Benefit-Cost Analysis of "Raise the Age" in Washington State: Exploring Extension of Juvenile Court Jurisdiction to 18-20-Year-Olds

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FOR THE WA-PCJJ RAISE THE AGE POLICY PROJECT

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GLOSSARY

Emerging Adult: Young people ages 18, 19, and 20 years old. Throughout this report, refers to those at risk of involvement or involved with the justice system.

Youth: Young people ages 12-17 years old. Throughout this report, refers to those at risk of involvement or involved with the juvenile justice system.

Court-involved people: Individuals with experience in navigating the criminal justice system through contact with the courts through criminal charges, probation, parole, providing witness testimony, or other involvement. Importantly, this term is not a label for criminal activity, but rather our approach to describing people with some relationship with the judicial process.

Adjudications: The legal decision-making process involving evaluation of facts and legal standards to conclude whether a defendant is guilty or not guilty of an accused crime.

Diversion: An alternative to traditional prosecution that is typically used as a for first-time or low-risk offenders, allowing a defendant to avoid a criminal record by completing a rehabilitative condition such as treatment programs, community service, and/or counseling. These alternatives aim to prevent future offenses and reduce court caseloads.

Dispositions: In Washington's juvenile court, disposition is the equivalent for sentencing an adult, describing a judge's decision around penalties for young people who have been found guilty of a criminal offense.

Recidivism: An individual's repeated engagement with the criminal legal system, occurring when they are convicted of a crime after serving a sentence for a prior conviction.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

The Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice (WA-PCJJ or "the Council") to provide recommendations for expanding juvenile court jurisdiction to include 18-, 19-, and 20-year-olds ("emerging adults"). This initiative, known as *Raise the Age* (RTA), aims to align juvenile justice practices with research on brain development to improve rehabilitation opportunities and justice system outcomes for these Emerging Adults and their communities. The Council developed a Raise the Age Workgroup, which contracted the Evans Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) at the University of Washington to better understand the implications of RTA through analysis of potential benefits and costs associated with serving emerging adults under the juvenile court jurisdiction. The following summarizes our report describing the findings of this benefit-cost analysis (BCA).

Findings

We find that raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to include 18–20-year-olds would lead to long-term net cost savings through projected reductions to spending on incarceration. This finding is consistent across all three of the caseload scenarios we model: (1) optimistic, (2) cautious, and (3) pessimistic.[1] In the short term, we see variation in potential immediate impacts on expenditures related to RTA, ranging from modest cost savings to small increased expenditures for state government in the first year of implementation, depending on caseloads. These findings point to a general direction of the fiscal impact of RTA on the Washington State juvenile and adult legal systems, but due to significant data limitations (see below), they lack precision and should be interpreted with caution.

We find that:

- RTA will drive net cost savings over the first five years of implementation.
    - We estimate that shifting Emerging Adults from the adult to juvenile system could drive net cost savings of between **$12 million and $20.3 million** in the first five years of implementation**.**

[1] While the pessimistic scenario assumes no drop in juvenile justice caseloads for minors younger than 18 years-old and no drop in recidivism (consistent with the status quo), the cautious model assumes some drop in caseloads and recidivism, and pessimistic scenarios assumes relatively strong drops in caseloads and recidivism.

- The primary driver of *costs* around serving emerging adults in the juvenile justice system will come from increased expenditures related to juvenile courts and detention. According to our model:
    - Overall, we project the need for an additional **$1.9 million - $2.8 million** in net costs to cover the shift from adult jail to juvenile detention for emerging adults in the first year of implementation, leading to **$14.6 million - $27.3 million** in net costs over the first five years of implementation.
- Overall, *cost savings* are driven by shorter average sentences for juveniles and a decreased share of emerging adults receiving jail and prison sentences.
    - We project significant net cost savings related to corrections. According to our model, shifting emerging adults to juvenile rehabilitation would cost **$27 million - $40 million**. This corresponds with savings to adult prisons of **$61.9 million - $91.7 million**, resulting in estimated overall net cost savings of **$30.5 million - $46.8 million**.

Limitations

The BCA was originally scoped to include data inputs that were delayed or unavailable at the time of publication. Consequently, much of this analysis relies on assumptions derived from data that are dated, not specific to emerging adults, and/or focused outside of Washington State. Characteristics such as race, offense severity, gender, and age can all impact the exact marginal cost per individual, and calculating averages inherently masks much of the variation present in how real emerging adults experience our criminal justice system. We are only able to incorporate variation from offense type given the data and time limitations of this analysis; a more complete analysis would also consider variation by age, race, and other demographic and criminogenic factors. While interpretation of these estimates should consider these significant limitations, our analysis provides valuable insight into some of the potential costs and considerations surrounding implementation of RTA. Perhaps more importantly, this BCA clarifies key questions and outlines additional data needs to inform successful planning and implementation for RTA.

INTRODUCTION

Project Background and Purpose

During the 2023 legislative session, the Washington State Legislature directed the Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice (WA-PCJJ) to work on the implementation plan to expand the juvenile court jurisdiction to persons 18, 19, 20 years old ("emerging adults"), known as the *Raise the Age* criminal justice reform ("RTA"). In addition to the implementation plan, the Council's recommendations will include a timeline for structural and system changes within the juvenile justice system and an operations and business plan defining benchmarks for resource allocations and cost. Full language describing the directive can be found in ESSB 5187, pages 396-397.

