Prevent Violence, Transform Young Lives: The Promise of Comprehensive Adolescent Services and the Role for States

December 16, 2024
Josh Weber, Director, Youth and Juvenile Justice

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We are a national nonprofit, nonpartisan organization that combines the power of a membership association, serving state officials in all three branches of government, with policy and research expertise to develop strategies that increase public safety and strengthen communities.

We've helped improve outcomes for millions of youth and families in contact with the juvenile justice system across the country.
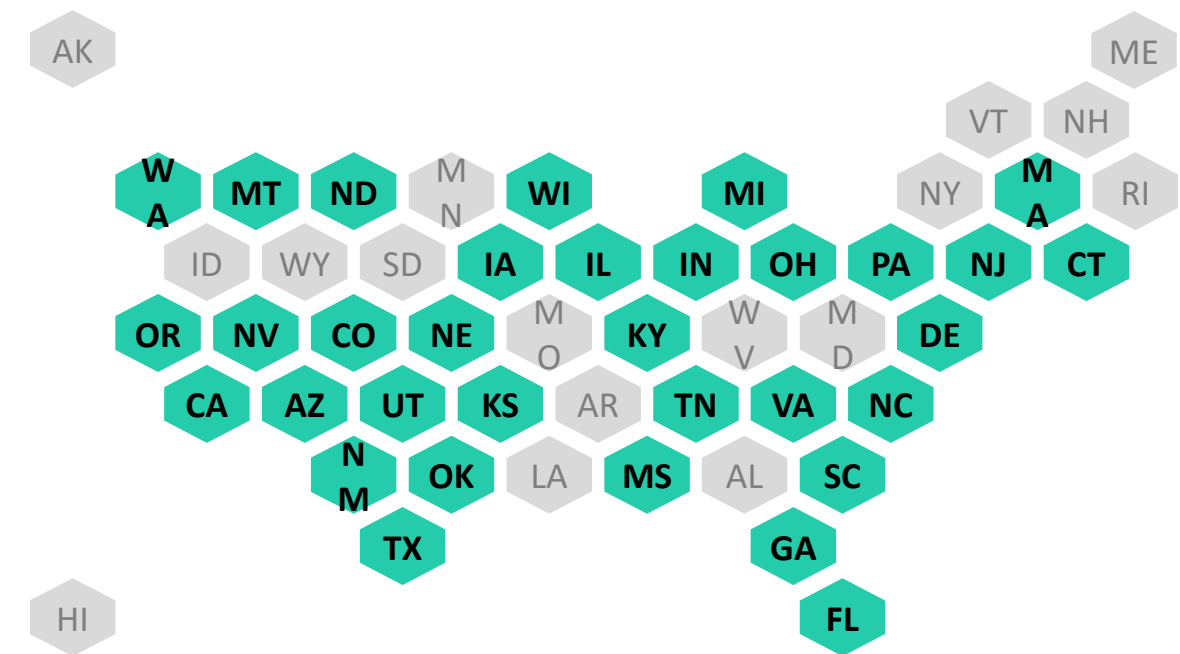
The Challenge:

Youth arrests for violent offenses overall remain historically low. However, post-pandemic, youth arrests for homicide and weapons surged.

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Overall, arrests for youth violence declined 54% from 2000 to 2022, and in 2022, remained near historical lows.

