

CLOSING SAN FRANCISCO'S JUVENILE HALL: AN ANALYSIS OF THE YOUTH POPULATION



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Introduction

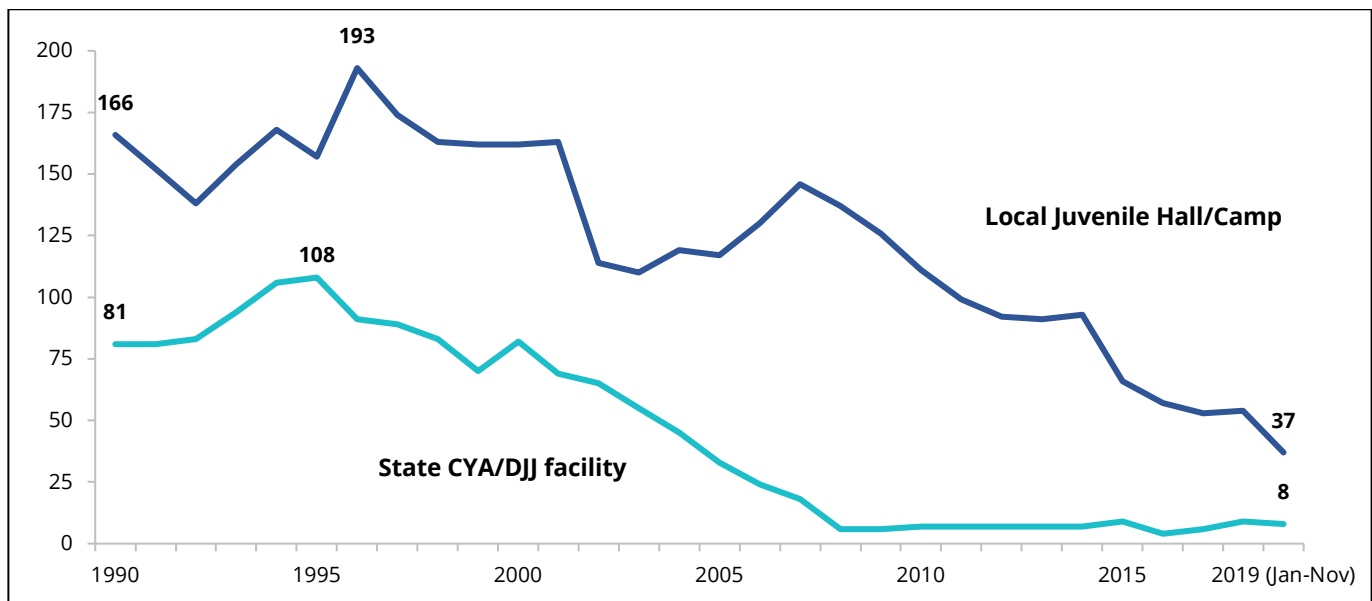
In June 2019, the San Francisco Board of Supervisors voted to close the city's juvenile hall, setting in motion a planning process that will culminate in the transfer of all remaining youth out of the facility and into community-led alternatives by the end of 2021. This analysis is the first in a series by the Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice (CJCJ) to assist in planning for the closure of the juvenile hall.

CJCJ has conducted a comprehensive review of the juvenile hall population using official data gathered from more than 200 annual and monthly reports issued by the San Francisco Juvenile Probation Department (SFJPD) from 1990 through November 2019, monthly tabulations compiled by the Board of State and Community Corrections and Division of Juvenile Justice (DJJ), and case tabulations by San Francisco's Community Assessment and Referral Center (CARC). The detailed data provided by these official sources offer vital information on population trends within the city's juvenile justice system and aid in developing an effective system of alternatives to detention.

Background

San Francisco youth are being detained in record low numbers (Figure 1). From a peak in 1996 of 193 youth held in either the juvenile hall or the city's recently-shuttered Log Cabin Ranch, San Francisco now holds an average of just 37 youth (January-November 2019), a decline of 81 percent. The juvenile hall, which has 150 beds, is now 75 percent empty. This decline in local youth detention accompanies an even larger reduction in the number of youth confined in state-run DJJ correctional facilities, which fell from a peak of 108 in 1995 to just eight as of November 2019.

