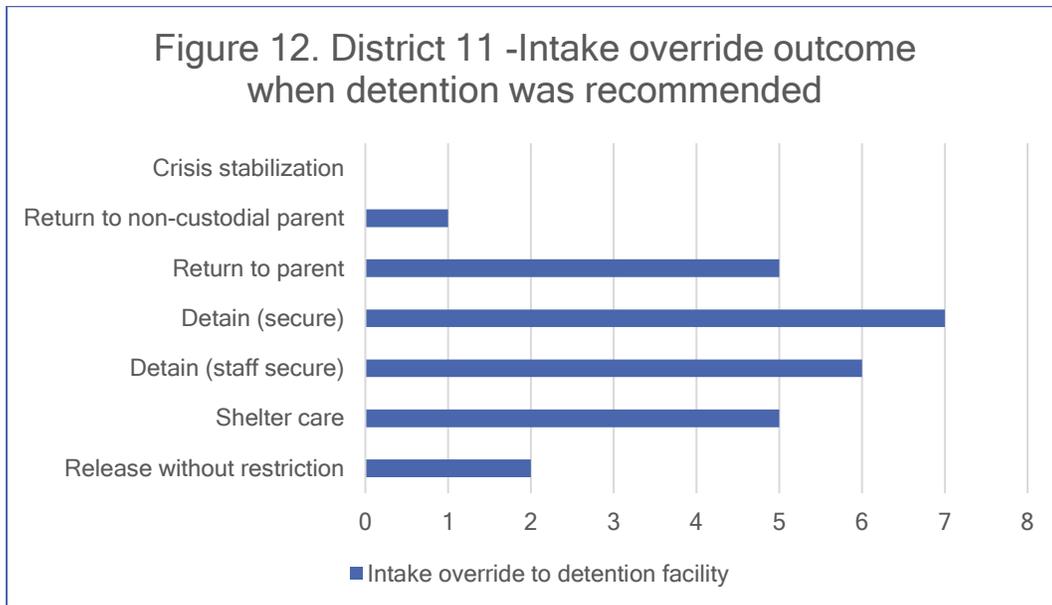
Of the 330 intake screenings conducted in Districts 11 and 12 in 2023, 32% resulted in an intake decision to release the youth (release without restriction, return to parent, or return to non-custodial parent), 63% resulted in the youth being detained (shelter care, detain (staff secure), detain (secure), crisis stabilization, placement, or emergency professional foster care), and 5% listed as “other available alternative” (Release to parent with curfew or other restrictions, Community Youth Coach, Day/Evening Reporting, Electronic Monitor, Non-custodial parent placement, Reception Center, Relative/kinship placement, Foster Care placement, Emergency Professional Foster Care (no eject/no reject for 5 days), Emergency Youth Shelter or Crisis Stabilization) (see Table 12 above).

The ten intake decision options available to probation staff during intake screening were collapsed into three broad categories (release, detain and other available alternative) to facilitate analysis and to assess intake override decisions. Figures 10 and 11 below show the breakdown for intake decisions for each District.



Out of 330 intake screening decisions conducted in Western Nebraska in 2023, the RAI tool was overridden by the probation officer 84 times (25% of screenings). The intake override options included seven possible alternative placements to detention. The categories (overlapping 7 of the 10 intake decision categories) are provided in Figures 12 and 13 below.

Of the 84 intakes that resulted in an override of the RAI tool, 56% involved detaining the youth at a different security level, 7% involved releasing a youth rather than detaining them, 17% altered a decision to release, and 20% involved detaining a youth that would otherwise have been released.



When probation officers chose to override the intake recommendations, they were provided with nine possible explanations for the override decision. AOC data shows that the most common driver for the override in District 11 was “other” followed by “the physical safety of the community would be seriously threatened.” The most common driver for an override in District 12 was “physical safety of the community would be seriously threatened,” followed by “other.” Figures 14 and 15 include the frequency of override drivers in Districts 11 and 12.

Figure 14. District 11 Description for intake override

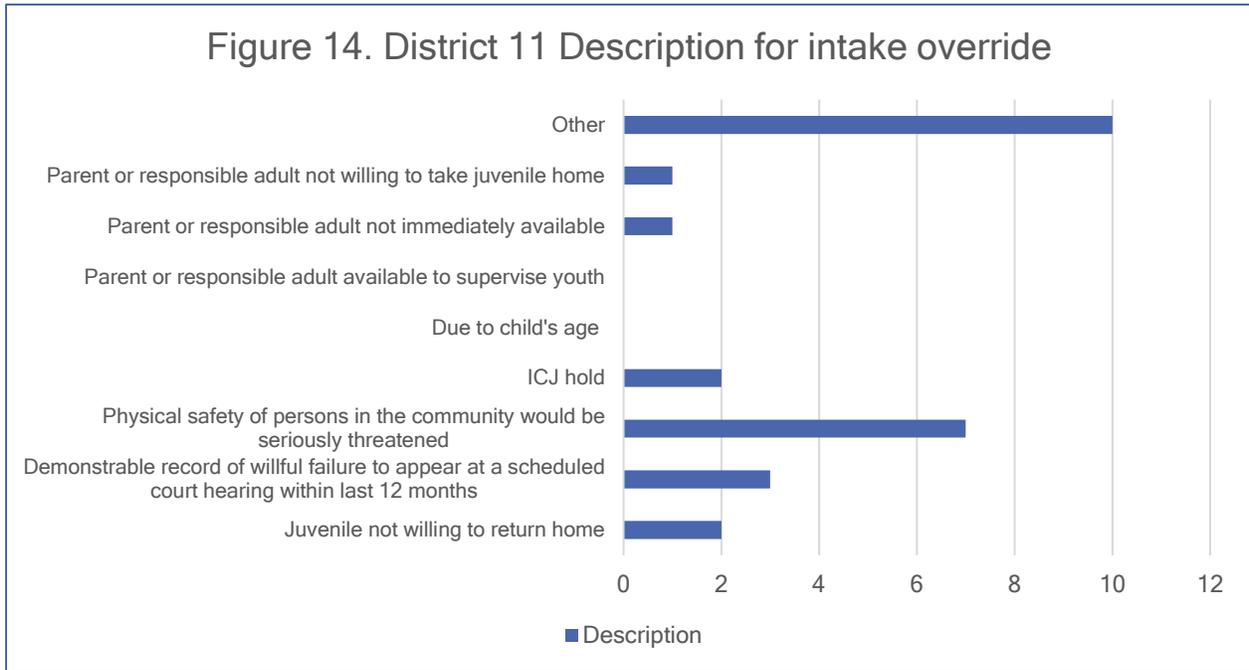
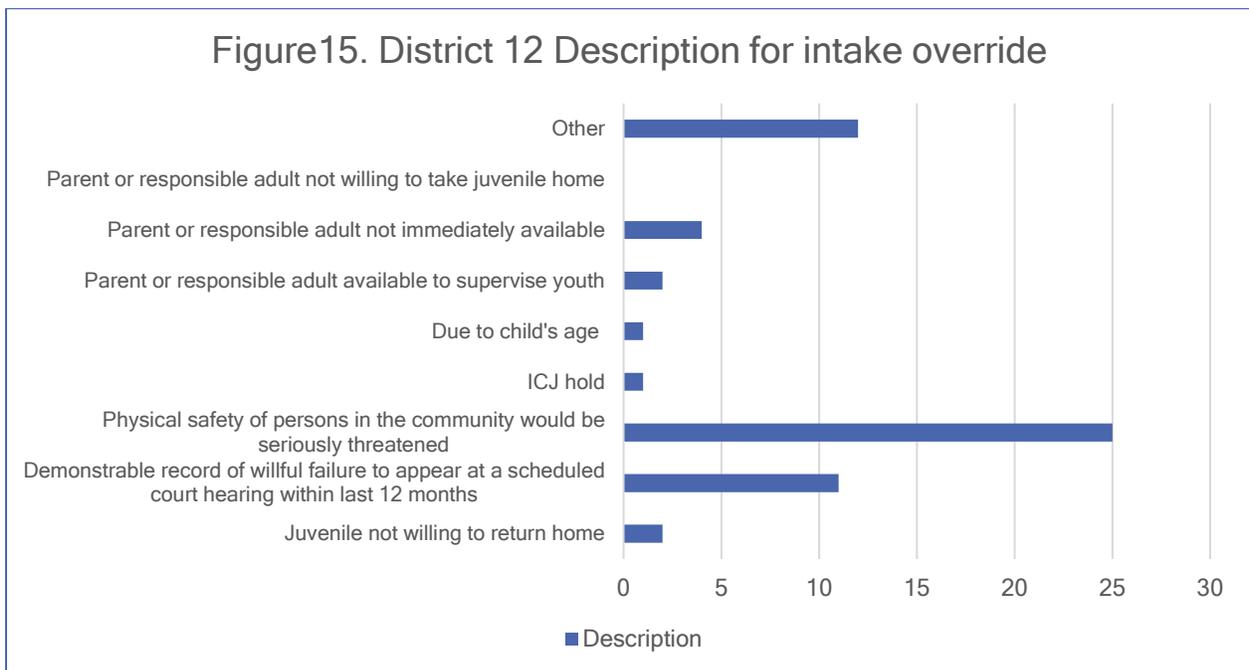


Figure 15. District 12 Description for intake override



For the 26 cases that were categorized as “other”, each example was uniquely described (see table 13 below). It is important to note that some of the reasons provided by probation staff for altering the intake decision from detain to release included weather conditions, the unavailability of a secure placement bed, or that no law enforcement officers were available to transport the youth to a facility.

<b>Table 13.Override other reasons included:</b>
Parents want her home but know she will take off
For placement at Madison
Court order minor to be placed in shelter upon pic
Located out of district 11 CYC previously in place
Weather conditions
Secure placement was not available
Detention order issued by County judge
HHS placement/Foster home
Flight risk
Mental capacity to adjust.
No staff secure beds available
Mental Health
Flight risk, unsafe behaviors, uncontrollable
Law enforcement could not transport
Secure facilities are full
Juvenile is possible risk to self
Reception
Active warrant indicates secure detention
Scottsbluff has contract with Natrona County JDC
Unable to find available beds in detention/shelter
Youth placed on alternative to detention



## Part II – Stakeholder Perceptions

- Areas of Consensus – Shared Vision
- Perceived Strengths of the System
- Services Currently Available in Districts 11 and 12
  - Mental Health Services
  - Family Support Services
  - Out-of-Home Placements / Alternatives to Detention
  - Additional Areas of Need
- Resources that Should be Locally/Regionally Accessible
- Informal Supports in Districts 11 and 12
- Detention / Juvenile Intake
- Juvenile Intake Overrides

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## Areas of Consensus – Shared Vision

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Requests for interviews were made to all County Court Judges in Districts 11 and 12. Nine out of 10 judges were interviewed; all nine were interviewed in person in their offices in their judicial districts. Requests for interviews were also made to all county attorneys and probation officers in Districts 11 and 12. Five county attorneys were interviewed through Zoom and thirteen probation officers were interviewed either in person or through Zoom.