Total Youth Arrests for Violent Index Offenses, 2000–2022

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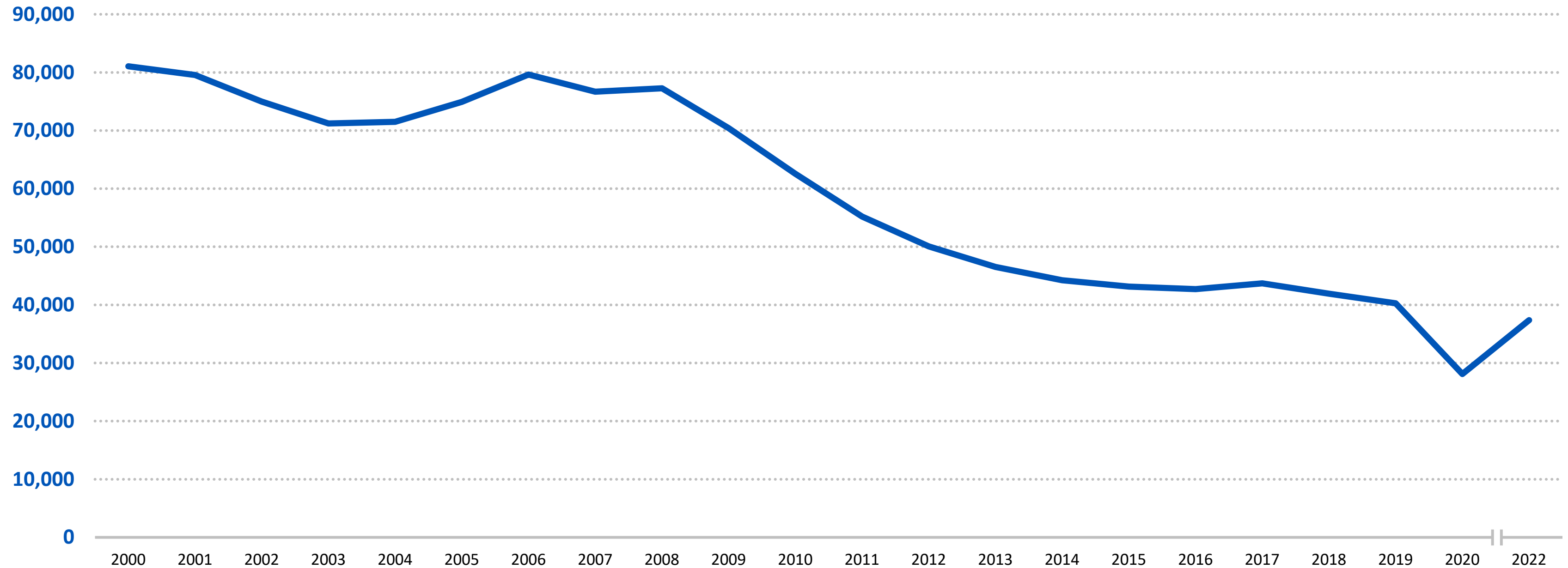
However, youth arrests for homicides have increased for a decade and surged in 2022 to never-before-seen levels.

Youth Arrests for Homicides, 2000–2022
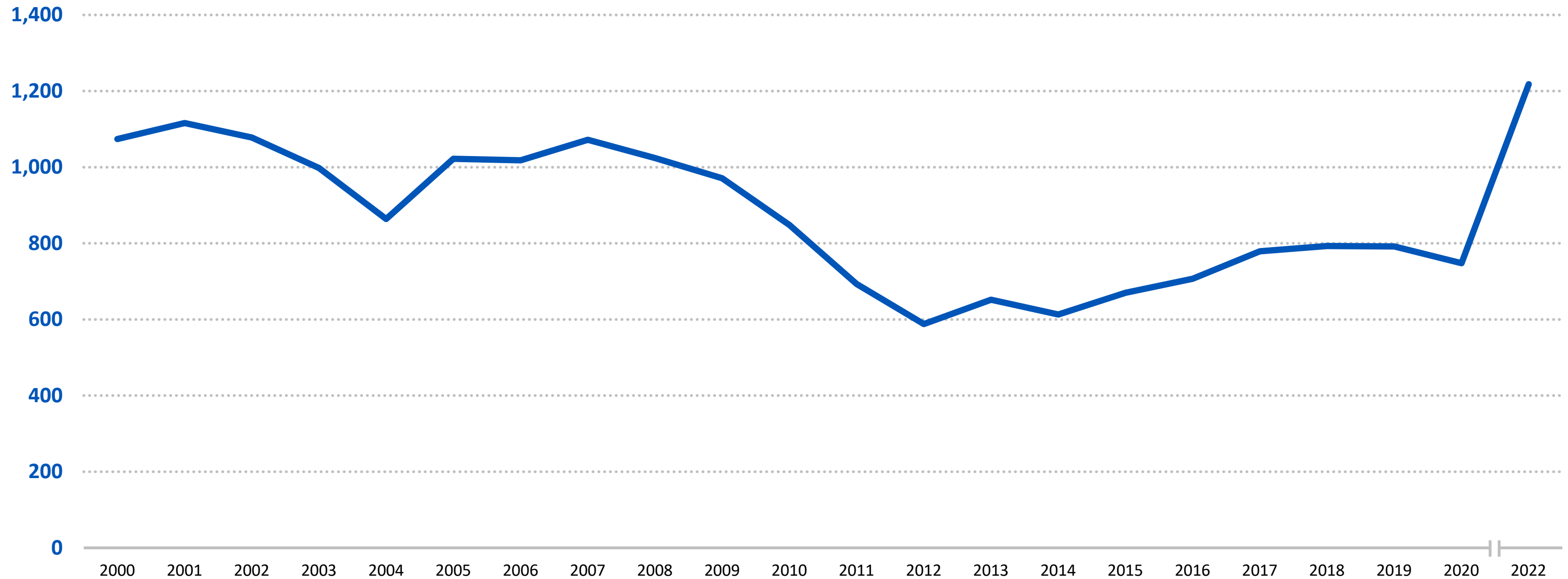
Homicide and suicide are now the leading causes of death among children and young adults, particularly among youth of color.