Figure 1. San Francisco local youth detention and state confinement, 1990-2019



Source: BSCC, 2019; SFJPD, 2019

The decline in youth detention and confinement appears to be due primarily to a drop in youth arrests, which fell from a peak of 5,214 in 1993 to 3,069 in 2000 and to 847 in 2018 (DOJ, 2019). A smaller fraction is due to the decline in the San Francisco's youth population, which fell from approximately 55,000 youth ages 10-17 in the early 1990s to

50,000 in 2000 and 49,000 in 2019 (SFJPD, 2019). However, as populations in the juvenile hall declined in recent years, the city saw an increase in the share of youth who were detained after an arrest or referral to the SFJPD, the entity responsible for operating and staffing the juvenile hall.

SFJPD has maintained high levels of spending on the juvenile hall despite steep declines in its population. As a result, the cost of holding a youth for one year in juvenile hall has risen by more than 130 percent in the last decade, from approximately \$137,000 per youth in fiscal year 2009-10 to \$316,000 per youth in fiscal year 2018-19 (San Francisco Office of the Mayor, 2019; SFJPD, 2019).¹

As rising costs and falling population trends have come to light, community leaders and youth advocates have galvanized support for the closure of the juvenile hall. Now, San Francisco is poised to reinvest millions of dollars into local alternatives, such as diversion programs, community-based services, or small, temporary shelters for youth. Planning for this reinvestment of city resources requires a clear understanding of the youth population that will need to be served following the closure of the juvenile hall.

Population Analysis

Characteristics

As of November 30, 2019, SFJPD reports a population of 40 youth in the juvenile hall, a 61 percent decline since November 2009. (Ninety youth were held in juvenile hall and 13 youth were held in the city’s Log Cabin Ranch in November 2009, so the total detained locally in that month was 103 youth.) Compared to a decade ago, youth detained in San Francisco’s juvenile hall are less likely to be Latino, male, or over age 18, and more likely to be African American, female, and under age 16 (Table 1).

Table 1. Characteristics of youth detained in juvenile hall, November 30, 2009 vs. November 30, 2019

	November 30, 2009	November 30, 2019
Total number of youth in local custody	90	40
Race		
African American	51.1%	72.5%
Latino	38.9%	20.0%
Asian/Pacific Islander/Other	5.6%	2.5%
White	3.3%	2.5%
Other	1.1%	2.5%
Gender		
Female	11.1%	22.5%
Male	88.9%	77.5%
Age		
Under age 16	18.9%	37.5%
16	33.3%	35.0%
17	35.6%	22.5%
18+	12.2%	5.0%
Residence		
Bayview/Hunter’s Point	25.6%	30.0%
All other San Francisco	52.2%	58.0%
Non-San Francisco	22.2%	12.0%

Source: SFJPD, 2019

¹ All costs are in constant 2019 dollars adjusted by the Bay Area Consumer Price Index.

Offenses

Compared to a decade ago, youth in San Francisco are about as likely to be detained for a felony offense and more likely to be detained for a status offense or other violation. The proportion of youth detained in juvenile hall for non-felony offenses (33.3 percent in 2009; 32.5 percent in 2019) has stayed approximately the same (SFJPD, 2019). That is, a youth confined in juvenile hall in 2019 is about equally likely to be charged with a non-serious offense, including a misdemeanor or process violation, than in years past (SFJPD, 2019).

Table 2. Offenses for which youth are detained in juvenile hall, November 30, 2009 vs. November 30, 2019

	November 30, 2009	November 30, 2019
Total number of youth in local custody	90	40
Offense		
Felonies	66.7%	67.5%
Violent felonies	45.6%	52.5%
Other felonies	21.1%	15.0%
Misdemeanors	15.6%	2.5%
Status/other	17.8%	30.0%

Source: SFJPD, 2019

Reason for detention

The San Francisco juvenile hall population is comprised generally of three distinct groups: 1) youth who are detained following their arrest, 2) youth awaiting transfer to an out-of-home placement, and 3) youth detained for violating the terms of their probation.