To accomplish this, the Council formed the Raise the Age Workgroup ("the Workgroup"), co-led by individuals from the Office of Juvenile Justice (OJJ) and WA-PCJJ. The Workgroup includes diverse stakeholders who would be impacted by the policy and/or have expertise related to the implementation of "Raise the Age." A full list of members can be found on the Raise the Age policy studies page.

The Workgroup contracted the Evans Policy Innovation Collaborative (EPIC) at the University of Washington's Evans School of Public Policy & Governance to provide technical assistance to better understand two distinct aspects of this policy intervention through: (1) **asset mapping** to provide analysis of available services and supports for youth or Emerging Adults who are involved in or at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system and (2) **Benefit-cost analysis** to examine potential benefits and costs associated with serving Emerging Adults under the juvenile court jurisdiction, including any new costs and/or cost savings for local and state government. This report addresses the Benefit-cost analysis, and both this and the companion report on the Asset Map of Services can be found on the EPIC website.

Goals of the Benefit-cost analysis

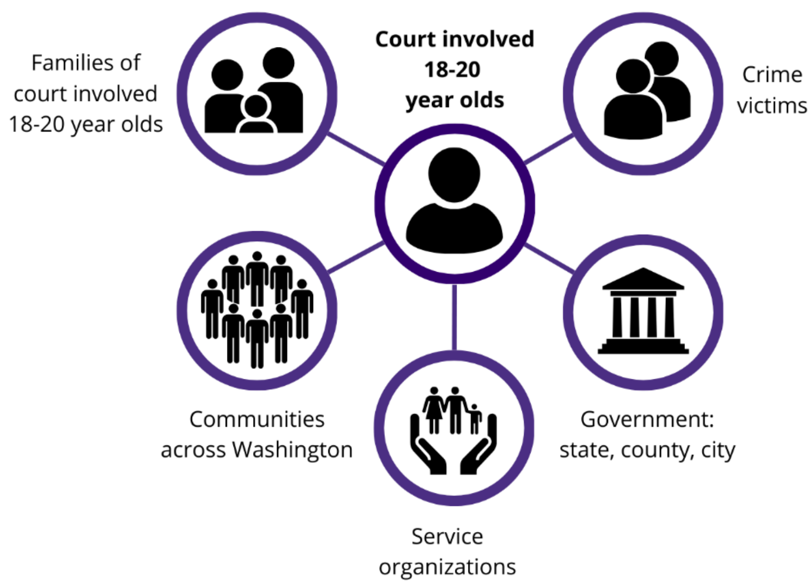
Benefit-Cost Analysis (often referred to as cost-benefit analysis) is a systematic process used to evaluate potential benefits of a project, program, or policy against its potential costs. It supports informed decision-making by quantifying relevant benefits and costs to determine the overall value and feasibility of a proposed initiative like RTA. In this case, we address two questions from the legislature: (1) added costs ("estimated new costs incurred to provide juvenile justice services to persons 18, 19, and 20 years old"), and (2) cost-savings ("a review of the estimated costs avoided by local and state governments with the reduction of recidivism and an analysis of cost savings reinvestment option").

It is important to note that these questions are framed to help the Raise the Age Workgroup understand implementation decisions *should this legislation be passed* in Washington State (for example, to provide recommendations around the budget, timeline, and additional resources that might be necessary, etc.). This analysis is not designed to assess whether RTA *should* be passed. Therefore, we will not be reporting the "return on Investment" or the savings on a dollar invested.

Framework for Societal Impact of Raise the Age

To take a comprehensive view on the impacts of Raise the Age, we map six stakeholders groups that would be impacted by the Raise the Age reform: (1) court involved emerging adults, (2) their families, (3) communities across Washington State, (4) state and local governments, (5) service providers, and (6) victims of crime.

Figure 1: Society stakeholders affected by Raise the Age



This report responds to the legislature's request to understand impacts on three groups of stakeholders: (1) court involved emerging adults (impacts related to recidivism), (2) state, county, and local government (budgetary impacts), and (3) service providers (impacts related to expanded capacity and resource needs).

Theory of Change: Why Raise the Age?

To examine the potential impacts of Raise the Age on system-involved individuals, we must first understand how individuals move through juvenile and adult justice systems and how their journeys would be altered by RTA propositions. Our analysis began with a review of relevant literature[2] and interviews with stakeholder groups (e.g., the Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice [WA-PCJJ], advocacy groups, and King County juvenile court program managers), finding that juvenile and adult systems are similar in structure. While aspects of the system have different names and flow through different entities, they exist as parallel tracks through the system. However, when we map system outcomes along these parallel journeys, we see significant differences in the experiences and outcomes that adults and juveniles face.

The literature suggests that these differential impacts are driven by contrasting approaches to juvenile and adult justice stemming from normative views around crime, punishment, and human development. While the adult system centers on deterrence, retribution, and incapacitation, the juvenile system is rooted in the idea that youth are still developing and therefore more vulnerable to influence—positive and negative—and therefore deserve rehabilitation and treatment.[3] Consequently, when we compare youth and adult systems, we find more alternatives to incarceration for those younger than 18 and more supportive pathways and programs for juveniles navigating the system. This background illuminates the theory of change underlying RTA: Providing emerging adults with access to the rich supports and services in the juvenile justice system can reduce harm, lower caseloads and recidivism, and improve overall justice system outcomes for these young adults and their communities.