Each of the stakeholders were asked about their philosophy regarding juveniles in the court system as well as the purpose of juvenile probation. (Select quotes are provided in bold.) Stakeholders were unified in their responses to these two questions in that they identified rehabilitation as the purpose, but many also saw rehabilitation as their personal philosophy.

**Juvenile courts are designed to be a problem-solving court so my philosophy is to try and do what I can do to solve the problem...figuring out what services are going to keep this kid from transitioning into being an adult criminal – County Attorney**

Stakeholders also stressed that while rehabilitation is the primary function of the juvenile court, the safety of the community is another important focus. Many stakeholders described the need to keep the youth safe in the community but also to be concerned with keeping the community safe, sometimes from the youth in juvenile probation.

**To help make things better for the child ... but also in terms of that rehabilitation also includes making them accountable for what they've done, and keeping the community safe at the same time - Judge**

It should be noted that not only were stakeholders committed to rehabilitation as their primary goal, but they were also committed to building relationships with youth and their families and partnering in the best interests of the youth.

**I really believe in trying to create some kind of relationship with these kids – Judge**

**I guess for me I would say building relationships with the kids is like our # 1 philosophy to get kids to do anything. I think we really struggle if we can't find some type of . . . middle ground with some of them – Probation Officer**

**My philosophy of juvenile court is rehabilitative, which is in line with the statute. I adhere to that in my personal philosophy as well, but that's the whole purpose of juvenile court, is to intervene and put services in place for kids so that you don't see them in the adult criminal justice system - Judge**

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## Perceived Strengths of the System

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When asked to identify the strengths of the juvenile justice system in their jurisdictions, stakeholder responses aligned with three key themes:

1. Stakeholders respected their colleagues across the system and appreciated the dedication and commitment of probation officers, judges, county attorneys, and service providers.

**Our probation is engaged, and they do care** – County Attorney

**We have really good attorneys out here that are really dedicated and do a really good job**  
– Judge

**We've got good probation officers that do a good job supervising the kids** – Judge

**I like our judges, and I think the majority of them trust our judgment and the work we're doing... I feel like we're pretty well supported by them** – Probation

**My judge is amazing. I feel very good about going and being able to talk to him** – Probation

**When we go into court we can look at each other – defense, county attorney, and everybody, and say "what's the plan, how are we going to help this youth and this family?" Then we all come together** – Probation

**Judge [redacted]...a superior judge and they know juveniles** – County Attorney

2. In counties where diversion programs are available, they are well administered and effectively reduce the caseload for probation and the juvenile court.

Diversion was viewed as a necessary and helpful service in Districts 11 and 12. One judge reported **"I think juvenile diversion is being utilized a lot. The County Attorney's Office does utilize that service a lot, and I think that's a really good service"**, while another commented:

**Speaking of diversion] I think the strengths of the system is when we can keep them out of it from the get-go.** – Judge

**... we have a very good diversion program. Three of the counties. . . have teamed up so they have a diversion coordinator for the lower things, where I don't really need to see the person ... they're not going to get a lot out of coming to court, but they can go through [programming] and get everything out of it I would have possibly ordered and we never see them again so that has been a big positive** - Judge

Diversion success rates are high in Nebraska ranging from 76.2% to 80.3% for youth between the ages of 11 and 18. However, it is important to note that three counties in District 12 do not operate diversion programs.

3. Rural communities are close-knit, aware of system involved families and their needs, and willing to support one another.

**One of the strengths is that we have a lot of people in these communities that really care about kids and work hard to trying to make things better for kids – Judge**

**We are community-focused – Probation**

**But then we're also mentors and teachers and caseworkers and counselors and social workers, like all rolled into one, assisting the juvenile in their family – Probation Officer**

Finally, it must be acknowledged that some stakeholders were less complimentary when it came to identifying the strengths of the system, signaling issues with service availability and delivery:

**Well, there are absolutely zero strengths in [redacted] county – Judge**

**Boy, that's hard...it's really hard to know what the strengths of the system are – Judge**

**Hmmm...that's difficult for me. I don't think the system works very well – Probation**

**I think the system could use a big overhaul - Probation**



## Services Currently Available in Districts 11 and 12

This research utilized the Juvenile Services Probation Catalog (2024) to capture the range of services available in Nebraska. Service needs and barriers to service were assessed through interviews with stakeholders in Districts 11 and 12. County Court Judges, Probation Officers, and County Attorneys were interviewed. Specifically, stakeholders were asked about the needs of system-involved juveniles in their jurisdictions and to identify which services would be the best fit for meeting those needs. Stakeholders were also asked to comment on whether the services being discussed were readily available for youth in their counties, and if not, whether they should be made locally or regionally accessible.

When asked which services were the best fit for youth in the counties they served, some stakeholders expressed frustration, largely stemming from a lack of service options that are available to them. One Judge sighed and responded, **“I don’t know what the best fit is”**, while another replied that they did not even know which services were supposed to exist and thus couldn’t assign them. Yet another judge commented. **“We don’t have enough services out here. Period. Across the board.”** This sentiment was supported by a County Attorney, who replied **“We’ve only got so much out here in the sticks that we have to work with.”**

Keeping those concerns in mind, stakeholders’ perceptions regarding services that are available to them, or should be available to them, are presented in the following section.

The discussion begins with three services to which access is seriously impeded: mental health services, family support services, and out-of-home placements up to and including psychiatric residential treatment.



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## Mental Health Services

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Judges unanimously listed mental health services and substance abuse treatment as a critical need in Districts 11 and 12. As one judge stated:

**First and foremost, [we need] therapy... therapeutic intervention. First and foremost is that. And that's for mental health and substance abuse or dual diagnosis, therapeutic intervention.** – Judge

Probation staff and county attorneys strongly agreed, citing a high-level need among the youth they serve:

**We have a drug problem, and we don't have enough chemical dependency evaluators. I think we have a trauma problem, and we don't have enough trauma-based therapists.**

– County Attorney

**It's about rehabilitation and treatment without having the people necessary to treat and rehabilitate.** - County Attorney

### DISTRICT 11

Currently, access to mental health services is limited in Districts 11 and 12. District 11 is served by Region II Human Services in Lexington, McCook, North Platte, and Ogallala. Services administered through Region II include juvenile assessment services, substance abuse evaluations, and outpatient therapy. Region II accepts juvenile clients who are diagnosed with serious emotional disturbances (as eligibility is determined by their staff).

In addition to Region II Human Services, private providers (registered with probation) offer the following services to youth:

**McCook** has three private practices which offer mental health outpatient services for mental health issues and substance abuse disorders (one clinic is only registered for treatment related to substance abuse disorders). One of the providers in McCook can also deliver trauma therapy services.

**North Platte** has five private practices, three of which offer pre-treatment assessments and psychological evaluations, and all of which offer out-patient counseling. One provider provides eye-movement desensitization reprocessing (EMDR), cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), and dialectical behavioral therapy (DBT). Two providers offer trauma-focused behavioral therapy and child-parent psychotherapy. Finally, one provider offers treatment for children and adolescents who sexually harm.

**Lexington** has two private practitioners who offer mental health and substance abuse counseling, one of whom is also certified in EMDR. Interpreters are available through this service. Youth in Dawson County also have access to a private practitioner in Kearney, 40 minutes away, who offers pre-treatment assessments, psychological evaluations, and out-patient counseling. This practitioner also offers bilingual services.

No services are located in these District 11 counties:

- Hooker County
- Thomas County
- Arthur County
- McPherson County
- Logan County
- Chase County
- Hayes County
- Frontier County
- Gosper County
- Furnas County
- Dundy County
- Hitchcock County

Mental health services in District 11 are clustered on the eastern side of the district, in McCook, North Platte, and Lexington. The majority of counties in District 11 do not have any mental health services. A list of counties providing no mental health services is presented in the box to the left.

While providers in District 11 offer services to youth living in neighboring counties, youth in other areas of the district may have to travel to access mental health therapies. For example, youth living in Beaver City, Benkelman, Imperial, Thedford and Mullen must travel approximately one hour each direction. As will be discussed later in this narrative, accessibility of services is a barrier for many rural youths.

## DISTRICT 12

District 12 is served by Region 1 Behavioral Health Authority. In addition, private providers (registered with probation) offer the following services to youth:

**Scottsbluff** has seven mental health practices. All seven offices offer mental health counseling, treatment for substance abuse disorders, assessments, and evaluations, and four practices will offer family counseling (one provider offers telehealth services). One of the practitioners provides only substance abuse evaluations for youth over the age of 16, while another specializes in youth who sexually offend. Intensive outpatient therapy is offered by that therapist for youth who sexually offend. Cirrus House in Scottsbluff provides independent living with a capacity of nine, along with outpatient therapy. Community Action Partnership of Western Nebraska (CAPWN), located in Gering, provides shelter care, group home A, and independent living. They have ten beds for probation and DHHS.

**Gering** has two sole practitioners who specialize in substance abuse evaluation and therapy.

**Chadron** has one practitioner who offers youth counseling and evaluations for substance abuse.

**Alliance** has one practitioner who offers youth counseling along with family counseling.

Services in District 12 are heavily concentrated in and near Scottsbluff. Outside of that area, Chadron and Alliance each have one mental health practitioner. This leaves most of the district underserved. A list of counties providing no mental health services is presented in the box to the right. Youth living outside the communities housing services face a commute. For example, a youth living in Kimball may travel 45 minutes each way for counseling, while a youth from Oshkosh may travel 1 hour and 15 minutes each way for services.

