

## YOUTH DEVELOPMENT CENTER POPULATION PROJECTIONS: FISCAL YEAR 2026 TO FISCAL YEAR 2030

### INTRODUCTION

North Carolina General Statutes §§ 164-40(b) and 164-42.1(b) direct the North Carolina Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission (Sentencing Commission) to develop a computerized simulation model to be used to prepare Youth Development Center (YDC) population<sup>1</sup> projections and to help assess North Carolina's long-term resource needs for juvenile dispositions. The projections are prepared in conjunction with the North Carolina Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP). The computer simulation model used to project the juvenile population relies on empirical information about how juveniles are processed through the juvenile justice system (JJS) using data extracted from the North Carolina Juvenile Online Information Network (NC-JOIN), the DJJDP's juvenile management information system.

### YDC POPULATION PROJECTIONS AND CAPACITY

The Sentencing Commission prepared YDC population projections for all juveniles adjudicated delinquent and disposed on or after July 1, 2025 (new population) and for all juveniles committed to a YDC as of June 30, 2025 (resident YDC population), the beginning of the current projection period.<sup>2</sup> The projections take into account the decline of the resident YDC population and the buildup of the new YDC population over the projection period (new YDC commitments that occur through the imposition of a Level 3 disposition or because of a probation violation or a revocation of post-release supervision [PRS]). Starting in FY 2026, the projection excludes 16- and 17-year-olds with violent offenses (Class A – E felonies) who will be processed in the adult system.<sup>3</sup>

Table 1 shows the projected YDC population and capacity over the five-year projection period.<sup>4</sup> YDC capacity was provided by the DJJDP. The total YDC population is projected to be 220 in FY 2026 and 214 in FY 2030. A comparison of the projections with YDC capacity indicates that the projected YDC population will be higher than the available YDC capacity during all projection years. The YDC population was 219 on June 30, 2025, and 206 on November 15, 2025.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout this document, any reference to the YDC population includes juveniles on-campus and off-campus (e.g., home visit, community commitment, hospitalization, escape).

<sup>2</sup> Starting in FY 2026, a new methodology was employed to refine the length of stay for committed juveniles by offense class.

<sup>3</sup> See Session Law (S.L.) 2024-17, effective for offenses committed on or after December 1, 2024.

<sup>4</sup> Separate housing units are required for male and female juveniles. Of the projected YDC beds needed for each year of the five-year projections, 92% are for males.

<sup>5</sup> NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention's *Committed Youth Report*.

**Table 1**  
**Youth Development Center (YDC) Population Projections and Capacity**

Fiscal Year	YDC Population as of June 30 <sup>6</sup>		YDC Capacity <sup>7,8</sup>	Difference between Projection and Capacity <sup>9</sup>
	Previous Projection	Current Projection		
2026	176	220	196	-24
2027	162	218	196	-22
2028	164	206	196	-10
2029	165	212	196	-16
2030	N/A	214	196	-18

Note: Prepared in conjunction with the Department of Public Safety's Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

<sup>6</sup> Juveniles on-campus and off-campus (e.g., home visit, community commitment, hospitalization, escape) are included in the projections.

