



Restoring Judicial Oversight of Youth Involved in the Justice System



Black and Latino youth are disproportionately referred to and tried in adult court.

In King County, **82%** of cases referred by law enforcement for potential automatic decline into adult court involved youth of color.



Between 2011 and 2015, **95%** of auto-decline cases filed in adult court by prosecutors involved youth of color.

Judges should be able to decide whether a child who has committed a serious crime should be tried as an adult or kept in the juvenile justice system. Yet for 16- and 17-year-old children who commit certain crimes, Washington law has unfairly stripped that power from judges.

A child who is **automatically declined** by Washington law into adult court faces lifelong adult consequences:

- A child awaiting trial in adult court is typically held in an adult jail. Adult jails fall far short of offering the same educational and rehabilitation services as juvenile facilities, and treatment can be much harsher.
- Children in adult jails can be held in **solitary confinement** for 23 hours a day. They are **36 times** more likely to commit suicide and are at the greatest risk of sexual victimization.
- Youth convicted in adult court must carry the lifelong burdens of an adult conviction. These include legal financial obligations, public criminal records, and several barriers to housing, employment, and reintegration into society.

We now know that children are different than adults at the most basic neurological level. Brain development that governs judgment, impulse control, and long-term planning continues throughout adolescence into a young person's mid-20s.

Children aren't widgets. Judges should be able to make individual decisions about individual cases, instead of the current system which resembles assembly-line justice.

The legislature has the opportunity to align our laws with behavioral science and how our justice system should work by reforming auto-decline laws to return the role of judging to judges.