Suicide and Homicide Death Rates Among People Aged 15–19: United States 2001–2021
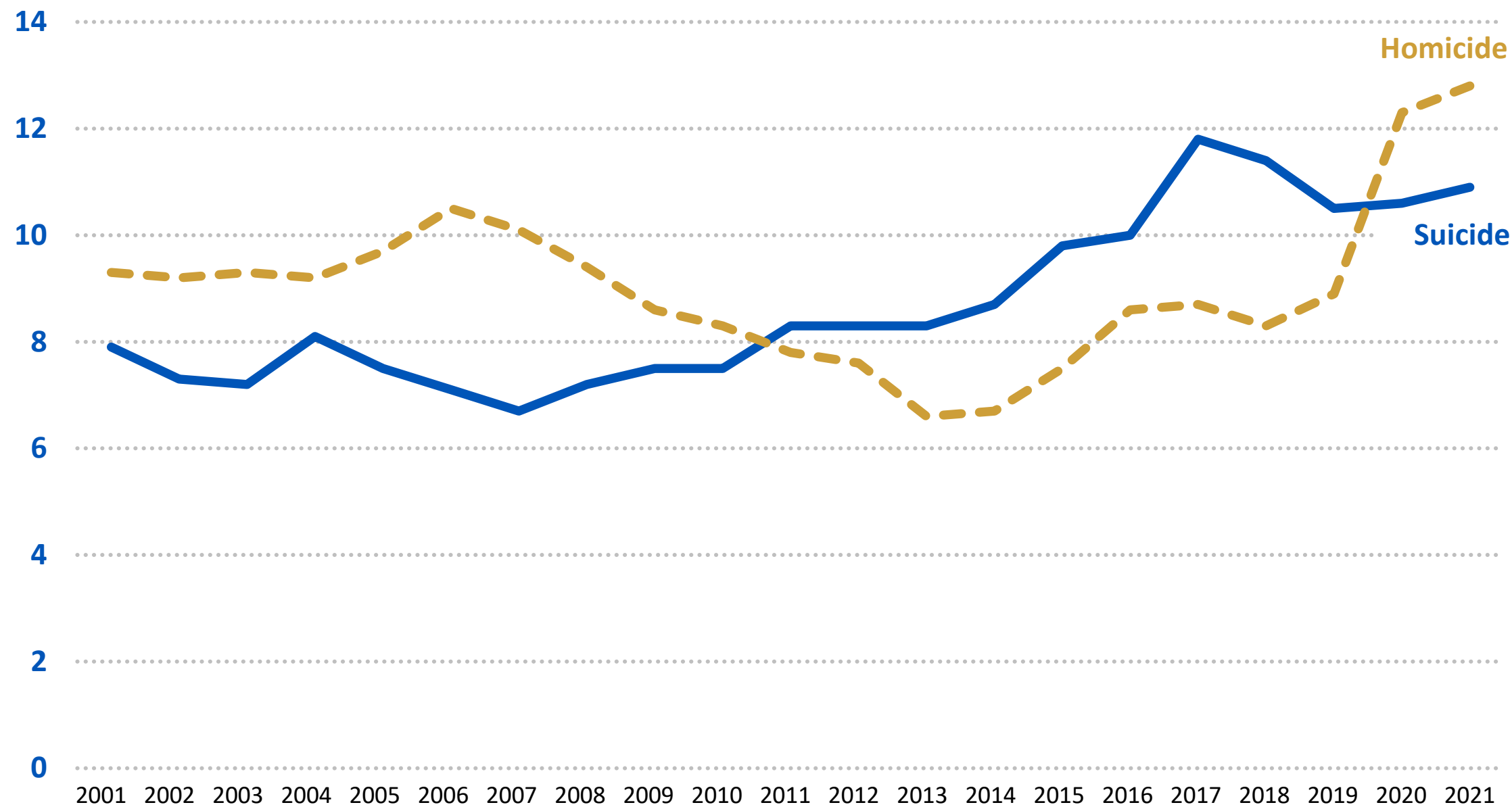
- In half of all cases in which a minor committed a violent crime, the victim was also a minor.