On a given day, most youth in the juvenile hall are there awaiting processing or adjudication following an arrest. Many are released within 48 hours, yet a very small number, usually those with more serious charges, remain for longer periods, including some that are detained for more than a month. Approximately 15 percent of arrested youth bypass juvenile hall and are brought directly to the city's CARC (Table 3). CARC develops individualized plans for youth and connects them with services and interventions in the community. Another one-third of arrested youth, generally facing minor charges such as misdemeanors or infractions, are released without being booked into juvenile hall.

Table 3. Post-arrest location by offense category, January 1, 2017-November 13, 2019

Reason for arrest	Number of youth	Percent brought to:		
		Juvenile hall	CARC	Released/other
Violent felony	337	88.7%	5.9%	5.3%
Other felony	453	60.9%	15.7%	23.2%
Misdemeanor	645	28.4%	21.1%	50.4%
Infraction/other	90	44.4%	6.7%	48.9%
Total	1,525	52.3%	15.3%	32.3%

Source: CARC, 2019

Some youth remain in the juvenile hall after they have been adjudicated because they are awaiting placement in an out-of-home program. These youth constitute approximately one-third of the juvenile hall population and may serve considerable time. Often, they are awaiting transfer to a non-secure program, such as a group home, but must remain in the high-security juvenile hall until probation staff identify a suitable placement. The time required to locate a placement can depend on the availability of programs and the urgency with which a youth's probation officer completes the process.

A small share of youth in the juvenile hall are placed there after violating a condition of their probation, such as failing a drug test or skipping school. Between January 2018 and June 2019, an estimated 6 percent of youth booked into San Francisco's juvenile hall were being held for a probation violation (Palomino & Tucker, 2019).

Length of stay

San Francisco's juvenile hall detains youth for similar offenses today than it did in 2009, and the average length of stay has fallen. After spending 66.1 days in custody in November 2009, the average time served by youth in custody fell to 43.7 days in November 2019. Youth serve shorter time on average, and the proportion serving 30 or more days has decreased (Table 4). Importantly, research shows that any amount of time in detention can be traumatic for youth and have lifelong effects on their well-being (Burrell, 2013).

Table 4. Average days served in juvenile hall by population type, November 2009 vs. November 2019

	November 2009	November 2019
Number of youth released	128	53
Number of youth detained	90	41
Average days served		
Releases	25.2	13.5
In-custody population	66.1	43.7
Long-stay youth		
Percent serving 30+ days	34.4%	21.3%

Source: SFJPD, 2019

The large majority of youth referred to SFJPD are released quickly or spend only a few hours or, at most, a few days in custody. However, more than one-fifth of the youth released from juvenile hall account for more than 75 percent of the hall's total bed days due to their lengthier periods of detention. Primarily, these youth are awaiting adjudication, usually for more serious charges, or have been adjudicated and are awaiting transfer to an out-of-home placement. From January through November 2019, 120 youth were released from juvenile hall after serving 30 or more days, while 41 youth remained detained during this period having served an average of 43.7 days (SFJPD, 2019).

Conclusion

San Francisco is the first major urban area in the country to respond to a shrinking juvenile justice system by planning for the closure of its juvenile hall. This effort comes after decades of groundwork by community service providers to develop alternatives to detention. To ensure the success of this reform, the city must begin directing resources from its near-empty facility into the community-based services that will soon take the place of detention. Subsequent reports in this series will explore strategies for serving each of the key populations in the juvenile hall: youth brought to the hall after an arrest, those awaiting transfer to an out-of-home placement, and those detained following a probation violation.

A thorough understanding of the needs of the juvenile hall population — particularly the small number of youth who experience lengthy periods of detention — is necessary to identify suitable alternatives in the community. In advance of the 2021 deadline, CJCJ recommends that the city undertake a case-level review of youth currently and recently detained in the juvenile hall. Such a study could be led by the working group convened to plan for the juvenile hall closure and could focus on youth with the highest needs to ensure that community programs are prepared to begin serving them. The closure of San Francisco's juvenile hall presents city leaders with an opportunity to design a system that serves the small number of youth who require secure placements. This system should, whenever possible, divert youth out of the formal justice system, provide them with services in their communities, or quickly move them to an appropriate out-of-home placement.

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Please note: Jurisdictions submit their data to the official statewide or national databases maintained by appointed governmental bodies. While every effort is made to review data for accuracy and to correct information upon revision, CJCJ cannot be responsible for data reporting errors made at the county, state, or national level.

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