Report Overview

The remainder of this report describes analysis of potential costs and benefits of Raise the Age in four sections. First, we describe the BCA, including data and methods used in our analysis, and significant data limitations that shape our findings. Second, we highlight results of our analysis, finding that RTA would lead to long-term cost savings for state government through projected reductions to spending on incarceration. Third, we describe recommendations for additional data

[2] Mostly from the Department of Children, Youth, and Families (DCYF) and Washington State Institute of Public Policy (WSIPP) materials and analysis of the sequential intercept model (SIM), which describes how individuals navigate the justice system.

[3] See, for example, Fowler and Kurlychek (2017).

and analysis to inform successful planning and implementation of RTA. Lastly, we conclude the report with a summary of our findings and recommendations.

THE BENEFIT-COST ANALYSIS

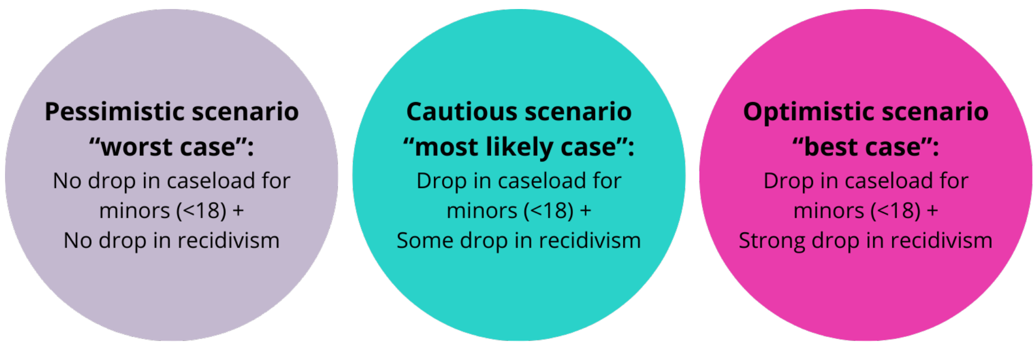
This report provides estimates of the direct costs and cost savings to government stakeholders that would likely arise from implementation of RTA. Because of significant data limitations, we were unable to project long-term costs or savings from anticipated reductions in criminal justice system involvement among Emerging Adults. We present the following analysis as a starting point for stakeholders to understand how costs may shift from adult to juvenile systems if Raise the Age were to be implemented, and present modest estimates of cost savings that may accrue due to common practices in the juvenile justice system (i.e., diversion). An ideal analysis with more complete data would include information on how this policy change would impact costs and caseloads for professionals working across the system, including law enforcement, courts, public defenders, service providers, jails, juvenile rehabilitation, and prisons.

This analysis leverages caseload forecasts from the Emerging Adults Justice Project (EAJP) that allow us to project the shift in caseloads allocated to law enforcement officials, courts, jails, and Juvenile Rehabilitation after implementation of Raise the Age. We use these caseload projections to assess potential costs and cost savings through a modeling exercise that asks: *What would Raise the Age cost if it were implemented starting in 2026?*

These caseload projections incorporate the proposed phased roll-out of Raise the Age and assume a modest proportion of emerging adults that commit serious offenses would continue to be processed in the adult system. Importantly, we only model the new costs and savings to the justice system imposed by shifting projected caseloads of emerging adults from the adult to the juvenile justice system. A complete projection of costs to both the juvenile and adult systems in the coming years was not possible given the data available. Despite their many limitations, these projections can help stakeholders understand some of the additional costs imposed by the implementation of Raise the Age and prepare funding support accordingly.

We use EAJP caseload projections to assess how RTA implementation would impact system needs using a range of potential scenarios surrounding system capacity. Each scenario is based on adjustments to assumptions around how caseloads in the juvenile justice system will shift over time. First, we explore a set of assumptions related to the number of young people served by the juvenile justice system. Second, we explore assumptions related to the rate of recidivism, or reengagement with the justice system after serving a prior sentence. We examine three scenarios: (1) a pessimistic ("worst case") scenario that assumes no drop in caseloads for people under the age of 18 and no reduction in recidivism or future crimes; (2) a cautious ("most likely") scenario that assumes a modest drop in caseloads for people under the age of 18 and some drop in recidivism; and (3) an optimistic ("best case") scenario assuming a drop in caseloads for people under the age of 18 and a strong drop in recidivism (see **Figure 2** below).

Figure 2: Caseload scenarios after Raise the Age



Data and Methods

Our analysis relies on data and estimates from a variety of sources. Given data limitations we had to rely on historic (and often national, rather than local) estimates to build assumptions of how individuals move through the criminal justice system. The data elements present in this modeling are outlined below.

Caseloads

We received caseload projections from EAJP to model estimates of the additional load on the juvenile justice system from the implementation of RTA. Specifically, EAJP provided projections of the number of (1) arrests by age cohort; (2) new juvenile court filings; (3) new juvenile detention admissions; (4) new juvenile dispositions; and (5) new Juvenile Rehabilitation admissions that would arise from serving emerging adults in the juvenile justice system. EAJP also provided historical data on the share of court cases by disposition, the number of case filings in juvenile and adult courts, and the number of cases that were filed versus cases that did not progress past the referral stage. Projections for arrests were provided for

2026 and 2027; and all additional projections were provided from 2026 to 2030. These projections allowed us to estimate the additional number of individuals served by juvenile courts, juvenile detention, and Juvenile Rehabilitation if emerging adults were served by the juvenile justice system starting in 2026.

