

Law Enforcement Officials Report Frequent Frustration With Juvenile Justice



Officers cite three common complaints about their cases involving youth and their interactions with the juvenile justice system.

Lost time in service

Officers may be discouraged by juvenile court processes that require them to spend long stretches of time supervising youth while juvenile court or probation staff conduct intake, or while searching for parents or other adults to whom they can release youth they have taken into custody.

“Frequent Flyer” cases

- Officers frequently cite frustration and concern about troubled youth who pose minimal threat to public safety but generate repeated calls for service due to acute but unmet psychological, familial or human service needs.
- Incidents involving these youth can consume a disproportionate share of officers’ time on the job, and they can be especially exasperating for officers when the human services, education, and/or juvenile justice systems fail to connect these youth (or in some cases their parents and families) to needed mental health, substance abuse, emergency shelter and/or other services.

Perceived lack of consequences

Officers frequently voice frustration over situations in which they do not see youth they apprehend facing any meaningful consequences for their misbehavior. This perception can arise for several reasons:

- Officers may be justifiably disturbed at delays in court processing, resulting in no court response for weeks or months.
- They may be angry that detention is not imposed on youth they arrest in the belief that detention is the best or only meaningful response to delinquent behavior.
- They may not be informed (due to lack of any feedback loop) about the consequences and interventions provided to youth following police contact.