- The rate of firearm deaths among Black youth is 20 times higher than White youth.

- Rates of gun violence victimization for Black youth in rural areas are now equal to urban areas.

2023 FBI data (youth/adults combined) shows declines in the violent crime rate and historically large declines in the murder rate.

US Murders and Rate Per 100k, 1960 - 2023
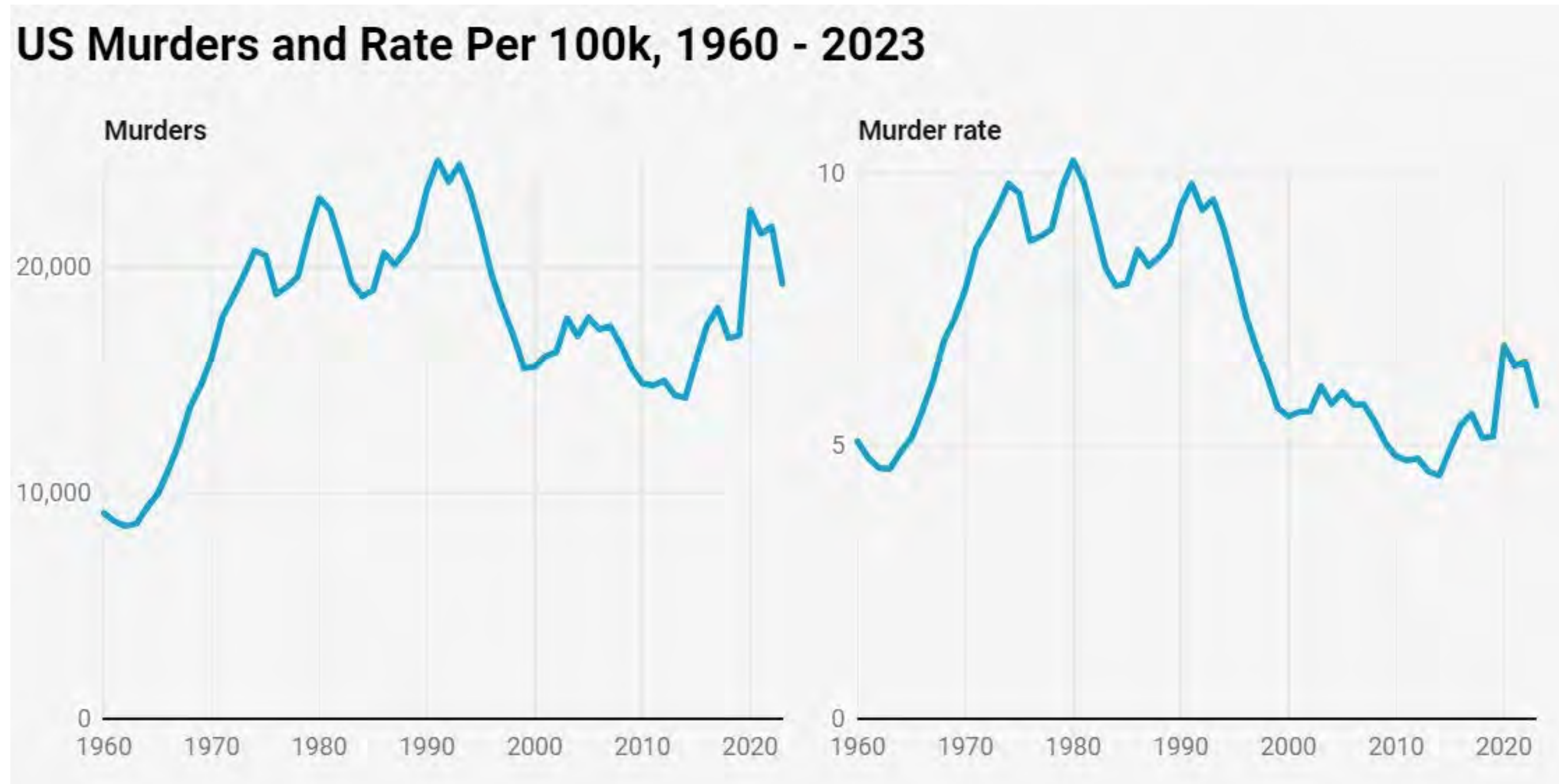
The Challenge:

Adolescents are increasingly struggling with challenges that can impact their well-being, and ultimately, risk to themselves or others.

Public systems and providers are struggling to address these needs.

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Adolescents are experiencing unprecedented mental health challenges, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic.

29%
Reported that their **mental health was not good** "most of the time or always.

20%
Seriously considered attempting suicide.

40%
Felt sad or hopeless, compared to 26% in 2009.
This includes 53% of girls and over 65% of LGBTQ youth.

109%
Increase in adolescent drug overdose deaths during the pandemic.

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Adolescents are experiencing significant trauma that can lead to self-harm, family conflict, violence, and system involvement.

55%
Experienced emotional abuse by an adult at home.

12%
Reported physical abuse.

20%
Witnessed someone get physically attacked, beaten, stabbed, or shot, including almost 30% of Black students.

11%
Experienced sexual violence, including 17% of girls and 20% of LGBTQ youth.

36%
Experienced racism, including over half of Black, Asian, and mixed-race students.

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Most states have historically lacked a formal adolescent behavioral health system.

~5M

youth with at least one major depressive episode (MDE)

~3M

youth with severe major depressive episode (MDE)

Only half of all young people with a major or severe depression episode receive needed treatment.

47%

youth with MDE who received mental health services

53%

youth with severe MDE who received consistent treatment

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Public agencies and providers are facing significant staffing challenges that are further undermining their ability to address youth's needs.

> 85%
Cite moderate or severe challenges in hiring and retaining staff.