No services are located in these District 12 counties:

- Sioux County
- Sheridan County
- Garden County
- Morrill County
- Banner County
- Kimball County
- Cheyenne County
- Grant County
- Deuel County

Judges and probation officers in both districts talked about the frustration in being able to have youth evaluated in a timely fashion, and then being unable to match the youth with the services recommended. Stakeholders noted:

**[The] greatest need is more providers, more mental health, more substance abuse, we have not enough and [there are] long waitlists – Probation**

**[Referencing assessments]and at some point, they'll get done – Judge**

**Mental health services are terrible – Probation**

**I would say our mental health resources are horrible here. They're very limited and I think we have a lot of kids who do struggle with mental health aspects more than we have the resources for - Probation**

Depending on the community, the level of care needed, and the quality of care available, waiting times for system-involved youth are lengthy, ranging from two weeks to twelve weeks. One judge estimates an average wait time of four weeks for counseling services, at best. This view is shared by probation staff and county attorneys as well:

**[Assessments] may take 30, 45 days... then try to find someone who can do the therapy - Judge**

**[We need] a therapist that can get started right away .... that's the thing, the most important piece of any of these cases doesn't happen until well into the case – Judge**

**If I order counseling, I want that kid to go this week, or next week. It's usually a month, but because of a waiting list. I can understand with the evaluations that takes time, two to four weeks, reasonable. Sixty to ninety days is not, and that's what we're generally getting. – Judge**

Services required include a broad range of treatments. Access to trauma-informed care is also extremely limited. One judge noted that it is possible to have a youth assessed, but there is only one provider in District 11 and there are no providers in District 12 specializing in trauma that the youth can be referred to:

**And you know we can do those trauma assessments and what not. But then we don't really have anybody to send them to that are trauma-informed counselors in the area. So, we have good counselors, but not that are ... trained on that particular type**

of area. Now, do they do that kind of work, do they do those discussions? Probably yes, but are they technically trained with that particular focus? I don't believe so - Judge.

**More beds in the crisis stabilization. We need MDT and EMDR – they are recommended for kids with out of home placements in Lincoln, but we can't deliver the services here when they come back – Probation** *\*note that these services are not available in District 12*

**[Medication management]... it's really hard to get them in... so it's hard to have consistency with the meds” - Probation**

Stakeholders also expressed mixed feelings about telehealth services:

**I'm not a huge fan of telehealth. I think that it's better than nothing, but I don't think it's great. And I think that's been really pushed as a solution for rural kids and I think it's a substandard level of care compared to in-person which is more accessible in other parts of the state - County Attorney**

**Even for the therapists I've talked to, they don't like telehealth as much... unless there's like a really good dynamic or with the provider it's not as successful – County Attorney**



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## Family Support Services

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In discussing their approaches to juvenile justice, judges, county attorneys, and probation officers advocated for a holistic approach and universally identified families as being in need of services, rather than youth alone. In fact, many felt that rehabilitation could not be truly successful without family-level interventions:

**Work with the parents... that is the number one problem with cases that become problematic, in that they're protracted, there's not a lot of rehabilitation. There's not a lot of improvement –**  
Judge

**We need healthier families – family support therapy, more psychiatrists, more out of home placements like group homes –** Judge

**[We need] plans to strengthen families, perhaps start with meal planning, nutrition and also time together. Also, the ability to offer emergency aid to a family, like fixing a car tire to keep them out of crisis. The generational issues are significant. They see the same core group of people over and over. No jobs to bring people out of poverty –** Judge

**Parenting support is a huge need –** Probation

**[We need more] work with the parents -** Judge

Ten years ago, in 2015, the state of Nebraska embarked on its Juvenile Justice Home-Based Initiative. This effort was designed to keep youth who are not a danger to themselves or the community out of residential placements and in their homes and communities. As a result of this initiative, there are three forms of family support services offered in Nebraska: Multisystemic Therapy (MST), Family Functional Therapy (FFT) and the Boys Town Model (formerly known as the EIHFT model in the Evidence-Based Practice Clearinghouse). MST is widely considered the most robust and effective of the three programs in terms of evidence-based impacts on recidivism, followed by FFT.

Neither District 11 or 12 has access to Multisystemic Therapy (MST), which is a targeted in-home therapeutic intervention for youth who are between the ages of 12 and 18 and who have a history of aggression, violence and antisocial behavior. MST requires a practitioner with a master's degree, which means it has been easier in the larger urban areas of the state to staff programs. The rural nature of Districts 11 and 12, coupled with the lack of qualified providers, make sustaining MST and FFT impossible at this point in time. Currently, these services are available in Grand Island, Norfolk, Lincoln, and Omaha, placing them hours away from youth living in Western Nebraska and their families.

In District 11, Boys Town In-Home Family services (centered in North Platte) serves most of the jurisdiction. In District 12, Boys Town In-Home Family Services (centered in Scottsbluff) also serves most of the jurisdiction. In the Terraluna Collaborative report (2022), stakeholders specifically commented on the role that geography played in the rollout of these services:

*So MST we're really looking at for the larger urban areas. And then Functional Family therapy is being like, well in some of the rural parts where they couldn't necessarily sustain the covered team needed for MST, [they could] replicate it...and Boys Town was even interested in having an MST program through Boys Town so they just kind of got brought into the mix as a third option for the rural, rural areas (2017, p. 35).*

In line with the view that family well-being is central to youth success, when stakeholders were asked to identify their most critical service needs, family support emerged as an important intervention:

**[The services] I think would be best we don't currently have – Intensive Family Preservation (IFP), which I know is not traditionally a probation service, is something we've been lacking specifically – Probation**

**Family in-home services, Boys Town ...there is a shortage in these services, we need more – Judge**

**Boys Town and yes, I order it – Judge**

**More IFP would be nice - Probation**

**We are lacking ... in home family services, community youth coaching - Probation**

**I do want to say this... we have excellent family support workers. We have some really good ones that get really, really connected with the kids and the families, and they really get comfortable with them - Judge.**

**[We need] more options for, you know, family preservation, in home counseling, family therapy type of stuff – County Attorney**

**The saying I like to say is, "It's not reasonable efforts, it's reasonable efforts where you're located." Because they're not the same. Kearney has more access to things than I do. If I order intensive family preservation, it should be able to go in the home immediately... I've got a family in crisis that needs them now. Two or three weeks, it may be too late. - Judge**



## Out-of-Home Placements / Alternatives to Detention

Stakeholders identified out-of-home placements as a critical need in Districts 11 and 12. As one Judge succinctly stated, **“We have zero out-of-home placements.”** Another judge agreed, explaining that **“some youth can’t remain in the home, but don’t need detention.”**

Out-of-home placements described by stakeholders as critical needs include:

- Alternatives to Detention - Crisis Stabilization (30 days or less)
- Alternatives to Detention - Shelter care (30 days or less)
- Alternative to Detention – Emergency Professional Foster Care (EPFC)
- Group Homes A and B
- Therapeutic Group Home (ThG)
- Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTF)
- *\*Detention will be discussed in a later section of this report.*

**Crisis stabilization placements** are designed as short-term out-of-home placements which allow youth and their family time and space to return to a stable and safe level of functioning. These facilities house youth for (typically) a week or less and allow the youth to remain in the community and close to family and other supports. There is one crisis stabilization resource in District 12 which is registered as a Group Home A and maintains limited placement for crisis stabilization. It has a capacity of twenty youth, though not all those spaces are designed for crisis stabilization. There are no facilities in District 11 which offer short-term crisis stabilization. As with other services that have been discussed, transportation to and from the facility remains problematic, and visits from family are often limited due to travel distance.

**Shelter care** is also a short-term residential option. Shelter care serves youth who require an immediate out-of-home placement, generally because of safety concerns in the home. There are two shelter care facilities in District 11 (Maxwell and North Platte), and one shelter care facility in District 12 (Scottsbluff).

**Emergency Professional Foster Care (EPFC)** offers professional care in a family setting. These placements serve to stabilize youth and prepare them for a community-placement after detention. EPFC is not available outside of Omaha.

**Foster Care (FC)** are family placements with families that are licensed by the Department of Health and Human Services. Placements generally range from 6 to 8 months. There are no licensed and registered providers in District 11. North Platte has one licensed agency, but it is not registered with probation. District 12 has one licensed and registered provider in Scottsbluff, who maintains 29 beds for youth in abuse and neglect cases. Probation has contracted this provider to provide beds to youth in need of foster care placement.

**Group Homes A and B** Group Homes A (GH A) are residential facilities which are not run by families, but rather by staff who are on duty (and awake) 24 hours per day. They provide a higher level of security than foster care placements. Group Homes B (GH B) are also residential facilities; however, staff are not required to be awake overnight and there is a slightly lower level of security for this reason. Both Group Home settings are meant to house youth for up to six months. North Platte maintains a Group Home A

facility in District 11 for males only, with a capacity of 12. District 12 has one Group Home A facility in Minatare, with a capacity of 20, however, some of those beds are reserved for Crisis Stabilization. There are no Group Home B facilities in District 11 or 12.

**Therapeutic Group Homes (ThG)** are meant to provide a congregate environment for youth who require residential treatment and security. Ideally, therapeutic group homes are located strategically to allow a youth to maintain a connection to their community and family supports, while providing rehabilitation and treatment services. Youth generally stay in Therapeutic Group Homes for 4 to 6 months. There is one Therapeutic Group Home in Nebraska, and it is in Lincoln. There are no Therapeutic Group Homes in District 11 or 12.

**Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facilities (PRTFs)** provide 24-hour a day inpatient psychiatric care for youth who require close supervision. PRTF placements occur when they are deemed medically necessary for the safety of the youth. Currently, the only PRTF facilities in Nebraska are in Lincoln and Omaha. Transportation times (one-way) range from 2.5 hours (Lexington) to 3.5 hours (McCook) to 6 hours (Scottsbluff) and nearly 7 hours (Chadron).



Stakeholders universally agreed that the services listed above are critically needed in their jurisdictions.