We also received case-level data with offense details for each case from the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). These data allowed us to calculate the share of felony cases per offense type and the average sentence imposed on emerging adults for each felony category (e.g., murder, aggravated assault, felony property). These calculations enable a more accurate picture of the anticipated costs to courts and secure facilities, as the offense type drives both time spent in court and time spent incarcerated (see Hunt et al., 2017).

Additional Model Inputs

Average length of confinement

While data from AOC describes sentence lengths for emerging adults charged with felony offenses, limited data are available on emerging adults who are charged with misdemeanors and the sentences they face. To project how emerging adults would move through the juvenile justice system, we apply the average share of misdemeanors and the average confinement lengths for local detention in jails from the most recent complete Juvenile Disposition Summary Report (Washington State Caseload Forecast Council, 2025). This report also included average lengths of confinement in Juvenile Rehabilitation, enabling us to project anticipated costs to corrections facilities from shifting emerging adults from the adult to the juvenile justice system.

Jail and prison caseloads

With limited availability of comprehensive data from different criminal justice institutions in Washington State, it is difficult to predict how emerging adults would move through the adult system. For example, data on the average confinement length in jails for adults is not readily available; as such, we rely on estimates from a 2016 analysis from the Washington State Statistical Analysis Center (Jetzer, 2016). Because these data are nearly a decade old, they likely differ from today's average time spent in confinement, but they are the most recent estimates we found from a reliable source in Washington State. We also relied on recent caseload reports from Washington's Superior Courts to estimate the average share of criminal court cases that end in either a jail or prison sentence (Washington Courts, 2025a). While these estimates are for the entire adult population, we apply them to project additional jail and prison caseloads for emerging adults moving through the adult system.

Pretrial detention

We also faced many limitations in estimating the share of emerging adults who would be placed in pretrial juvenile detention under RTA. Because the share of criminal court cases in Washington State that use pretrial detention were not available to us, we used figures from a study examining the use of pretrial detention in other states (Liu et. al., 2018). These estimates were used to predict the number of additional emerging adults who would be placed in pretrial detention in the juvenile court system.

Diversion

Data on the number of emerging adults who would access diversion services were equally sparse. A 2024 report by the WA-PCJJ contains estimates of the number of juvenile diversions compared to adjudications and indicates that diversions have consistently outnumbered adjudications by a ratio of nearly 1.5 to 1 (Washington State Partnership Council on Juvenile Justice., 2024). We projected the number of adults in diversion programs, and although these estimates allow us to measure the share of convictions to diversions in the adult court system, the data only apply to adults who commit misdemeanors (Washington Courts, 2025b). We rely on these estimates as well as caseload data from EAJP to project the number of emerging adults who would have their cases diverted in the juvenile court system compared to the adult court system.

Costs

We calculate the impact of Raise the Age on the state government budget using analysis by the Washington State Institute for Public Policy (WSIPP). WSIPP has recently estimated the cost of one additional case to law enforcement, prisons, jails, and courts (WSIPP, 2024). These estimates are collected from the latest academic studies and reflect our most current understanding of the costs incurred by the state government in each phase of the criminal justice system. Court cost data is broken out by offense type, reflecting the fact that the length and therefore cost of a given court case often depends on the offense. Marginal cost data for prison and jail admissions include estimates for both the adult and juvenile systems, allowing us to more accurately project the costs of prison versus Juvenile Rehabilitation and jail versus local juvenile detention. However, estimates of the marginal cost of an arrest or court filing are not differentiated between adults and juveniles, which limits our ability to distinguish between costs imposed by emerging adults charged in juvenile court cases and costs related to cases in Superior Courts or Courts of Limited Jurisdiction (CLJs). Data on the marginal benefits (e.g., dollars saved) for diversion services per individual served also comes from another WSIPP study (WSIPP, 2023).

Limitations

We faced significant data limitations when projecting how emerging adults would move through both adult and juvenile justice systems. For example, we do not project caseloads by age cohort or incorporate estimates of how caseloads would change over time with different (and perhaps lower) rates of recidivism for earlier cohorts of emerging adults under Raise the Age. We also lack the data available to provide a more complete sense of how total costs for each phase of implementation will shift over time, as we are only able to model the change in costs due to serving emerging adults in the juvenile rather than adult system.

A major limitation of this benefit-cost analysis is that we rely on assumptions derived from data that are (1) dated, (2) not local to Washington State, or (3) not specific to emerging adults. All three of these limitations are present in many of our projections, particularly of how emerging adults would move through the adult system. These estimates should be interpreted with caution, as we were not able to update some key assumptions (such as the average jail stay for adults) or project these assumptions into the future.

As with any analysis relying on averages, we are also unable to capture much of the variety that affects the cost burden of each unique court case or stay in a detention facility for emerging adults. Characteristics such as race, offense severity, gender, and age can all impact the exact marginal cost per individual, and calculating averages inherently masks much of the variation present in how real emerging adults experience our criminal justice system. We are only able to incorporate variation from offense type given the data and time limitations of this analysis; a more complete analysis would also consider variation by age, race, and other demographic and criminogenic factors.

Our analysis does not estimate the exact cost burden that would be shifted from adult courts to juvenile courts given a lack of data on how costs vary between juvenile and adult court cases. It is possible that given the shorter average case processing times in juvenile courts, these cases likely result in a lower cost burden compared to adult criminal court cases. However, we were unable to locate an exact estimate of how costs for juvenile court cases differ from adult court cases, whether national or specific to Washington State.