> 80%
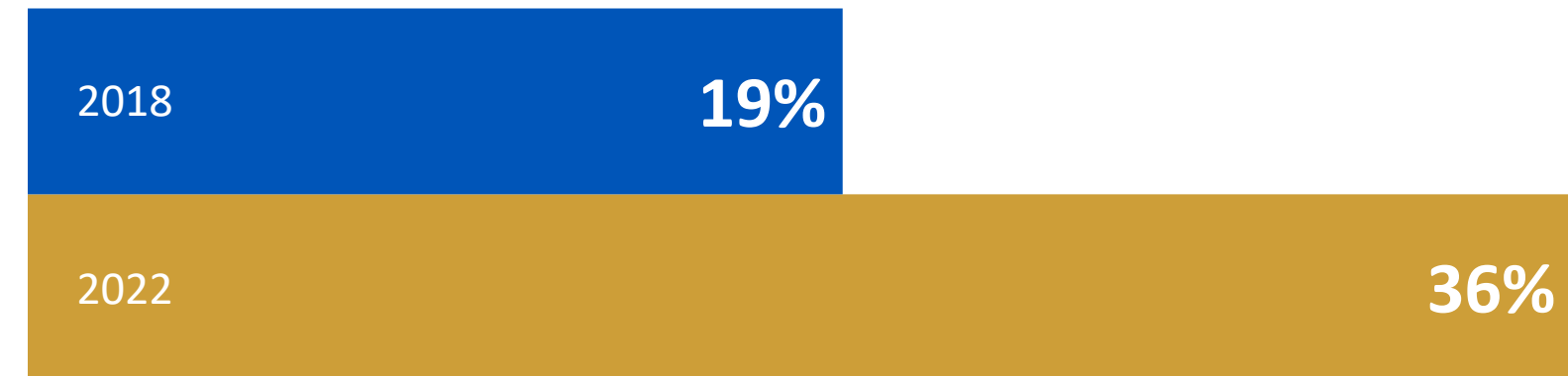Report moderate or severe staffing challenges among service providers, significantly impacting service availability.

< 10%
Felt their state had a plan to address these staffing challenges.

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Schools have traditionally been a key outlet for identifying and supporting youth with behavioral health and other service needs, but absenteeism has surged.

Chronic Absenteeism by District Type 2018–2022

Low Achievement

2018	**19%**
2022	**36%**

Middle Achievement

2018	**16%**
2022	**29%**

High Achievement

2018	**10%**
2022	**20%**

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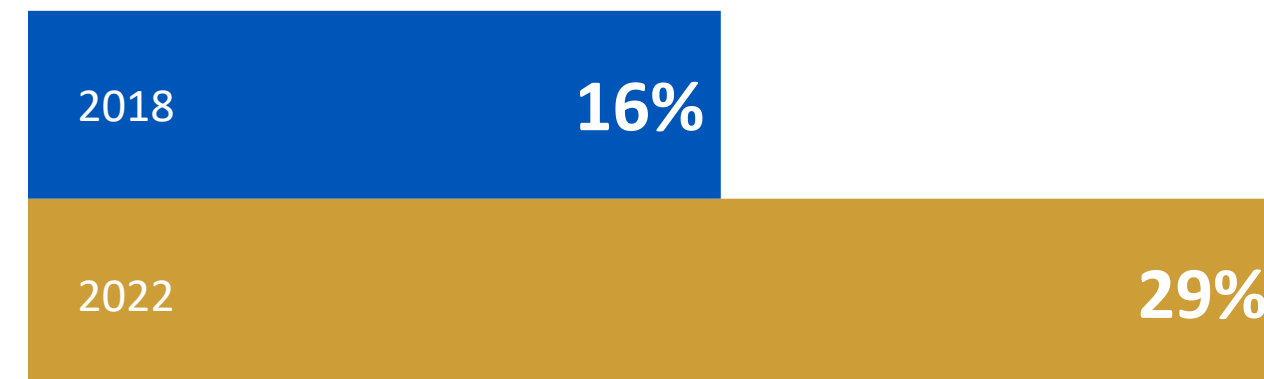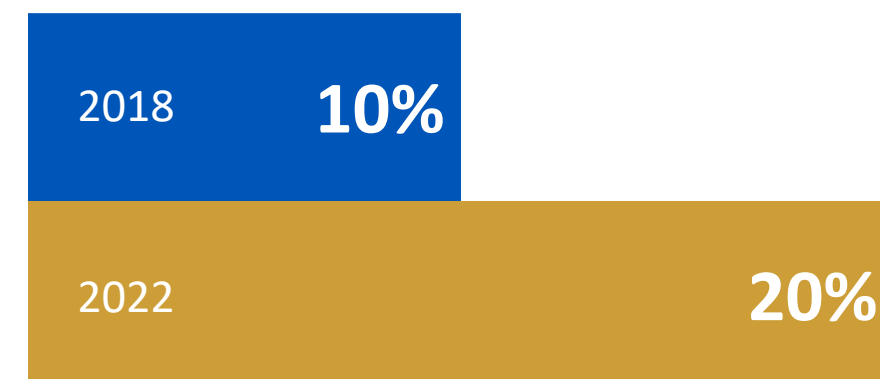
The Challenge:

Most youth involved in the juvenile justice system have committed offenses that don't involve physical harm to another person.