### **Crisis stabilization:**

**[We need] short-term crisis stabilization – Probation**

**We have a crisis facility with two beds, but it is usually filled with kids from other parts of the state – Probation**

**For years I've thought we needed some place to go with the youth here, regionally or locally, I don't care. As a cooling off period of 48 hours because we don't have anything. We're taking them to Madison.... There's nothing locally and there used to be – Probation**

**In Scottsbluff there is a youth shelter. Usually that is pretty full with Scottsbluff kids, but if we had more shelter places, just for the short term. You know, for leveling off of whatever is going on with the kid, you know, it's a situation where they actually need to be removed from the community just to have a more local place to have them placed with – Judge**

### **Foster care and group home placements**

**We don't have any real foster placements. I mean, we're lucky if we can get a family member that lives close by. We have a lot of kids who have to be placed a long way away just because that's the closest placement available. I mean they may be 100 miles away – Judge**

**So that's one of the biggest issues that we have. We don't have any foster homes for youth here. None. Zero. So yeah. So that's our difference – Judge**

**I know that I called and vented to another judge...I had three weeks in a row, three different kids, where I had a juvenile with an evaluation that recommended an out of home placement and probation said "there's just no place for them to go, so we'll just send them home.....maybe a group home will open up later" – Judge**

**The probation officers like (redacted) are very genuine. And (they've) tried really tried to help the kids, so it's certainly like if you're hearing complaints about lack of services, it's not the local probation officer's fault – Judge**

...and I've been saying this for a long time. We need foster homes even for youth, because one of the things that we have consistently said in this district for a long time is that if a youth can't maintain at home, sometimes it's because of issues with their parents, or lack of supervision, or any number of factors where they just can't maintain at home safely. We've had several recently where they just really have horrific conflicts with their parents, and they might maintain really well in a foster home, but we don't have any middle ground. We have to either leave them in that home where they are getting absolutely physical with that parent, or we put them in a shelter, or group home placement. There's no in between. But if I had foster homes available where they could stay in the community, stay in their school, stay in it and work some family counseling with the parent, and actually we could fix whatever this relationship is without that constant tension of being in the home, then we could start trying to fix it and work on it. But the closest foster home I've got is probably Lincoln or Omaha. So how do I do that? - Judge

Stakeholders not only identify out-of-home placements as a critical need but also make it clear that those services should be locally, or at the very least, regionally accessible. With family conflict a common driver of delinquent behavior, judges perceived continued contact with family as important to treatment and rehabilitation. As one judge expressed, **“how can you work on that relationship when you are 250 miles apart?”**

**Our kids in detention have to go across the state, hours away, so they can't see their parents.... One of the probation supervisors said “Well, on a positive note, we've had two new detention beds open in Iowa” - Judge**

**And like I said then, that takes them out of their school, takes them away from their friends, their extended family. And how do you start working fixing that relationship with their parents to get them back in the home and put things back together if they are 250 miles apart? - Judge**

**He sat in detention for over 90 days. Nobody could find a place to put him, so I ordered him to the local Holiday Inn with 24/7 family support and within five days they had a place for him – Judge**

**We were promised the world, and nothing's really come to fruition that way. We have a group home here and we have a shelter bed here or two, other than that we have nothing - County Attorney**

Stakeholders identified beds for youth in Psychiatric Rehabilitation and Treatment Facilities (PRTF) as a particularly acute need:

**I think it's crisis. I think it's the worst I've ever seen it. When you have a 12 to 14 week wait to get a kid into a PTRF and you have to send them home and just hope in that next 12 weeks and nothing horrific happens, it's crisis - Judge**

**Mental health, aggression, things like that... and so, they have been recommended in psychological evaluations for the highest level of care. Psychiatric residential treatment, level of care, and we can't get them in one because nobody will accept them because of their behaviors. This we see all the time. All the time – Judge**

That you have kids with the highest needs, and so the facilities that are supposed to be there. . . treating these, well, kids, will not accept them because they've got bad behaviors, and so we've exhausted all the in-state facilities. Now we're going to all the out-of-state facilities, and they're all not accepting the child... I mean its heartbreaking, . . . or the kids will finally get the treatment after waiting a long time, and then they'll have some sort of aggressive behavior in treatment, and so then, they boot him out because they're privately run facilities, they can do that. So, here we are, and families are beyond frustrated if they're trying to get their child help, and we're beyond frustrated because we can't get children with the highest-level needs help or placements. ... I'm seeing them more and more all the time... it's not rare - Judge

If [psychiatric evaluations] take too long and you know, to have kids sitting in you know Madison waiting for a PRTF for 45 days it's not good, obviously. You know, so we're, we're battling with the very few PRTFs we have here and where we still actually have a whole year to work with those kids but none of the others that we use will take them. - Judge

And it's frustrating for judges. It's, I know I've talked to some of my colleagues. I know they're frustrated by it as well. It's frustrating for probation. It's frustrating for us. It's frustrating for the parents. It's frustrating for the kids. It's frustrating for law enforcement. I had one kid where we couldn't find a place to take him, and in a month he racked up 45 charges. Like law enforcement was going to his . . . he was being raised by his grandma . . . like sometimes multiple times a day for assaultive behavior, like threatening to kill her, and like they're, "Well, he's only 12, there's no place we can put him." And I'm like, "Well, I hope he doesn't kill his grandma between now, and by the time you get him somewhere." Even not intentionally harming her because he would just explode. And that's a really terrible feeling to think, you know, leave a hearing and be like, well, I hope that kid doesn't accidentally or intentionally kill the grandma. Yeah, but you can't do anything about it because of their age, or there's no placements, or they're violent, and nobody will take them. - Judge



There was a big push to do everything on a community basis. But when you're a small rural community you don't have them. And so, you have kids that are higher need and like when you have the kid that has to wait, is on a waiting list for a PTRF for 12 weeks and you have no place . . . and you don't have the treatment ability to maintain them safely, or in the community. So then what are the likelihoods that they're going to run? What are they going to be like? Are they going to be worse when they get there? Are they going to overdose between now and then? Are they going to pick up eight new criminal charges between now and then? I don't think it should have to wait three months to get a treatment bed. Then, by the time you get to the point where you're going to remove them from home, they've already . . . you've exhausted all of your community resources, at that point, because that's required by statute, is you have to exhaust all your community resources, and then you've exhausted them. And then by the time you find the bed and it's a 12 week wait then you're just prolonging them getting any services. You're keeping them in the system longer, and the other thing is, I think a lot of the treatment providers are not equipped, or not willing, to handle really high needs children, or delinquent youth. Because if they've got any kind of an aggressive background, or any kind of an assaultive background, it is incredibly difficult to find placements for them, and so instead you're told, "We just don't have a place for them." So, we have children that have highly aggressive characteristics, they're assaultive, they're verbally abusive, a number of things like that. They're aggressive towards like adult peers, and then we can't find a treatment bed for them, detentions, or group, or shelters can't take them because they're so aggressive, and then probation will come to court and say, "We have no other options you need to send them home." So, they're being rewarded basically for being aggressive and being combative -

Judge

**And we're in a position now where there's such a shortage of placements and treatment available that the answer is, "Well, nobody wants them just send them home." And you're not doing anything at that point. You're doing nothing. And half the time you're putting it back in the home where the home doesn't want, . . . the parents don't want them, and can't control them. And they will be very vocal about the fact that they don't want them and can't control them. And then you're like, "Well, too bad. Here's your kid back." And it's not great – Judge**

**Usually, you see that criteria for PRTF, but they're still like "let's try counseling.... Let's try counseling... It's one of those barriers that just gets worse as you get into the smaller towns"**

– Probation

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## Additional Areas of Need

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In addition to the three services identified as critical, stakeholders also identified the following as needs in their jurisdictions:

### REENTRY/TRANSITION SERVICES

Stakeholders recognize that reentry services are vital for youth who are returning to the community following out-of-home placement.

**I've had so many kids who have gone to PRTF treatments, and they shine... you know, it's wonderful. There's this transformation and then they're back in the home they came out of and no more than 90 days and they're right back where they started – Judge**

Probation staff also agreed that reentry programming is vital, arguing that counseling and medication management services must continue after release. Barriers to access for youth and their families include cost, transportation, and wait-time to connect with licensed providers.

**You go from 24/7 care to back in the community with really no structure... as soon as they're back its kind of you're back to Square 1, almost. - Probation**

Along with programs to help youth who age out of the system transition to independent living. Several staff specifically mentioned “Bridge to Independence” as a model.

### MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

A consistent perspective was that youth would benefit from mentorship programs. In counties where mentoring is delivered through the public schools, youth who are system-involved may be excluded from participation. As one judge summarized “**some of the kids that could really use mentors the most aren't getting them.**” Judges familiar with the Thrive Mentorship program expressed a desire to see that program expand into their jurisdictions.

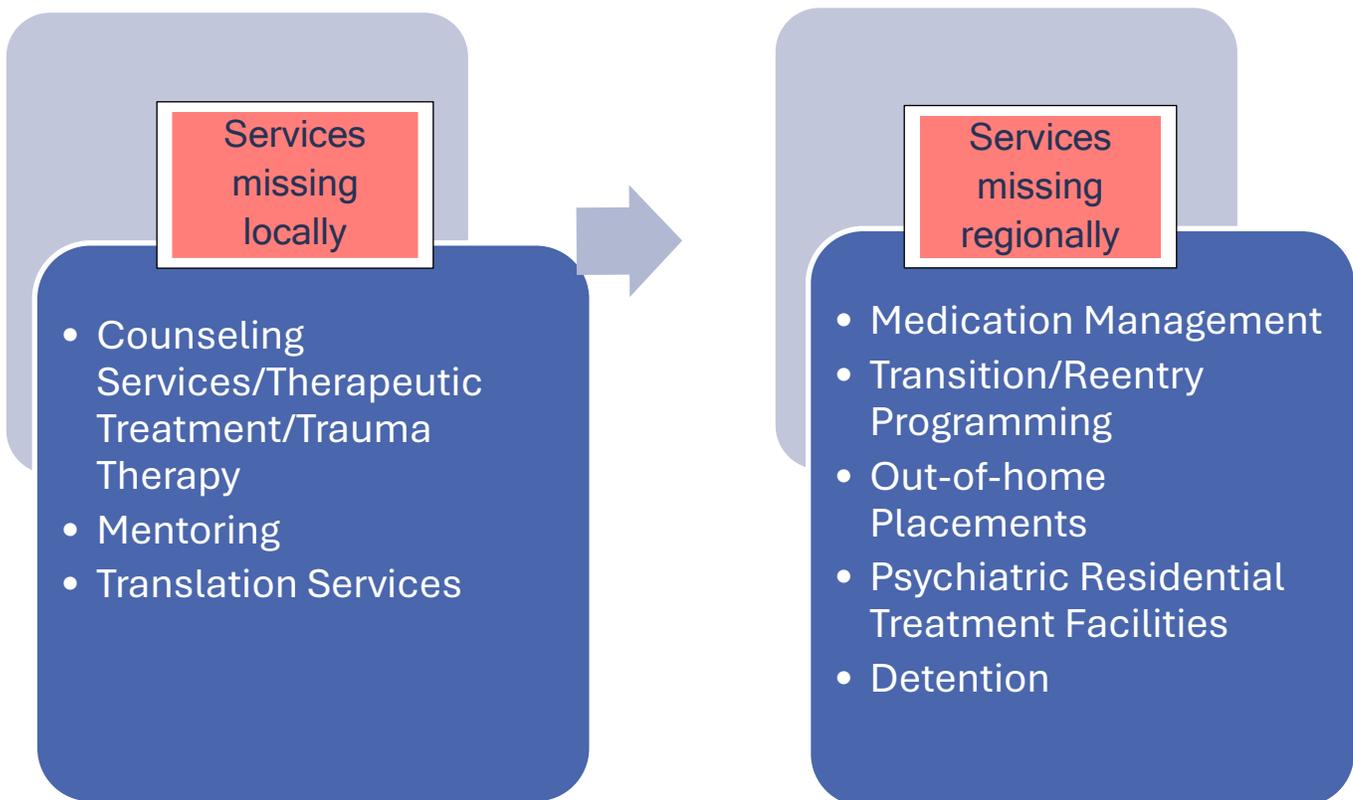
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## Resources that Should be Locally/Regionally Accessible

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Stakeholders in Districts 11 and 12 shared their frustrations with a lack of ready access to services. Figure 16 below indicates services missing both locally and regionally by stakeholders during their interviews:

**Figure 16. Services missing in Districts 11 and 12**



Stakeholder perceptions are supported by data. Based on information provided by the Juvenile Probation Services Division and described below in Table 14, the pink boxes in the tables below indicate services not available in each of Districts 11 and 12. The yellow boxes indicate the services provided only through Telehealth.