Methods

Given the limitations in available data, we conducted a simple analysis of the projected change in costs imposed on law enforcement, courts, local detention, and corrections in two alternate cases: (1) one where the status quo remains and emerging adults continue to be served the adult system and (2) an alternate scenario where Raise the Age is implemented in 2026 and emerging adults instead move through the juvenile justice system. Our projections are based on caseload data from EAJP which assumes that all cases for 18-20-year-olds would be moved into juvenile court except for the serious violent offenses (which would continue to be processed in adult criminal court) and certain license-related infractions (which would continue to be processed by adult courts of limited jurisdiction). Projected caseloads are then combined with cost estimates from WSIPP to produce aggregated estimates of the costs to each portion of the justice system in case 1 (status quo) and case 2 (Raise the Age implementation). All costs are reported in 2024 dollars.[4]

As mentioned above, we estimate additional costs imposed by serving emerging adults under both the status quo and RTA implementation. We do this by evaluating three scenarios based on adjustments to assumptions around how caseloads in the juvenile justice system will shift over time. First, we explore a set of assumptions related to the number of young people served by the juvenile justice system. Second, we explore assumptions related to the rate of recidivism, or reengagement with the justice system after serving a prior sentence. We provide a (1) pessimistic (“worst case”) scenario that assumes no drop in caseloads for people under the age of 18 and no reduction in recidivism or future crimes; (2) a cautious scenario that assumes a drop in caseloads for people under the age of 18 and some drop in recidivism; and (3) an optimistic (“best case”) scenario assuming a drop in caseloads for people under the age of 18 and a strong drop in recidivism. These three scenarios (pessimistic, cautious, and optimistic) only change the caseload data; the costs and parameters applied remain the same across these three scenarios (see **Figure 2** above).

We also calculate preliminary estimates of cost savings due to the increased use of diversion in the juvenile justice system. These estimates, calculated based on

[4] Costs were adjusted using annual inflation data from the Consumer Price Index (CPI).

estimated ratios of adjudications to diversions in the adult and juvenile justice system, are also calculated for the optimistic, cautious, and pessimistic caseload scenarios. To incorporate some aspect of the cost of providing diversion with services, we rely on an analysis from WSIPP that provides estimates of the average cost savings to the state government from providing diversion with services rather than allowing juveniles to continue through the court system.

PRELIMINARY BENEFITS AND COSTS

Our benefit-cost analysis estimates costs and cost savings associated with shifting Emerging Adults (ages of 18 to 20) from adult to juvenile justice jurisdiction through RTA in Washington State. Using available data sources, we estimate that this shift will drive net savings for Washington State over the first five years of implementation. We describe our analysis in three sections. First, we examine projected costs of serving Emerging Adults in the juvenile justice system. Second, we explore projected cost savings of removing this population from the adult system. Third, we combine projected costs and savings to analyze the net impact of RTA (see Figure 3 for a table of projected costs and cost savings).

Projected costs and cost savings

Courts and law enforcement

We predict that the bulk of new expenditures through RTA will impact the juvenile court system as it absorbs cases involving emerging adults. It is important to note that data sources do not differentiate between court and law enforcement costs for arrests and court filings involving juveniles versus adults. While we face data limitations that impact the precision of our estimates, our model uses available data to predict that – depending on caseloads – the state would need to allocate an additional **$8.2 million - $9.7 million** for juvenile courts in the first year of RTA implementation. Over the first five years, we estimate that the state would need to allocate an additional **$86.2 million - $127.7 million** to support the increased caseload in the juvenile court system. However, these costs are associated with equivalent cost savings on the adult side as this population is diverted away from adult courts, resulting in a projected overall **net zero** impact.

Corrections

Using assumptions around the average stay in jail, we predict that serving emerging adults in the juvenile system rather than the adult system will lead to an additional **$2.4 million - $3.4 million** needed to support juvenile detention in the first year of implementation. This corresponds with cost savings of between

$500,000 and **$600,000** in adult jails. Overall, we project the need for an additional **$1.9 million - $2.8 million** in net costs to cover the shift from adult jail to juvenile detention for emerging adults in the first year of implementation, or **$14.6 million - $27.3 million** in net costs over the first five years of implementation.

The most significant driver of cost savings in our model comes with shifting emerging adults from serving sentences in adult prison to juvenile rehabilitation. In both the cautious and the optimistic scenarios, the cost savings from serving emerging adults in Juvenile Rehabilitation versus prison are **$2.6 million** and **$3.3 million** respectively, leading to **$0.2 million - $1.4 million** in net cost savings when considering overall system impacts of RTA implementation in the first year. However, in the pessimistic scenario, increased caseloads indicate that cost savings from serving emerging adults in Juvenile Rehabilitation versus prison would total **$2.7 million** which would lead to the state government spending an additional **$100,000** to support the first year of RTA implementation. Overall, reduced expenditures due to shorter average prison sentences for juveniles as well as a decreased share of emerging adults receiving jail and prison sentences lead to moderate cost savings in two scenarios and relatively small expenses for the state government in the “worst case” scenario of the first year after RTA implementation.