State responses risk increasing the use of the justice system as a default response to adolescents in crisis, causing more harm than good.

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Public concern, media coverage, and political divisiveness on youth crime and violence is currently at levels not seen since the mid-1990s.

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HOMEPAGE SHOWCASE

'You can't keep letting them get away with it': Addressing juvenile crime

MOCO 360

Opinion

Opinion: To fix our juvenile justice system, we need accountability for offenders

Montgomery County has an obligation to fill the gaps to prevent recurring incidents

by **Dawn Luedtke**
November 18, 2023 11:00 am

At our Oct. 30 County Council Public Safety Committee

Some say - it all starts at h
change. Either way, every
carjackings shouldn't be c
Adrian Inniss. "You can't k
changes and they're hurti
down. It's bad," said Linda

By: Elizabeth V

READER

NEWS & POLITICS

Politics of fear: Are youth really to blame for the car-jacking spike?

Cops say masked teens with a thirst for violence and
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reveals
al evide

Dukmas
2021

ACTION NEWS 5

97°

Lawmakers looking to hold parents accountable for their children's crimes

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

Juvenile Crime Surges, Reversing Long Decline. 'It's Just Kids Killing Kids.'

Violence among children has soared across the country since 2020. One consequence: a mounting toll of young victims.

By *Dan Frosch* and *Zusha Elinson* | Photographs by José A. Alvarado Jr. for *The Wall Street Journal*
Jan. 23, 2023 10:06 am ET

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IN FOCUS

Governor wants juvenile justice bills to focus on accountability

Justice system involvement negatively affects the entire course of young people's lives.

Youth formally processed by the juvenile justice system experience far worse outcomes in the 5 years after arrest as compared to similar youth who were diverted:

✗ More likely to be rearrested and incarcerated

✗ More engaged in violence

✗ More peers involved in delinquency

✗ Lower school attainment and graduation rates

✗ Fewer skills to manage their emotions

✗ Lower perception of opportunity

Most youth involved in the juvenile justice system have not caused physical harm to another person.

Proportion of All Youth at Each Decision Point Whose Most Serious Offense was a Non-Person Delinquent Offense

70%

Arrest = ~250,000

62%

Probation = ~106,000

62%

Incarceration = ~24,000

Youth of color are more likely to be pushed into the justice system than White youth; disparities have worsened over the last 15 years.

In 2020/2021, Black youth were:

2.5x	**2.9x**	**4.7x**	**5.7x**
more likely to be arrested	more likely to be referred to court	more likely to be detained	more likely to be placed

than White youth.

The Opportunity:
States should develop a new vision and approach for comprehensively addressing the needs of youth and families to protect public safety and improve youth outcomes.

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Objective 1: Develop an early intervention structure that helps youth and families get the help they need without system involvement.

A place to go when they need help

An alternative to the police when in crisis

An assessment of their needs and warm handoffs to services

A peer and credible messenger support system for guidance

A place to cool off and mediate conflict when a break is needed

Services that address a range of needs and that are timely, free, and culturally competent

Opportunities that support youth to achieve a more prosperous and health future

Chance to understand and repair any harm caused to victims or communities.

Objective 2: Adopt and implement a research-based violence prevention and recidivism reduction strategy for higher risk youth.

- Street teams and violence interrupter programs

- Mentors, life coaching, and credible messengers

- Cognitive behavioral therapy including trauma informed CBT, hospital-based programs, and victim supports

- Mental health and substance use counseling

- Family therapeutic and conflict mediation supports

- Pathways to education, employment, and economic opportunity

- Cultural competence, community partnerships, and care coordination

Objective 3: Address gaps in public agency and service provider capacity and expand and transform the workforce engaging with young people.