<b>Table 14. Services Available and Not Available in Districts 11 and 12.</b>			
<b>Treatment Services</b>	D11	D12	
Acute Inpatient Hospitalization		Yes	
Community Treatment Aid (CTA)			
Co-occurring Evaluation	Yes	Yes	
Day Treatment			
Enhanced Mental Health Evaluation	Yes	Yes	
Functional Family Therapy			
Intensive Outpatient Counseling (IOP)		Yes	
Juveniles Who Sexually Harm Risk Evaluation	Yes	Yes	
Medication Management	TH	TH	
Mental Health Outpatient Counseling (Individual/Group/Family)	Yes	Yes	
Multisystemic Therapy (MST)			
Partial Hospitalization			
Psychiatric Evaluation	TH	TH	
Psychiatric Residential Treatment Facility (PRTF)			
Psychological Evaluation	Yes	Yes	
Substance Use Addendum	Yes	Yes	
Substance Use Evaluation	Yes	Yes	
Substance Use Outpatient Counseling (Individual/Group/Family)	Yes	Yes	
Substance Use Partial Care			
*TH – Telehealth			
<b>Out-of-Home Placements</b>	D11	D12	
Agency Supported Foster Care	Yes	Yes	
Crisis Stabilization		Yes	
Group Home A	Yes	Yes	
Group Home B			
Independent Living		Yes	
Maternity Group Home Parenting			
Shelter Care	Yes	Yes	
Detention			
Kinship Placements	Yes	Yes	
<b>Non-Treatment Services</b>	D11	D12	
Case Managed Tutoring	Yes		
General Education Class			
Boys Town in-Home Family Service	Yes	Yes	
Day and Evening Reporting	Yes	Yes	
Expedited Family Group Conference	Yes	Yes	
Family Support	Yes	Yes	
Intensive Family Preservation	Yes	Yes	
Justice Wraparound Program	Yes		
Employment Placement			
Mediation	Yes	Yes	
Transportation	Yes	Yes	
Community Youth Coach	Yes	Yes	
<b>Supportive Services</b>	D11	D12	
Continuous Alcohol Monitoring (CAM)	Yes	Yes	
Electronic Monitoring	Yes	Yes	

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## Informal Supports in Districts 11 and 12

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To gauge the availability of informal community support systems for youth, judges, probation officers and county attorneys were asked “Are there informal supports that exist in your counties that you can/do utilize for youth who come through your courtroom?”

The most common response from Judges (56%) was that “**no**” there are not informal supports available to youth in their communities to which they can refer the youth or their families. Judges referenced extended family as the most called upon informal support, but did not reference non-profit organizations in the community as being a dependable resource. This question spurred discussion as some stakeholders were unsure which services would be considered “informal” in nature. Other stakeholders noted that this was an area of weakness:

**[We probably have informal supports], but they aren’t strong. We have [agency names], but we haven’t seen super good success, specifically in the juvenile base - Probation**

When community resources were identified, the most referenced informal support by judges (44%) was the Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA) program. The Nebraska CASA network has 22 programs which serve 55 counties. There are five CASA programs operating in Districts 11 and 12, and all counties are covered, except for the northern portion of District 12: Sioux, Sheridan, Grant, Dawes, Box Butte, Morrill, and Banner. It is important to note that CASA is not designed to work with delinquent or status offending youth, rather as a support for children experiencing child abuse and neglect. Stakeholders who view CASA as a valuable support find it serves dually-involved youth well:

**We occasionally, and even in juvenile justice will appoint CASA’s which we’re not really supposed to, but we have, just because we've seen the need, and we've seen cases where, even though it's a juvenile justice case it’s more like a 3A abuse and neglect case so we have appointed CASA’s just because we needed those extra supports - Judge**

Stakeholders had mixed feelings about the role that public schools play in supporting youth and their families. In District 12, schools were not identified as cooperative partners by judges and county attorneys, while those in District 11 cited a variety of school-based programs as helpful, including programs designed for youth experiencing food insecurity. One judge found church-based programming as an asset, while another cautioned that faith-based programming may not be a helpful connection for some youth.

Finally, probation stakeholders found the Professional Partners Program operated through Region 1 to be a valuable resource for youth with a mental health diagnosis. According to Region 1 Behavioral Health Authority (2025):

*The purpose of the Professional Partner Program (PPP) is to assist families who have a child with severe emotional disturbance (SED) in accessing services for the family without having to either give up their child as a ward of the state or incur undue debt to cover such services.... The PPP team, chosen by the family, meets monthly to develop an individualized service plan based on the strengths and needs of the family. PPP promotes the least restrictive, least intrusive, developmentally appropriate, culturally competent interventions in accordance with the strengths and needs identified by the family and within the most normalized environment (Professional Partner Program section).*

One potentially powerful “informal” support is the family of the youth. However, family involvement in the rehabilitation of system-involved youth seems to be waning.

**[Parents] have said “there is nothing wrong with my parenting, my parenting is fine,” and declined the service. Then the youth come to me and says “my parents don’t know where I’m coming from” – Probation**

**I get a lot more pushback from the parents than I do the youth – Probation**

**Getting parents to do things like releases of information and stuff like that .... has become a very large barrier, because parents really don’t seem to want to engage too much anymore – Probation**

**The higher the YLS, the less family engagement we’re seeing and so our officers will spend hours and days trying to get families to comply or complete paperwork – Probation**

**[Redacted] has a kid right now where we asked the mom to try in-home family services. She goes “I have the skills. I don’t see why I need to do anything. It’s my kid who’s in trouble” – Probation.**

**Parents need to learn to be parents, and the parents need to be accountable - Probation**

**The parent may have their own mental health and trauma stuff going on. Or their own bad relationships that they’re involved in. But when we get 11, 12, 13-year-old kids and the parents don’t want to participate.... We have no leverage to get the parent involved – Probation**

## Detention / Juvenile Intake

There are two levels of juvenile detention services provided in Nebraska: Secure Detention and Staff Secure Detention. Detention centers are defined according to Nebraska statutes:

**Secure Detention:** (Nebraska § 43, 245) detention in a highly structured, residential, hardware-secure facility designed to restrict a juvenile's movement.

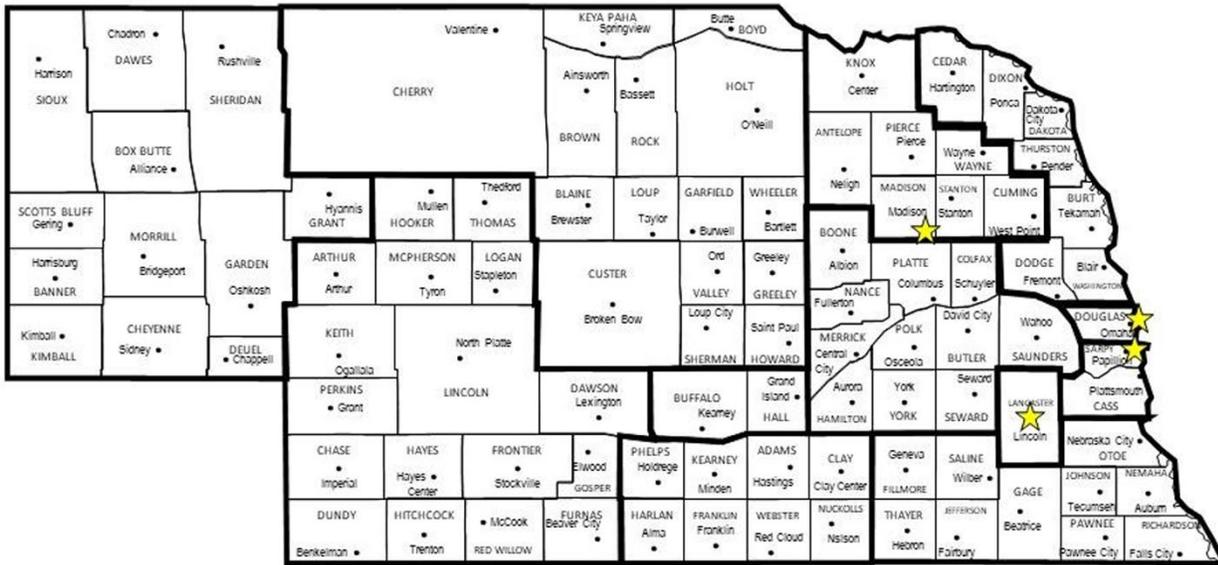
**Staff Secure Detention:** (Nebraska § 83-4, 125) a juvenile residential facility operated by a political subdivision (a) which does not include construction designed to physically restrict the movements and activities of juveniles who are in custody in the facility, (b) in which physical restriction of movement or activity of juveniles is provided solely through staff, (c) which may establish reasonable rules restricting ingress to and egress from the facility, and (d) in which the movements and activities of individual juvenile residents may, for treatment purposes, be restricted or subject to control through the use of intensive staff supervision. Staff secure juvenile facility does not include any institution operated by the department.

**Locations of Detention Centers:** Secure detention services are located in four Eastern Nebraska cities: Omaha (Douglas County), Lincoln (Lancaster County), Madison (Madison County), and Papillion (Sarpy County). In addition, the detention service in Madison is also a staff secure detention center (see Table 15 and Figure 17).

<b>Detention Center</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>City</b>	<b>County</b>	<b>Level of Service</b>
Douglas County Youth Center	1301 South 41 <sup>st</sup> St	Omaha	Douglas	Secure detention
Lancaster County Youth Services Center	1200 Radcliff St	Lincoln	Lancaster	Secure detention
Northeast Nebraska Juvenile Detention Center	1313 – ½ North Main St	Madison	Madison	Secure detention Staff secure detention
Sarpy County Juvenile Justice Center	9701 Portal Rd	Papillion	Sarpy	Staff Secure Detention



**Figure 17. Location of Nebraska Juvenile Detention**



Note. From *Juvenile Probation Services Catalog* by Administrative Office of Probation, 2024, p. 11.