Although there is some variation in cost savings in the short term, in the long-term cost savings from serving emerging adults in Juvenile Rehabilitation surpass additional costs incurred by county jails in all three scenarios. Over the course of the first five years of RTA, we project that county jails would incur additional costs of **$14.6 million - $27.3 million** depending on caseloads. Prison expenditures, however, would be reduced by **$35 million - $46.8 million** depending on caseload scenario. Our projections indicate that prison caseloads would rise faster than jail caseloads in the five years after RTA implementation, so regardless of caseloads the state government would save an estimated **$12 million - $20.3 million** over five years. Across optimistic, cautious, and pessimistic scenarios, shifting costs incurred by serving emerging adults from the adult to the juvenile justice system leads to cost savings for the state government through reduced spending on incarceration.

Figure 3: Preliminary Benefits and Costs of Raise the Age

Agency	Optimistic Scenario			Cautious Scenario			Pessimistic Scenario		
	Cost Savings (Adult Systems)	Added Costs (Juvenile Systems)	Net	Cost Savings (Adult Systems)	Added Costs (Juvenile Systems)	Net	Cost Savings (Adult Systems)	Added Costs (Juvenile Systems)	Net
1 Year After RTA Passage									
Annual costs, corrections (Department of Corrections | Juvenile Rehabilitation)	$5.9M	($2.6M)	**$3.3M**	$6.1M	($3.5M)	**$2.6M**	$7M	($4.33M)	**$2.7M**
Annual costs, local detention (adult jails | juvenile detention)	$0.5M	($2.4M)	**($1.9M)**	$0.5M	($2.9M)	**($2.4M)**	$0.6M	($3.4M)	**($2.8M)**
Annual costs, County courts (juvenile | adult)	$8.2M	($8.2M)	**$0**	$8.47M	($8.5M)	**$0**	$9.7M	($9.7M)	**$0**
Annual costs, Law enforcement*	$7.9M	($7.9M)	**$0**	$8.46M	($8.5M)	**$0**	$10.2M	($10.2M)	**$0**
Total projected cost savings			**$1.4M**			**$0.2M**			**($0.1M)**

Agency	Optimistic Scenario			Cautious Scenario			Pessimistic Scenario		
	Cost Savings (Adult Systems)	Added Costs (Juvenile Systems)	Net	Cost Savings (Adult Systems)	Added Costs (Juvenile Systems)	Net	Cost Savings (Adult Systems)	Added Costs (Juvenile Systems)	Net
Cumulative Estimates (5 Years Post Implementation)									
Annual costs, corrections (Department of Corrections | Juvenile Rehabilitation)	$61.9M	($27M)	**$35M**	$66.5M	($36M)	**$30.5M**	$91.7M	($45M)	**$46.8M**
Annual costs, local detention (adult jails | juvenile detention)	$5.3M	($19.9M)	**($14.6M)**	$5.7M	($24.2M)	**($18.5M)**	$7.8M	($35.1M)	**($27.3M)**

Annual costs, County courts (juvenile | adult)	$86.2M	($86.2M)	**$0**	$92.5M	($92.5M)	**$0**	$127.7M	($127.7M)	**$0**
Total projected cost savings			**$20.3M**			**$12M**			**$19.5M**

NOTE: *Projected added costs are noted with (parenthesis). These estimates point to a general direction of the fiscal impact of RTA on the Washington State justice system, but due to data limitations, they lack precision and should be interpreted with caution. *Projections for law enforcement impacts only available through 2027.*

Projected Benefits

A more complete analysis of projected benefits from the implementation of RTA would require data on downstream effects and benefits deriving from reduced recidivism. While we lack this data, we can use available data to estimate of one potential benefit: cost savings from increased use of diversion services in the juvenile system. We find that increased use of diversion in the juvenile justice system could lead to additional cost savings of between **$1.2 million - $1.4 million** in the first year of implementation, and total cost savings of **$12.5 million - $18.5 million** over the course of the first five years of implementation. Because the theory of change for RTA centers on the long-term impacts of rich rehabilitative supports in the juvenile system, we recommend further exploration of potential benefits and costs might arise from supports like diversion, probation, or community-based therapeutic services. However, when we combine these preliminary diversion estimates with our projected cost savings arising from reduced incarceration, we can begin to predict the benefits of serving emerging adults in the juvenile justice system.

Additional Data Recommendations

These estimates provide a sense of some of the costs imposed and benefits gained by serving emerging adults in the judicial justice system. However, a more complete benefits-cost analysis would also include data points around costs borne to community providers, as well as a sense of how reduced recidivism would affect costs in the longer term. A rich picture of potential RTA impacts would also include costs and benefits associated with communities, victims of crime, neighborhoods, and emerging adults themselves. In this section we outline some additional data points needed for this more complete model and include some discussion of other proposed benefits to serving emerging adults in the juvenile justice system (see **Appendix A** for a summary of additional data needs).

Probation, diversion, and therapeutic service provision

While we were able to produce estimates of the average length of probation and average marginal cost of a probation case for adults and juveniles (from WSIPP), we would need to incorporate caseload data on the expected number of probation cases that would arise from serving emerging adults in the juvenile and adult justice systems to project the added costs from probation. Data on the share of superior court cases that end in probation is likely available from AOC, but data on the share of misdemeanor charges that use probation may be more difficult to incorporate into a complete model.

We present some preliminary estimates of the savings that could be incurred through the increased use of diversion in the juvenile justice system. While these are helpful indicators of potential savings, a more complete analysis would incorporate estimates of the share of juveniles who receive diversion with versus without services as well as data on the share of adults charged with more serious offenses who have their cases diverted.