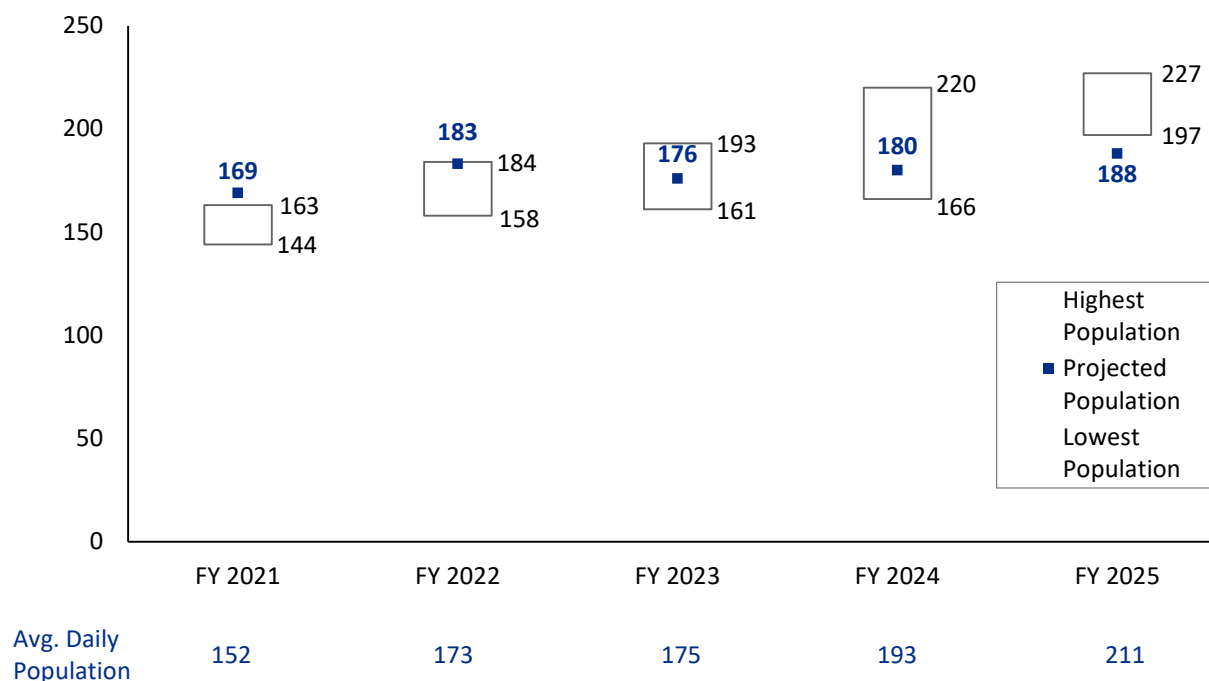
<sup>7</sup> YDC capacity is contingent on staffing patterns to meet required ratios. It does not include community commitment placements or transition step-down beds, which are alternatives to YDC placement for some juveniles in this population, for all or part of commitment.

<sup>8</sup> The Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention implements flexible usage of housing units to transition between YDC and detention center use in response to population demands. One million dollars was appropriated to start the planning phases of a new 48-bed detention center project (DPS23-1), with construction pending capital appropriation.

<sup>9</sup> Positive numbers indicate that the current projected population is lower than capacity, while negative numbers indicate that the current projected population is higher than capacity.

Figure 1 illustrates the historical accuracy of the first year of the YDC projections for the previous five projections in relation to the actual lowest and highest YDC populations for each fiscal year. Given the small number of juveniles in YDCs and the substantial fluctuations in the population over the course of the year, the accuracy of the projections is assessed by examining the projected population within the context of the lowest and highest YDC populations over the fiscal year. Ideally, the projection should be closer to the highest population of the fiscal year. Typically, the projected YDC population has been within the range of the lowest and highest YDC populations for any given fiscal year except for FY 2021 and FY 2025.

**Figure 1**  
**A Comparison of the Actual and Projected YDC Population**  
**FY 2021 to FY 2025 Projections**



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

## ASSUMPTIONS

This section details the assumptions that were used to develop the YDC projections for FY 2026 through FY 2030 (see Table 2). The growth rates were determined after reviewing census projections for North Carolina's youth population and other juvenile justice indicators.<sup>10</sup> Assumptions related to the composition of YDC admissions, lag-time to YDC admission following revocation of probation or PRS, the percentage of Level 3 dispositions, and length of stay were determined using empirical data from the most recent fiscal year (FY 2025).

<sup>10</sup> The rate of delinquent complaints was 23 per 1,000 juveniles in FY 2025 (DJJDP). Overall arrests for index crimes committed by juveniles under 18 increased 3% from CY 2023 to CY 2024. (*Crime in North Carolina – 2024*, State Bureau of Investigation, <http://crimereporting.ncsbi.gov>).

The projections also take into account legislation (House Bill [HB] 834<sup>11</sup>) that redefined the delinquent juvenile to exclude youth aged 16- and 17-years who commit a Violent offense (i.e., Class A – E felony).<sup>12</sup> These youth are charged as adults effective December 1, 2024. The projections assume minimal impact from this change; once empirical information is available under this new law, the assumptions will be modified if necessary.