Stakeholders in Districts 11 and 12 overwhelmingly agreed that the services of Nebraska juvenile detention centers were great distances from their districts in Western Nebraska. One County Attorney stated **[Transportation] is a huge issue.** -while another County Attorney commented **We've only got so much out here in the sticks that we have to work with.**

Travel to detention services are as great as 450 miles, or approximately 7 hours, one way, and in some cases, include time zone changes. Examples of distances and travel times between towns in Western Nebraska and detention services in Eastern Nebraska are listed in Table 16; however, distances and travel time may vary according to the route taken, e.g. interstate vs highways, and weather conditions.



**Table 16. Distances/Travel Time between Western Nebraska Towns and Eastern Nebraska Detention Services**

District	From	To	Approximate Distance	Approximate Time
District 11	Lexington (Dawson County)	Omaha	222 miles	3 hrs 10 mins
	McCook (Red Willow County)	Omaha	283 miles	4 hrs 15 mins
	Ogallala (Keith County)	Omaha	330 miles	4 hrs 37 mins
	Lexington (Dawson County)	Madison	179 miles	2 hrs 52 mins
	McCook (Red Willow County)	Madison	241 miles	3 hrs 57 mins
	Ogallala (Keith County)	Madison	270 miles	4 hrs 22 mins
District 12	Chadron (Dawes County)	Omaha	441 miles	7 hrs 5 mins
	Gering (Scotts Bluff County)	Omaha	450 miles	6 hrs 31 mins
	Alliance (Box Butte County)	Omaha	401 miles	6 hrs 26 mins
	Chadron (Dawes County)	Madison	334 miles	5 hrs 22 mins
	Gering (Scotts Bluff County)	Madison	366 miles	5 hrs 48 mins
	Alliance (Box Butte County)	Madison	313 miles	4 hrs 57 mins

Reference was made to previous services versus the current lack of local services.

**There's nothing locally and there used to be, and this is a long time ago, there was a hold over here where youth could go for 48 hours before they had court and we weren't taking them clear across the state to Lincoln, or whatever, Madison, or places like that –Probation Officer**

The removal of previous services, in addition to long distances, burdensome travel time, the cost of transportation, and combinations of these factors were clearly topics of concern and frustration to stakeholders.

**When they privatized, after they privatized, almost all of our group homes out here, none of them survived. Our detention beds did not survive and so we are put in a position where we don't have . . . you don't have placement. Privatization was incredibly detrimental to services, and service providers, and pretty much everything we had going in Western Nebraska. –Judge**

**So, law enforcement, I think at three in the morning when they have a youth and they're calling our intake officer. You know, then we have to get that youth, if we make a determination that youth needs to be placed somewhere, then law enforcement is responsible for transporting that youth. So, if we could have something . . . They had to take a youth clear to Iowa because there's no other place to put the youth. That seems ridiculous to me, when we drive right by YRTC in Kearney, that if they had a three-bed location then we could have a western service . . . --Probation Officer**

Stakeholders who expressed their concerns about the lack of detention services were also unanimous in their opinion regarding the need for a detention center located in Western Nebraska.

Interviewer: **Do you want the detention center to come back to this area?**

Respondent: **Oh yeah.** –Judge

Interviewer: **Do you believe there is enough need for a detention center in this area?**

Respondent: **I think there possibly could be. I think stuff we don't get called on now, like [redacted] Police Department will not call us unless somebody has been murdered essentially. When they see juvenile stuff they usually will turn the other way** - Probation

Respondent: **I think, Yeah, it would be really nice to have detention. We've definitely talked about that numerous times...** - Probation

Additionally, in response to the question:

Interviewer: **In an ideal world if you could have the services you needed what would that look like?**

Respondent: **We'd have shelter beds, we'd have detention beds, we would have all the evaluators and counselors we needed, we would have valid drug testing, we would have changing behaviors programming, right now** – County Attorney



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## Juvenile Intake Overrides

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As detailed by Rumbaugh and Rupe (202) in the Juvenile Probation Services Annual Report 2022, Nebraska Revised Statutes §43-250 and §43-260 authorize probation to manage the juvenile intake process. A standardized risk assessment administered to youth assists in determining the least restrictive but most appropriate detention decision for youth while simultaneously considering the safety of the community. In some situations, youth may have more than one intake.

While results of the intake instrument are used to determine specific interventions for youth, probation officers may authorize a higher or lower intervention depending on the risk to community. According to Rumbaugh et al., (2024) in the Juvenile Probation Services Annual Report 2023, 60% of Nebraska juvenile intakes were not overridden, although 25% were overridden to a higher level and 8% were overridden to a lower level. The results of the qualitative interview questions indicated very few overrides in Districts 11 and 12, which is consistent with the data for 2023 indicating that 75% of intakes were not overridden in Western Nebraska and 25% were. Data regarding intakes and intake overrides is fully presented earlier in this report.

Stakeholders were asked for their views on intakes being overridden:

**We don't override a ton. We're pretty strong on using the tool as its intended. If we do override usually it's a firearm involved , or a weapon is involved of some sort. ...so if we're going to override there has to be an actual community safety risk – Probation**

**I don't override very often. I do it, but it's very rare for me...its always community safety – Probation**

**Kids who score to release to go home, we will rarely jump up above that – Probation**

**So, with me personally, when I do an intake, I stick with the intake tool as much as I can...to a T... it is there to guide me for a reason. I get a lot of pushback – Probation**

**I know in our district, we stay true to the tool. [But] there are some situations that just aren't in the matrix... and that includes additional patterns beyond you know what was allowed in our section of aggravating factors - Probation**

## **Challenges Facing Districts 11 and 12**

Interviews with stakeholders revealed a series of challenges currently facing juvenile justice in Western Nebraska, including the cost of services, a lack of licensed service providers, and long travel distances for youth to access interventions. Concerns begin with what is described by some as a “service desert”: **It's not just therapeutic services that we're lacking. We're lacking everything in world. Nebraska is suffering** – Judge

**The system is spinning its wheels in the juvenile court until the kids are in adult court if that makes sense. So, what I mean is, a lot of cases you are just waiting until the children are 18 and then their jail time makes sense** – Judge

**...there's a lot of good judges who get frustrated... there aren't some of these services, and you keep seeing the same kids** – Judge

Currently, proximity to service and long wait-times remain a strain:

**There need to be facilities for youth in western Nebraska, and there's not** – Judge

**If I place a child in a foster home, it should be in that community. It shouldn't be 60 miles away** – Judge

**To me it's more of a humanitarian issue than anything else, if we, we're, we're sending kids for detention 5, 6, 7, 8 hours away. Put him in the back seat of a sheriff's car in chains and shackles. I don't think that's very humanitarian, you know. And I think it's dangerous, you know. It's just going to take one car wreck or one bad wreck** – Judge

**The kid is in handcuff's the entire time....shackles...that's very traumatizing. It's like 4 ½ hours with the time change. I had a detention intake I actually did last Friday and transport wasn't able to get her until 9:30, so she didn't get to Madison until 2:00 in the morning** – Probation

**Distance, availability, scheduling can delay treatment three/four months** – County Attorney

Both issues negatively impact family stability as well:

**We have you know some of our delinquent that have been bad enough severe enough to warrant out of home placement...and so you know that becomes a big issue for the parents to travel to see their child...transportation can be a huge issue** – County Attorney

**It's really a financial strain for some of these parents to have to travel to either take their child to obtain services particularly .... [if it's another community] ... you know two or three times a week, or even once a once a week, you know for counseling and these folks that make minimum wage** – County Attorney

**Transportation is a big thing and I would say that's a huge thing for kids ...kids that are living in poverty. . . they have therapy like how're you going to get them there? So, transportation is a huge thing. Just access to the services.** – Judge

Stakeholders expressed frustration with a lack of service providers in Western Nebraska, ranging from community youth coaches (formerly referred to as trackers) to mental health professionals to attorneys. Stakeholders believe it has become more difficult to attract a qualified workforce to District 11 and 12; some citing the rural location and others low pay as the root issues of this phenomenon. To complicate matters, many services exist only due to the work of a few providers. When those providers retire or relocate, critical gaps in the juvenile justice system emerge:

**Our group home out here. They have a ... tremendously difficult time maintaining staff that is qualified to go one-on-one with these kids – Judge**

**So I think when they say, “Well, the cost of living is cheaper.” Well, yeah, that doesn't mean that the trauma from the job is any less severe than it is anywhere else. And I think again, we have to get quality people, and they just don't get paid enough – Judge**

**We have a lack of attorneys... It's getting harder and harder to get them to come out, and service, and serve in rural Nebraska and so. ...we have a number of attorneys that are going to be retiring...[and] your juvenile court system can't run and function without good quality attorneys. – Judge**

**Here in [redacted] for attorneys, I've got a public defender who lives here. And outside of that, we have to go to [redacted] to get attorneys, and guardian ad litem. We don't have a guardian ad litem that's here in [redacted] anymore. And [redacted] is the same way. [Redacted] is the same way. [Redacted] is the same way, and they don't even have public defenders. They have no other attorneys in their communities that take cases. – Judge**

Similarly, stakeholders lamented services that have disappeared from Western Nebraska, including Juvenile Drug Court, Job Corps, and the regional detention center. At the same time, stakeholders acknowledged that services come with a cost, and funding is scarce. With high rates of poverty and limited agency funding, some youth struggle with access to prosocial programming like scouts, youth sports, and art, music and theatre programs.