A comprehensive picture of the costs involved in serving emerging adults would also include costs and projected caseloads for therapeutic service providers, both court-based and community-based providers. Collecting costs and caseload estimates from community-based providers is particularly complicated given the decentralized nature of data and the difficulty service providers may have estimating the exact cost of provision per client. Determining the exact scope of service providers may also be difficult, as there are many service providers who already serve adults that may continue to serve emerging adults as well as service providers that serve youth and may want to expand to serve emerging adults who pass through the juvenile justice system as well. While complicated, collecting these data from service providers would produce a more complete picture of the investments needed to adequately serve emerging adults, as many of the proposed benefits of the juvenile justice system rely on services that can help address developmental needs of younger adults.

Additional benefits due to reductions in recidivism

Our model includes optimistic and pessimistic scenarios which model how costs during the first five years of implementation might differ based on higher or lower rates of recidivism; however, a more complete analysis would also include estimates of the impacts of each phase of the juvenile and adult justice system on future recidivism. Measuring rates of recidivism is inherently a complex task given the variety of definitions of recidivism often applied in the literature – whether one chooses to capture rearrest, re-engagement with law enforcement, or merely reincarceration will inherently affect estimates of both recidivism rates and subsequent costs incurred by emerging adults moving through the justice system.

Estimating the cost savings from reduced recidivism and adult incarceration would require estimates as to how each stage of the criminal justice system – from arrest to court processing to probation to jail to prison – impacts one's likelihood of future recidivism. We find some of these estimates, such as the effect of incarceration as a juvenile on adult incarceration (Aizer and Doyle, 2015), or the effect of pretrial detention on future criminal justice outcomes (Dobbie et. al., 2018), in the literature, but many shortcomings remain in our understanding of how different criminal justice system interactions impact future recidivism. There is a particular dearth of research specifically examining the effects of aspects of the juvenile justice system – such as diversion and therapeutic services – on future criminal justice system involvement. Understanding how these programs impact the likelihood of future recidivism would be critical in projecting how the implementation of Raise the Age might affect future incarceration and other criminal justice system costs.

Downstream Effects

A strong body of evidence from Washington State and beyond shows that the benefits of alternatives to detention extend well beyond the criminal legal system. Incarceration can directly hinder access to education (Sharlein, 2018), employment (Mueller-Smith and Schnepel, 2021), and housing (Clifasefi et al., 2017) and is associated with worse health outcomes (Bernard et al., 2020). Research indicates that these measures of individuals' financial security and overall wellbeing are associated with recidivism and future criminal legal system contact. This suggests that a Raise the Age policy reform could have meaningful benefits for Emerging Adults, their households, and the communities in which they live.

Currently, data limitations prevent our ability to connect individual criminal legal system outcomes with indicators of healthcare access, housing security, employment, income, or receipt of government benefits in Washington. Through data sharing agreements and linkages of administrative data sources, Washington could better evaluate the potential collateral consequences of this policy proposal by examining how different individuals fare as they are diverted to different therapeutic services or other alternatives to jail and prison. Individual-level data would also help measure whether the effects of Raise the Age address the unequal racial and gender impacts of our current criminal legal system

In addition, better measurement of education, housing, employment, health, and access to government services could lead to a better understanding of how Raise the Age affects Emerging Adults and their local communities. Outcomes outside of the criminal legal system also affect government expenditures and other relevant stakeholders, and better measurement could lead to a more comprehensive and accurate cost-benefit analysis of Raise the Age.

While many studies of recidivism, other criminal legal system outcomes, and collateral consequences have a relatively short time horizon, a policy reform as significant as Raise the Age could also lead to long term changes in individual and community-level indicators of crime, financial stability, or health and wellbeing. If an emerging adult can achieve a higher level of educational attainment in their late teens or early 20s, for example, they might have better employment, economic, and health prospects for years to come. Current data limitations prevent our ability to measure these changes, although administrative data linkage efforts like WashPop (Romich et al. 2024) and the Criminal Justice Administrative Records System (Finlay and Mueller-Smith, 2024) may allow for longer term measurement of different outcomes in years to come.

CONCLUSION

In summary, we find that raising the age of juvenile court jurisdiction to include 18–20-year-olds would lead to long-term cost savings for state government through projected reductions in spending on incarceration. This finding is consistent across all three of the caseload scenarios we model: (1) optimistic, (2) cautious, and (3) pessimistic. However, our analysis is significantly limited by challenges related to data access and availability. While we make recommendations for further analysis and data collection to inform more comprehensive models of RTA benefits and costs, this initial analysis provides valuable insight into some of the potential cost savings and added costs surrounding RTA implementation in Washington State. Perhaps more importantly, it illuminates key questions and next steps to inform successful implementation of this policy intervention to ensure that it achieves its desired aims.