**Table 2**  
**Assumptions for the FY 2026 to FY 2030 Projections**

<b>Growth Rates</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•1% each year</li> </ul>
<b>YDC Admission Type</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•60% from a delinquent complaint</li> <li>•34% from a probation violation</li> <li>•6% from a revocation of PRS</li> </ul>
<b>Lag-time to YDC Admission (Median)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•9 months for probation violations</li> <li>•5 months for revocation of PRS</li> </ul>
<b>Level 3 Dispositions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•3%</li> </ul>
<b>YDC Length of Stay</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•15 months on average: Adjusted to match FY 2025 length of stay by offense class</li> </ul>
<b>Impact of HB 834 on 16-and 17-Year-Olds with Violent Offenses</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>•FY 2026: Partial adjustment due to lag time for court processing</li> <li>•FY 2027 through FY 2030: Excluded from JJS</li> </ul>

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission; NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Outside of the aforementioned legislative change, the five-year projections assume no additional changes in judicial or prosecutorial behavior. The projections do not incorporate any potential increases or decreases in the YDC population due to budgetary or policy-driven changes implemented by the DJJDP and/or other agencies that provide services for juveniles.

<sup>11</sup> S.L. 2024-17, effective for offenses committed on or after December 1, 2024.

<sup>12</sup> See N.C. Gen. Stat. (hereinafter G.S.) 7B-1501(7).

## COMPONENTS OF YDC POPULATION PROJECTIONS

The Juvenile Disposition Chart (see Table 3), the empirical data from the latest available fiscal year, and the resident YDC population on June 30, 2025, form the basis of the five-year projections and are detailed in the following sections.

**Table 3**  
**Juvenile Disposition Chart**

Offense Classification	Delinquency History Level		
	Low 0-1 Points	Medium 2-3 Points	High 4 or More Points
<b>Violent</b> Class A-E Felonies	Level 2 or 3	Level 3	Level 3
<b>Serious</b> Class F-I Felonies Class A1 Misdemeanors	Level 1 or 2	Level 2	Level 2 or 3
<b>Minor</b> Class 1, 2, 3 Misdemeanors	Level 1	Level 1 or 2	Level 2

### FY 2025 Juvenile Delinquent Dispositions

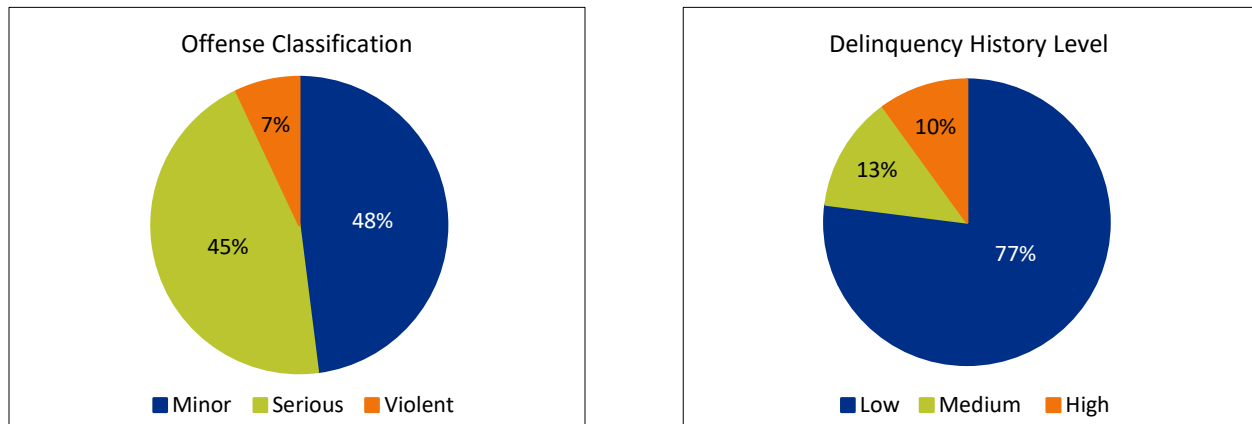
This section highlights information on the 3,185 delinquent dispositions in FY 2025, including offense classification, delinquency history level, and disposition level.<sup>13</sup> The court's selection of dispositional alternatives is governed by statute through a graduated sanctions chart that classifies adjudicated juveniles according to the seriousness of their offense (i.e., offense classification) and the degree and extent of their delinquent history (i.e., delinquency history level). A Level 1 or community disposition offers the court less restrictive dispositional alternatives (e.g., probation, community-based programs). A Level 2 or intermediate disposition is generally more restrictive than a Level 1 disposition and includes options such as intensive probation, group home placements (e.g., multipurpose group homes), regimented training programs, and house arrest. A Level 3 or commitment disposition provides the most restrictive sanction available to be imposed by a juvenile court judge – commitment to the DJJDP for placement in a YDC.