**Cost is a barrier. So, finding some kind of funding, or access, to just positive, pro-social activities is what I would call it, because a lot of kids don't have access to that – Judge**

Some stakeholders talked about the shortage of juvenile justice professionals and high caseloads leading to feelings of trauma and burnout:

**It's really hard to work in other people's trauma. And when you work in this field, you're working and living in other people's trauma, and it creates burnout, and it is difficult and I think that that is sometimes the vicarious trauma is kind of just heavy. It's heavy... We have people that make policy, who have never, ever in their lives worked in the field, on the ground, or been involved in the process, judging people who've dedicated their lives to it, and they're dictating policy – Judge**

Many stakeholders verbalized feelings of frustration and disenfranchisement on behalf of the youth they serve:

**I think there's a huge barrier as well between the services available for the youth in the eastern part of the state, and the services available in the Western part of the state – Judge**

**Our children are no less important than children in Lincoln and Omaha, and a lot of times the perception is our children are less important than Lincoln and Omaha – Judge**

**I would like to feel at some point that our kids are seen as being as important as kids on the Eastern end of the state – Judge**

**If the legislature is serious about the point of juvenile court is rehabilitative and that Nebraska is in fact like, we have on our capital building that it says “equal before the law”, you cannot pretend that equal before the law does not require equal access to justice, equal access to opportunities to be rehabilitated and equal access to opportunities to like have advantage or have it like have services that address your needs. And if you're not going to provide that to these kids, then just admit that you're not actually interested in rehabilitating them – County Attorney**

**And you know, you talk about facilities, yeah, we need them. They do not exist here. And I hate to say it, if you're a kid from Western Nebraska, and you get in some pretty serious trouble you're probably screwed – Judge**

Stakeholders universally agreed they were open to change, however, some stakeholders viewed change with skepticism and a deep desire to have some input into rural programming:

**Whatever Greater Nebraska is, our portion is, we just would like to distribute it ourselves and use our own judgement to be able to spend the money most wisely - Judge**

**I think a frustration that a lot of people who work in this area, rural areas, and the juvenile justice system have already, have edicts of people saying, “we know this, we know this better than you”, that are the policymakers. When I'm like, “I don't know why you think you can tell me that this is better. Like, why don't you come out here and deal with these kids, these kids who have tried to commit suicide, whose parents have abused them, or walked away from them or they've come home and found their parents choking on their own vomit, they haven't been to school in three months. And then you come and tell me how . . . like you've never sat in a room with that kid, so why are you telling me how I should handle that? Because you don't know what it's like and you don't know the effects of it” – Judge**

Some stakeholders envisioned what it would look like to have complete service access:

**Wow. Complete services would mean if I need something, I order it, and it happens. – Judge**

**I think for complete service access... I think you'd have access to educational requirements, so whether or not that looks like an online school or the alternative school... to address the educational needs of the child. I think therapeutic [services], and that includes medication management and therapy for either substance abuse or mental health. And then I think there's just a social work aspect to it as well – Judge**

# Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this research was to explore, in depth, the youth being served by Nebraska State Probation in Districts 11 and 12. This research is situated in temporal proximity to other projects, recently conducted, which focused on youth. The Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice completed a comprehensive system review of the Nebraska Juvenile Probation System in 2022. The Panhandle Partnership and the Snow-Redfern Foundation published its own Nebraska Panhandle Youth Environmental Scan in 2022 as well. Using data provided by the Juvenile Probation Services Division, and triangulating off existing reports, a profile of youth being served in Western Nebraska began to emerge, as did a picture of their service needs.

On the whole, youth in Districts 11 and 12 do not differ dramatically from system-involved youth throughout the state. One finding of interest in the youth profile data was that youth in Western Nebraska appear to be entering the system at younger ages than youth in more urban areas. There are several possible explanations for this, including the increased level of interaction between youth and the community that is common in smaller towns, and the possibility that in areas where few community resources are available, schools may direct children to the juvenile justice system in an effort to access needed interventions.

Most youth on probation in Districts 11 and 12 are male, however, female youth are statistically more likely to be on probation for a status offense. This is consistent with national trends regarding cultural views of acceptable behavior in young women and also with data for the state of Nebraska as a whole. While male youth are more likely to be supervised on probation of misdemeanor offending, there is no gender difference at all in felony offending. This underscores the need for treatment and placement options that serve both male and female youth populations.

Community partners expressed concerns about high rates of youth system involvement and racial inequity (Snow/Redfern, 2022). Those concerns are echoed in District 12 in particular, where over 40% of youth on probation are Hispanic. This is a distinct overrepresentation, given that Hispanic youth make up approximately 24% of the public-school population. In addition, Native American youth comprise over 16% of the probation population, though they comprise only 3% of the youth population. While minoritized youth are overrepresented in the probation population in Western Nebraska, it should be noted that there is little evidence that race and/or ethnicity is related to decision making once youth are in the system.

In terms of offending, the majority of adjudicated youths were charged with misdemeanors (48%) or infractions (32%) followed by status offenses (19%). Only 1% of youth in Districts 11 and 12 were being supervised due to felony offenses. Once on probation, youth remained system-involved for an average of 3 years. This indicates youth needs are ongoing and not responding quickly to the programming currently available. Statistically, Native American youth spend more years in the system compared to youth of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. Some of this may be explained through offense patterns; a small portion of youth being served have a larger than average number of offenses (one as many as 21 separate charges). However, given the small number of minoritized youth, it is difficult to gauge the relationship between race and offending.

Another strategy to assess youth risk level is through an assessment of YLS/CMI 2.0 scores. Averaging the two Districts together, roughly 60% of youth on probation in Districts 11 and 12 were categorized as

moderate risk, with only 10% presenting at high risk, and no youth presented at extremely high risk. In addition, the majority of YLS/CMI 2.0 scores decreased (more than 50%) between screenings or remained the same (16%), while nearly 30% increased between screenings. Gender was not related to changes in YLS/CMI 2.0 scores, and neither was ethnicity. However, in District 12, Native American youth were significantly more likely to have an increase in their YLS/CMI 2.0 risk score between the first time they were assessed and additional assessments. There are several potential explanations for this finding, however, AOCPP is encouraged to focus on whether probation programming strategies are effective for this population, and if not, how programming could be adjusted in collaboration with Native American communities to better serve the needs of Native American youth and their families. It is possible that the drivers for offending and incentives for rehabilitation for this population differ from the juvenile probation population as a whole.

Finally, it is important to note that children in Western Nebraska experience worse health outcomes and higher levels of poverty when compared to the state (Snow/Redfern, 2022). Both risk factors complicate the success of interventions and increase the challenges families face in accessing services. These concerns were echoed in stakeholder interviews conducted during this project which cited barriers to families as being significant factors in the delivery of treatment and programming.

In addition to reviewing data provided by the AOCPP, the research team traveled to Districts 11 and 12 to meet with Stakeholders, including county court judges, county attorneys, and probation staff. The research team had the opportunity to observe juvenile court proceedings, tour courtrooms, and visit probation officers in their workspaces. It was abundantly clear that the professionals who make up the juvenile justice system in Western Nebraska are deeply committed to serving the youth in their communities, with treatment and rehabilitation at the heart of their personal and professional philosophies. The level of dedication that stakeholders exhibit is admirable, given the challenges they face due to the emotional nature of working with youth and the barriers related to their rural location. Most stakeholders identified their colleagues in partner agencies as being important assets to their work. Similarly, many viewed their rural locations as a benefit, citing that small communities rally around each other and support each other when necessary. Diversion was repeatedly recognized by judges and county attorneys as a strength of the juvenile justice system in Districts 11 and 12. This was reassuring given the concerns expressed by the RFK research team that, regarding risk assessments and screening for diversion, “there is minimal awareness of the credible research and evidence in these areas.... and an apparent absence of commitment to the application of these principles in routine juvenile justice practice by key stakeholders” (2022, p. 39). An additional strength of service providers is their ingenuity. Judges have developed creative, low-cost strategies to provide services to young people in their courts; some, like the Thrive mentoring program, have been realized, while others, like gaming, remain in the concept stage.

Stakeholder interviews revealed a number of perceptions of the youth probation population in Western Nebraska, most of which is strongly supported by AOCPP data.

From a stakeholder perspective, much of the youth caseload is generational

**... repeat offenders. I mean, we see the same core people over and over and over and over –**  
Judge

and nonviolent:

**I think truancy is our biggest, biggest, biggest issue. I bet we have half our cases are truancy and we can't do anything about it** – Probation

the number of violent youths is increasing:

**the trend we've seen is just more violent, more severe, criminalized behavior** – Probation.

Stakeholders were also unified in their desire to see system change in their Districts, specifically in response to significant regional barriers to effective service delivery.

The RFK system review final report begins by providing some essential context for assessing the effectiveness of juvenile justice. Specifically, the report acknowledges three key responsibilities for juvenile justice systems in the United States: to hold youth accountable for wrongdoing, to prevent further offending, and to treat all youth with fairness and equity (RFK, 2022). One key observation of the RFK final report, underscored by stakeholder interviews conducted over the past year by the researchers in the current project is that “...*services and interventions need to be available and accessible to ameliorate the youth's risks and build upon their strengths*” (RFK, 2022). While fairness and equity can be interpreted to mean access to services, the RFK report underscores that fairness and equity are rooted in due process. A lack of access to a timely judicial procedure serves to lessen the odds of success for the youth. In Nebraska, statutory guidelines are no more than 90 days between the filing of the petition and adjudication, and no more than 45 days between adjudication and disposition. The timeline is accelerated if the youth is detained (Nebraska Supreme Court Rule 6-104). Data maintained by the National Juvenile Court Data Archive determined that smaller jurisdictions generally process youth more quickly than larger jurisdictions, which was not supported by stakeholder interviews in this project. Furthermore, research has documented the negative consequences for youth, families, and communities as the delays in the process (National Institute of Justice, 2014).

It is expected that each District in Nebraska will be impacted by the availability of service providers and programming, and that deficits in any area of programming may impact youth who need access to services. What has emerged through the research in this project is a stakeholder perception of critical deficits in areas of community-based services, out-of-home placements, and residential therapeutic services. Access to substance abuse and mental health evaluations were also problematic, which was consistent with the RFK findings (2022) and well documented by the Terraluna Collaborative in 2017. In fact, stakeholder interviews conducted in 2017 were strikingly consistent with those conducted in 2024, eight years later, despite a recommendation that resources be allocated to ensure that rural districts were not left behind as new initiatives were rolled out. Community non-profits and service providers in the Panhandle reported in 2022 that while youth mental health needs are on the rise and that drug misuse and overdose rates are overwhelming, mental health treatment and provider shortages are significant (Snow/Redfern 2022). This is consistent with data presented in the 2023 Kids Count Nebraska report which found that only 47.6% of children in Nebraska who need mental health services actually received them in 2022, with children of minority and multiracial descent being the least likely to receive community-based mental health services.

An additional concern highlighted in the RFK report was the research team’s observation that low-risk youth and high-risk youth were often assigned the same services – low risk youth receiving high risk interventions and that youth were being assigned compliance-based probation conditions that were not related to their service interventions or aligned with best practice recommendations which advise very limited system involvement (RFK, 2022, 33). Additionally, best practices highlight that matching services to specific, individual youth needs is also the most effective treatment strategy. In Districts 11 and 12, where services are scarce, it may be difficult to achieve either goal as limited services may shrink the portfolio of treatment options available to system-involved youth. That said, stakeholders seemed intentional in their efforts to avoid assigning youth to unnecessary services:

**Don’t over-supervise someone if they’re low risk...don’t treat them like they’re high risk and you’re constantly seeing them or you’re always doing something with them. The philosophy in my mind is “keep them out of the system”. The deeper they go, the more we end up seeing them as an adult – Probation**

In Districts 11 and 12, stakeholders noted a consistent drought of services accessible in the community as well as out-of-home placements. This is consistent with the RFK findings in 2022. While youth in rural Nebraska have access to recommended services in other areas of the state, logistical barriers bar ready access. For example, access to in-home family services is heavily sought. At this time Multisystemic Therapy (MST) and Functional Family Therapy (FFT) are not available in Western Nebraska. Evidence exists to suggest that MST is not sustainable in rural communities. Districts 11 and 12 do not have a population large enough to meet national guidelines; MST is not offered in Western Nebraska for that reason. FFT, on the other hand, can work in rural settings, but provider shortages in Districts 11 and 12 make that functionally impossible. Trauma-informed therapy and EMDR are also nearly non-existent in Districts 11 and 12 as well.