APPENDIX A. DATA INVENTORY

OVERVIEW OF DATA NEEDS FOR ASSESSING BENEFITS AND COSTS OF RTA

Research Objectives	Data Required	Additional Data (supports the research objectives, but is not required)

Estimate costs of juvenile and adult criminal court processing and incarceration currently, particularly for the estimated population defined as Emerging Adults.	**Data included in report from 2022**
	a. Cost per court case by offense type
	b. Cost per year of incarceration
	c. Caseloads in criminal court by sentence type and offense type
	d. Caseloads in juvenile court by sentence type and offense type
	Data included in report through 2024
	a. Total number of caseloads in criminal court
	Projected data included in report beyond 2024
	a. Total number of caseloads in juvenile court
	b. Juvenile rehabilitation caseloads (prison)
	Data not obtained
	a. Cost or savings of diverting one emerging adult out of incarceration into alternatives
	b. Caseloads in criminal court by disposition
	c. Caseloads in juvenile court by disposition
	d. Total number of caseloads in jail / prison
	    a. Baseline caseloads in local jail (detentions)
		Data not obtained
		a. Costs per different case type in juvenile court, and associated caseloads
		b. Costs per different case type for adult cases, and associated caseloads
		c. Costs for different types of incarceration
		    a. This would also require alignment with caseload or sentencing data
		d. Anything about expected costs for non-government stakeholders (families of the court-involved adults, communities where they live, victims of crime, and neighborhoods with crime)
		    a. For individual impacts, anticipated racial or gender heterogeneity

Forecast costs of juvenile probation, diversion services, and therapeutic service provision by both court-based and community-based services providers required to provide alternatives to juvenile detention and incarceration.	**Data included in report from 2022** a. Cost per probation case for juveniles and adults **Data not obtained** a. Cost per case for diversion services b. Cost per case for therapeutic services by court-based versus community-based service providers c. Caseloads for probation (juvenile and adult) d. Caseloads for diversion services (juvenile and adult) e. Caseloads for court-based therapeutic services f. Caseloads for community-based therapeutic services	

<table>
<tr>
<td rowspan="3">Forecast costs avoided by serving Emerging Adults in the juvenile justice system due to reduced adult incarceration and reduced recidivism.</td>
<td>Data included in report from 2022
c. Recidivism estimates for Emerging Adults
g. Cost per court case
h. Cost per year of incarceration for adults</td>
<td>Data included in report from 2022
a. Cost per probation case for juveniles and adults
b. Caseloads in criminal court by sentence type and offense type
c. Caseloads in juvenile court by sentence type and offense type</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data included in report through 2024
f. Total court caseloads for Emerging Adults</td>
<td rowspan="2">Data not obtained
a. Cost per case for diversion services
b. Cost per case for therapeutic services
    a. By: court-based versus community-based service providers
c. Estimates of medium- or long-term changes in recidivism
d. Anything about expected costs for non-government stakeholders (families of the court-involved adults, communities where they live, victims of crime, and neighborhoods with crime)
    a. For individual impacts, anticipated racial or gender heterogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data not obtained
a. Incarceration counts for Emerging Adults
b. Incarceration estimates for Emerging Adults \
d. Estimates for probability of adult incarceration given treatment in juvenile system (i.e., elasticity)
a. By: stage in process (e.g., juvenile court, probation, <u>incarceration</u>)
e. Estimates for probability of recidivism given treatment in juvenile system (i.e., elasticity)
a. By: stage in process (e.g., juvenile court, probation, juvenile rehabilitation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td rowspan="2">Forecast downstream employment, health, and well-being effects of providing programmatic and service alternatives, reduced collateral consequences, and more developmentally appropriate responses provided in the juvenile justice system.</td>
<td>Data included in report from 2022
Estimates of the following effect sizes of programmatic and service alternatives to incarceration:
a. Probation-> Employment (Adults)</td>
<td rowspan="2">Data not obtained
a. Estimates of programmatic impact by program size or type
    a. For individual impacts, anticipated racial or gender heterogeneity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data not obtained
Estimates of the following effect sizes of programmatic and service alternatives to incarceration:
a. Employment
    a. Probation -> Employment (Juveniles)
    b. Diversion Services -> Employment (Adults)
    c. Diversion Services -> Employment (Juveniles)
    d. Therapeutic Services -> Employment (Adults) by court versus community-based
    e. Therapeutic Services -> Employment (Juveniles) by court versus community based</td>
</tr>
</table>

	b. Health outcomes a. Probation -> Health outcomes (Juveniles) b. Probation -> Health outcomes (Adults) c. Diversion Services -> Health outcomes (Adults) d. Diversion Services -> Health outcomes (Juveniles) e. Therapeutic Services -> Health outcomes (Adults) by court versus community-based f. Therapeutic Services -> Health outcomes (Juveniles) by court versus community based c. Collateral consequences a. Probation -> Collateral consequences (Juveniles) b. Probation -> Collateral consequences (Adults) c. Diversion Services -> Collateral consequences (Adults) d. Diversion Services -> Collateral consequences (Juveniles) e. Therapeutic Services -> Collateral consequences (Adults) by court versus community-based f. Therapeutic Services -> Collateral consequences (Juveniles) by court versus community based d. Other aspects of individual wellbeing a. Probation -> Other outcomes (Juveniles) b. Probation -> Other outcomes (Adults) c. Diversion Services -> Other outcomes (Adults) d. Diversion Services -> Other outcomes (Juveniles) e. Therapeutic Services -> Other outcomes (Adults) by court versus community-based f. Therapeutic Services -> Other outcomes (Juveniles) by court versus community based	
In addition to net monetary costs or benefits, provide a description of likely non-monetary benefits. Possible outcomes to examine/consider include: earnings/income, high school graduation/educational attainment, EITC take-up/UI benefits take-up/benefits take-up, housing security, and substance use treatment.	**Data not obtained** Would need data on impacts on each of these outcomes of being treated in the juvenile system rather than the adult system for emerging adults.	
Estimate impact on individuals across the life course and for the State of Washington.	**Data not obtained** Would need data on longer-term impacts of diverting individuals from adult to juvenile justice system on all outcomes listed above	

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