

Executive Summary

Most states' juvenile justice systems have two main goals: increased public safety and the rehabilitation of adolescent offenders to prevent future crime. Policymakers and others need balanced information about the most effective ways to meet both goals.

Currently, North Carolina, New York, and Connecticut are the only states that prosecute 16- and 17-year-olds charged with a crime in adult criminal court. The North Carolina General Assembly is addressing the question of whether 16- and 17-year-olds charged with a crime should be prosecuted in juvenile court instead.

The question of whether adolescent offenders should be prosecuted in the juvenile or adult system is important because offenders aged 16-24 account for 37 percent of arrests for violent crimes in the United States and North Carolina. Policies that impact the frequency and duration of criminal activity among 16- and 17-year-olds have a major impact on overall crime rates and public safety.

This Family Impact Seminar briefing report addresses the line between the juvenile and adults systems. A “family impact perspective” on policymaking informs this report. Just as policymakers routinely consider the environmental or economic impact of policies and programs, Family Impact Seminars help policymakers examine impact on families by providing research findings and evidence-based strategies.

This report consists of five briefs:

Brief 1 provides **background and recent history on the handling of adolescent offenders in the United States and North Carolina**; a description of how the current North Carolina juvenile justice system works; recent North Carolina juvenile justice statistics; and information on programs and facilities for adolescent offenders in North Carolina and other states.

Brief 2 discusses **research on youth development** pertaining to three issues central to policies for adolescent offenders: blameworthiness, competence to stand trial, and the potential for an adolescent's character to change.

Brief 3 details **how other states treat adolescent offenders**.

Brief 4 discusses research on **how juvenile crime rates respond to changes in punishment laws**.

Brief 5 presents **three policy options** and a series of further considerations.

The briefing report concludes with a glossary, a list of acronyms, a list of additional resources, and a chart of the current legal age in NC for different activities.

Common Terms in this Report

Adjudication A legal case in which a youth has pled guilty or is found guilty of an offense.

Adolescent Offender For the purposes of this report, a person under age 18 charged with a crime.

Disposition The juvenile court's decision regarding the consequences of or punishment for committing a crime.