In regard to out-of-home placements at the state level (including Districts 11 and 12), detention was by far the most recommended (and utilized) out-of-home placement in 2022 and 2023. This was a source of frustration for stakeholders in Districts 11 and 12, where detention, and detention-alternatives, feel largely inaccessible. In 2022, crisis stabilization and foster care were heavily utilized at the state level, but not in Districts 11 and 12 where crisis stabilization was used in fewer than 5% of cases. In 2023, foster care and Group Home A and B placements were ranked behind detention as the most frequently occurring placements, but stakeholders in District 11 and 12 reported critical shortages in these areas. While the state as a whole is experiencing shortages in placements (In 2023, 13% of out-of-home placements were with facilities located outside of Nebraska) those working in Western Nebraska feel they are more impacted than those located in urban areas in the state (Probation Annual Report, 2023).

In Districts 11 and 12, approximately 37% of youth on probation had at least one out-of-home placement, and one youth had as many as 29. While female youth are more likely to be placed outside the home, this difference is slight. Statewide, Black and Hispanic youth on probation are disproportionately assigned out-of-home care compared to their representation in the population. This is not the case in Districts 11 and 12. Rather, Native American youth are more likely to be placed outside the home in both jurisdictions. This finding, along with data that Native American youth YLS/CMI 2.0 scores are likely to increase between screenings and they are likely to spend more years under

supervision than other youth, make this population of particular concern when planning programming and services.

The decision to detain is generally made during intake. Of the 330 intake screenings conducted in Districts 11 and 12 in 2023, nearly a third (32%) resulted in an intake decision to release the youth (release without restriction, return to parent, or return to non-custodial parent). The majority (63%) resulted in the youth being detained, with the vast majority going to detention and very few accessing shelter care, crisis stabilization, or emergency professional foster care. In this research, system stakeholders consistently expressed that they are not able to secure out-of-home placements easily or in a timely manner. The perception that more treatment and placement options are needed in the Panhandle specifically was echoed by community partners in 2022 (Snow/Redfern).

In 25% of intake screenings in Districts 11 and 12, the probation officer recommended that the intake decision be overridden. Of the 84 intakes that resulted in an override, 56% involved detaining the youth at a different security level, 7% involved releasing a youth that rather than detaining them, 17% altered a decision to release, and 20% involved detaining a youth that would otherwise have been released. In District 11 the most common explanation selected for the override decision was “other,” and in District 12 “other” was second most common explanation for the override. The “other” category includes detaining the youth for the protection of the community and not placing the youth in an out-of-home placement due to logistical concerns such as inclement weather, a lack of availability of law enforcement to transport the youth, and an inability to locate a placement due to facilities operating at capacity. It is important to note that the rate of overrides in District 11 and 12 (25%) is slightly lower than the level of overrides across the state (32%).

Low levels of family engagement are also a perceived barrier for youth rehabilitation in the Western part of the state. Research indicates that higher levels of family involvement result in lower recidivism on the part of youth. However, stakeholders consistently lamented the involvement of parents as their children navigate the juvenile justice process. Some stakeholders talked about reticence on the part of parents due to lack of engagement, while others cited the cause as poverty. Minority children of multiracial descent are the least likely in Nebraska to have health insurance, the least likely to be born at a normal birth rate and the least likely to be living above the poverty line. These populations experience the highest unemployment rates, and their children are the least likely to be enrolled in school (Kids Count in Nebraska, 2023). Research on Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) revealed that 18.4% of Nebraska youth reported at least one ACE, with economic hardship being the second most reported item (Kids Count in Nebraska, 2023). Food insecurity is increasing in Nebraska, with 12.5% of households, and (12% of children) reporting that they don’t know where their next meal is coming from. These problems are particularly acute in Western Nebraska where in some areas, like Box Butte County, over 1 in 4 children live in poverty and where poverty rates are 1.6 times higher than state levels (Snow-Redfern Foundation, 2022). It follows then, given these economic challenges, that these populations also experience disproportionate rates of system involvement and out-of-home placements (Kids Count in Nebraska, 2023).

It must be noted that a final theme apparent in the conversations with stakeholders was a sense of disenfranchisement. While stakeholders frequently expressed a desire that their own voices be actively sought and included in conversations concerning potential changes to the system and service delivery,

the disenfranchisement expressed most frequently by stakeholders was on behalf of the youth residing in Western Nebraska. It was a nearly unanimous perception that youth in Western Nebraska do not have equal access to critical services in the continuum, and that the access they do have is significantly delayed. This lack of access and issues with timeliness only serve to reduce positive youth outcomes. This is not a view that is isolated to this report, rather, this concern was expressed in the RFK Final Report (2022) and also in the Nebraska Panhandle Youth Environmental Scan (2022). The Terraluna Collaborative Report (2017) argued that while county attorneys and judges in Western Nebraska were frustrated as being left out of reforms and being the last to receive services, the report also suggested that “‘buy in’ to some of the national research remains low among judges and prosecutors in areas where services are lacking and the get tough on crime mentality may still be the dominant mindset in the community.” This research did not reveal that the mindset among stakeholders was particularly tough on crime or opposed to evidence-based practice, rather stakeholders consistently pushed back on what they perceived as urban solutions to rural problems.

In considering potential solutions to what some stakeholders described as “a crisis” for the juvenile justice system in Nebraska, it is important to discern what can be controlled by AOCB and what cannot. For instance, AOCB cannot influence shrinking rural populations or induce practitioners to relocate to the Western region of the state. AOCB has no influence over the rate of retiring practitioners or high levels of poverty among rural families. Most critically, AOCB has limited influence over the location of alternatives to detention, such as short-term crisis stabilization facilities, detention facilities, state-run residential therapeutic treatment centers, and state-run group homes. These decisions are in the hands of the Nebraska legislature. Ultimately, the state will be called upon to balance the needs of its rural population while also addressing the needs of urban youth located in proximity to the state’s urban centers.

**We have [conversations] with probation about trying to make things better and trying to locate services and new things out here. ...this is a problem that started clear back when privatization failed, and then it was just left to fester until it became crisis.... through the years, it's not like people weren't saying, “This is problematic. This is getting worse. This is getting, Yeah, it would be really nice to have detention. We’ve definitely talked about that numerous times . . .**

– Probation

The researchers would like to thank the stakeholders who volunteered their time, insight, and authentic reflections to this project. The challenges facing juvenile justice service delivery in Districts 11 and 12 are not insignificant. Concerns regarding the availability of services in Western Nebraska have been consistently documented and continue to worsen in many regards, to the point many stakeholders now describe their systems as being in a state of crisis. Without significant and immediate interventions, the future of juvenile justice in Districts 11 and 12 is unclear. In the face of that, stakeholders bring their dedication to the field and their resolve to serve the youth in their districts year after year. They are knowledgeable about the unique challenges facing rural youth, and creative in their approaches to addressing needs. They also appreciate and value their professional partnerships with one another. These professional stakeholders are tremendous assets, and collaborators, as the state seeks to move forward with innovative solutions that will serve all Nebraska youth, regardless of geographic location, to the best of its ability.

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# Appendices

## Interview Framework – Judges

1. How often do you have juveniles in your courtroom? Or approximately how many juveniles do you see in your courtroom each month?
2. Can you tell us a little about your philosophy regarding juveniles in your courtroom.
3. What do you perceive as the ideal purpose of the juvenile justice system? (compliance based/treatment orientated/rehabilitation oriented/punitive)?
4. When thinking about juvenile justice in your own counties, what do you think the strengths of the system are?
5. Which services in the juvenile justice continuum are the best fit for the youth in your counties? Are those services available to the youth you see?
6. Are there informal supports that exist in your counties that you can/do utilize for youth who come through your courtroom?
7. In your counties, what do you perceive as the greatest need(s) for system-involved youth? Are those needs being adequately met?
8. Are there resources that must be/should be locally accessible? Regionally accessible?
9. What do you think complete service access looks like? Do service gaps exist in your counties?
10. Are juvenile intake decisions being overridden, and if so, what is the rate of override, and the driving factor(s)?
11. How amenable are you to system change in your counties?
12. Is there anything else we should know?

## Interview Framework – Probation Officers

1. Tell me about your background working with juveniles in probation, including how long you have worked for the Juvenile Probation Office, and your areas of responsibility.
2. What is your average caseload?
3. Can you tell us a little about your philosophy regarding the juveniles that you supervise?
4. What do you perceive as the ideal purpose of the juvenile justice system? (compliance based/treatment orientated/rehabilitation oriented/punitive)?
5. When thinking about juvenile justice in your own counties, what do you think the strengths of the system are?
6. Which services in the juvenile justice continuum are the best fit for the youth in your counties? Are those services available to the youth you supervise?
7. Are there informal supports that exist in your counties that you can/do utilize for youth that you supervise?
8. In your counties, what do you perceive as the greatest need(s) for system-involved youth? Are those needs being adequately met?
9. Are there resources that must be/should be locally accessible? Regionally accessible?
10. What do you think complete service access looks like? Do service gaps exist in your counties?
11. Are juvenile intake decisions being overridden, and if so, what is the rate of override, and the driving factor(s)?
12. Tell me your thoughts about youth and family participation in the juvenile justice process?
13. How amenable are you to system change in your counties?
14. Is there anything else we should know?

## Interview Framework – County Attorneys / Prosecutors

1. Tell me about your background working with juveniles in probation, including how long you have worked for the Juvenile Probation Office, and your areas of responsibility.
2. What is your average caseload?
3. Can you tell us a little about your philosophy regarding the juveniles that you supervise?
4. What do you perceive as the ideal purpose of the juvenile justice system? (compliance based/treatment orientated/rehabilitation oriented/punitive)?
5. When thinking about juvenile justice in your own counties, what do you think the strengths of the system are?
6. Which services in the juvenile justice continuum are the best fit for the youth in your counties? Are those services available to the youth you supervise?
7. Are there informal supports that exist in your counties that you can/do utilize for youth that you supervise?
8. In your counties, what do you perceive as the greatest need(s) for system-involved youth? Are those needs being adequately met?
9. Are there resources that must be/should be locally accessible? Regionally accessible?
10. What do you think complete service access looks like? Do service gaps exist in your counties?
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