

Keep the YRA Intact!

THE PROBLEM

Unnecessarily incarcerating young people undermines public safety, does lasting damage to young people's physical and mental health, and impedes their educational and job success.

- As the brain develops and young people grow older, **most desist from lawbreaking and risky behaviors**.
- **Incarceration delays young people's psychological maturation** and hinders positive behavior change.
- Incarcerating young people **does not reduce delinquent behavior**, with confinement often resulting in higher rates of rearrest and reincarceration when compared to probation and other community alternatives.
- Increasing the severity of punishment **does not deter people** from engaging in criminal activity.

THE SOLUTION

- **Keep the YRA intact** to preserve the District's ability to hold young people accountable while supporting their rehabilitation and long-term success.
 - When a YRA sentence is legally available, its application is solely within the sentencing judge's discretion.
 - The law provides the court with clear factors to guide decisions to sentence young people under this law.
 - **Set-asides lift the life-altering collateral consequences of a felony** conviction, removing barriers to jobs, housing, education, and other opportunities, while **law enforcement still retains access to the record**.
- **Do not add more offenses** to the list that are ineligible for YRA.
- Continue to allow YRA alternatives both at the time of initial sentencing and at a later point, after successful completion of probation.
- Prioritize evidence-based public safety solutions to keep us safe.

The YRA provides a sentencing framework that aligns with scientific evidence on the developing brain, recognizes the unique needs of emerging adults, and advances public safety.



FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE YOUTH REHABILITATION ACT (YRA)

With exceptions for murder and serious sexual offenses, the Youth Rehabilitation Act (YRA), expanded by the DC Council in 2018, allows judges to sentence young people below mandatory minimums and allows eligible young people to have their conviction “set aside” if they successfully complete their sentence.

WHY DO YOUNG PEOPLE NEED SENTENCING ALTERNATIVES?

Young adults are developmentally different from older adults. Compared with older adults, generally, young adults are:

- Less able to moderate responses in emotionally charged situations
- Less likely to consider future consequences in decision-making
- More likely to experience behavioral health disorders
- More amenable to positive interventions

DOES THE YRA ALLOW EVERYONE CONVICTED OF A CRIME BEFORE AGE 25 TO ACCESS ALTERNATIVE SENTENCING AND RECORD RELIEF?

No. People convicted of the following crimes are excluded from consideration under the YRA:

- Murder,
- First-degree murder that is an act of terrorism,
- Second-degree murder that is an act of terrorism,
- First-degree sexual abuse,
- Second-degree sexual abuse, and
- First-degree child sexual abuse.

HOW MANY PEOPLE RECEIVE A YRA SENTENCE?

According to data from the [Criminal Justice Coordinating Council](#), between 2019 and 2020, of the 1,492 YRA-eligible cases out of a total of 6,517 cases disposed, 820 cases resulted in a YRA sentence, which is 13% of all disposed cases and 55% of all eligible cases. In 384 of the 1,492 YRA-eligible cases (26%), sentences were set aside (sealed) following the completion of the sentence.

WERE 60% OF CARJACKING SENTENCES BETWEEN 2022 AND 2024 YRA-ELIGIBLE?

Of the 25 carjacking counts sentenced, 15 (60%) were YRA-eligible. This represents 15 individual young people who could have received a YRA sentence for a carjacking offense. Importantly, the Sentencing Commission’s data reflects only eligibility based on age and offense, not whether a YRA sentence was actually imposed.

WERE 71% OF ARMED CARJACKING SENTENCES BETWEEN 2022 AND 2024 YRA-ELIGIBLE?

Of the seven armed carjacking counts sentenced, five (71%) were YRA-eligible. This represents five young people who could have qualified for a YRA sentence. The Sentencing Commission’s data reflects only eligibility, not whether a YRA sentence was imposed.

WERE 69% OF ARMED ROBBERY SENTENCES BETWEEN 2022 AND 2024 YRA-ELIGIBLE?

Of the 75 armed robbery counts sentenced, 52 (69%) were YRA eligible. This represents 47 young people who could have qualified for a YRA sentence. The Sentencing Commission’s data reflects only eligibility, not whether a YRA sentence was imposed.

WERE 61% OF AWIK SENTENCES BETWEEN 2022 AND 2024 YRA-ELIGIBLE?

Of the 67 assault with intent to kill (AWIK) counts sentenced, 41 (61%) were YRA eligible. These counts were spread across 14 young people who could have qualified for a YRA sentence. The Sentencing Commission’s data reflects only eligibility, not whether a YRA sentence was imposed.

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE YRA (CONT.)

HAS THE YRA ELIMINATED MANDATORY MINIMUMS IN DC?

No, the YRA has not eliminated mandatory minimums in DC. It has allowed for a judge's discretion in sentencing a young person when the YRA is legally available.

A lawyer can ask the court to order a youth study, and if the charge isn't one of the excluded crimes, the judge can require it. After reviewing the study, the judge decides whether to grant a YRA sentence and must explain the decision in writing. While judges are not required to sentence a person below the mandatory minimum sentence, it is an option.

From 2019 to 2020, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council reported that 1,142 people convicted of 2,116 total offenses were eligible for YRA sentences. Judges applied YRA sentencing alternatives to just over half of those offenses (1,104, or 52%). Only 45 of the offenses were subject to mandatory minimums. Of the 45 offenses, mandatory minimum terms were not imposed in 28 offenses.

DO JUDGES TEND TO DEPART FROM THE DC VOLUNTARY SENTENCING GUIDELINES DUE TO THE YRA?

Overall, judges in DC follow the Sentencing Guidelines at very high rates - 98.4% of felony sentences in 2024 were compliant. While judges can lawfully depart from the Guidelines, the data does not suggest widespread departures. We don't have data specific to YRA-eligible cases, but the overall compliance rate makes clear that departures remain the exception, not the rule.

WHAT HAS BEEN THE IMPACT OF YRA?

Compared to persons who did not have their convictions set aside, those who had their convictions set aside were significantly less likely to be rearrested or reconvicted within two years of completing their sentence. This finding also held true for specific types of offenses.

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