Who should be working with the most vulnerable, complex, highest risk youth in your state, and what qualifications, compensation, and support is needed to ensure their success and sustainability?

States needs a cross-systems, statewide plan to:

- Develop a vision for the workforce

- Expand and diversify providers and the workforce

- Align provider rates and workforce compensation with the challenging, comprehensive nature of the work

- Develop workforce partnership pipelines

- Establish a statewide system of credentialing, professional development, and staff wellness

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Collaborating for Youth and Public Safety Initiative (CYPSI)

We are partnering with six states to motivate, guide, and support them to realize a new, cross systems vision and approach for improving public safety and youth outcomes.

Assemble cross systems state leaders to oversee CYPSI

Conduct system mapping/gap analysis based on best practices framework

Site visit for listening sessions and strategic planning

Multi-state convening of cross systems leaders and action planning

Opportunities for intensive technical assistance to enact and implement plans

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Sources

Slide 5-6: Data regarding arrests for youth under the age of 18 between 2000 and 2022 comes from the FBI's Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program. In this data tool, we use SRS data for all analyses involving youth arrests between 2000 and 2020, drawing from the Uniform Crime Reporting (UCR) Program data: Arrests by Age, Sex, and Race dataset released by the FBI and cleaned and aggregated by Jacob Kaplan. For all analyses related to 2022 youth arrests for index crimes, we use NIBRS national estimates produced by BJS and RTI. 2021 data was collected by the UCR and therefore is not reported.

Slide 7 Nirmita Panchal, "The Impact of Gun Violence on Children and Adolescents," Kaiser Family Foundation, February 22, 2024, https://www.kff.org/mental-health/issue-brief/the-impact-of-gun-violence-on-children-and-adolescents/.

Slide 10 Youth Risk Behavior Surveillance System 2023, Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, https://www.cdc.gov/healthyyouth/data/yrbs/index.htm.

Slide 11: Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, "2022 National Survey on Drug Use and Health (NSDUH) Releases," accessed September 18, 2024, https://www.samhsa.gov/data/release/2022-national-survey-drug-use-and-health-nsduh-releases.

Slide 12: Josh Weber and Christina Gilbert, "Systems in Crisis: Revamping the Juvenile Justice Workforce and Core Strategies for Improving Public Safety and Youth Outcomes" (CSG Justice Center, 2023), https://projects.csgjusticecenter.org/systems-in-crisis/systems-in-crisis-brief/.

Slide 13: American Enterprise Institute, "Return 2 Learn Tracker," accessed June 3, 2024, https://www.returntolearntracker.net/.

Slide 16: Elizabeth Cauffman et al., "Crossroads in juvenile justice: The impact of initial processing decision on youth 5 years after first arrest," Development and Psychopathology (2020): 1–14. https://faculty.lsu.edu/pfricklab/pdfs/juvenilejustice-pdfs/dpcauffmanetalmaincrossroadsweb.pdf

Slide 17: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, "Easy Access to Juvenile Court Statistics (EZAJCS)," accessed September 18, 2024, https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezajcs/; Statistical Briefing Book, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, https://ojjdp.ojp.gov/statistical-briefing-book

Slide 18: We rely on the FBI's SRS data to evaluate racial disparities at arrest between 2000 and 2020, and EZAJCS (see the Youth Court Cases section for detailed description) to look at racial and ethnic disparities from referral to adjudication between 2005 and 2021. We measured racial and ethnic disparity using a relative rate index (RRI). The RRI provides a standardized comparison between two different groups on a particular event or outcome. To determine the RRI, we first calculated the rate of an event (e.g., arrest, referral, petition) for each racial and ethnic group by dividing the number of youth in the group who experienced the event by the total population of youth in that group. Population data comes from the U.S. Census Bureau. Then we divided the rate for the group of interest (e.g., Black youth) by the rate for the reference group, which in this tool is always White youth.

Thank you.

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