Figure 2 shows the distribution of the 3,185 delinquent dispositions by offense classification and delinquency history level. Of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent in FY 2025, 7% were adjudicated of a Violent offense, 45% of a Serious offense, and 48% of a Minor offense.<sup>14</sup> Over three-fourths (77%) of dispositions involved a juvenile with a Low delinquency history level, 13% involved a juvenile with a Medium delinquency history level, and 10% involved a juvenile with a High delinquency history level.

<sup>13</sup> A delinquent disposition is identified from NC-JOIN records as the disposition imposed for the most serious adjudicated offense for a given disposition hearing date during a fiscal year. While a disposition involves one juvenile, in the reporting time frame a juvenile may be represented by more than one disposition. For the sake of simplicity, the unit of analysis is referred to as "dispositions" or "juveniles."

<sup>14</sup> Overall, 57% (or 1,812) of the 3,185 dispositions were for misdemeanor offenses. Of the 1,431 adjudications for a Serious offense, 20% (or 292) were for Class A1 misdemeanor offenses. The remainder were for Class F – I felony offenses.

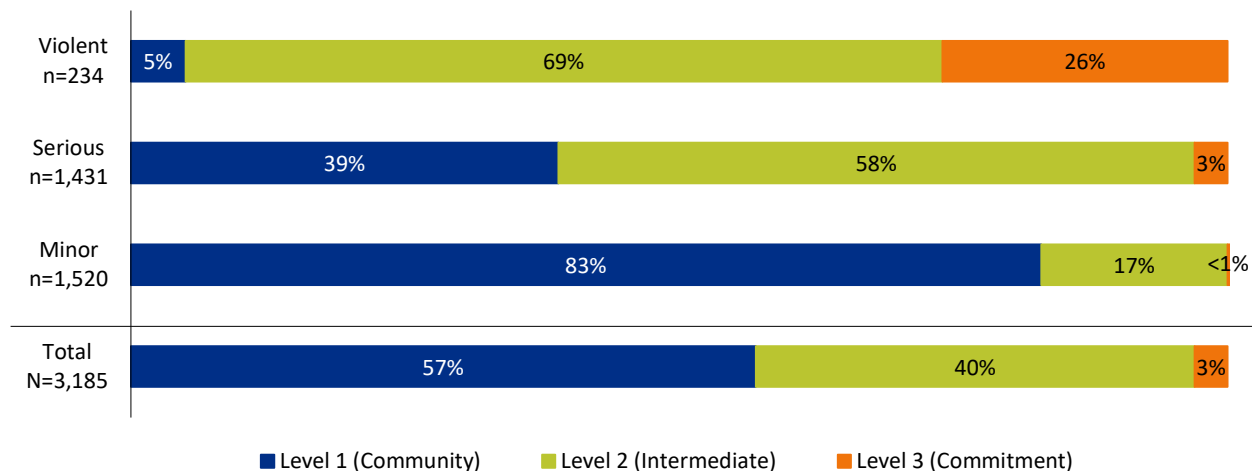
**Figure 2**  
**Dispositions by Offense Classification and Delinquency History Level**  
**Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent**



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2025 Disposition Simulation Data

Figure 3 summarizes dispositions imposed in FY 2025 by offense classification and disposition level. Overall, for juveniles adjudicated delinquent, the court ordered Level 1 dispositions for 57% of juveniles, Level 2 dispositions for 40% of juveniles, and Level 3 dispositions for 3% of juveniles. Juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense were most likely to receive a Level 1 disposition (83%). Juveniles adjudicated delinquent of a Violent or Serious offense were more likely to receive a Level 2 disposition (69% and 58% respectively). Of the 110 Level 3 dispositions, 56% were the result of an adjudication of a Violent offense, 41% of a Serious offense, and 3% of a Minor offense.

**Figure 3**  
**Dispositions by Offense Classification and Disposition Level**  
**Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent**



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2025 Disposition Simulation Data

Table 4 shows how judges used dispositional resources within each combination of offense classification and delinquency history level. As indicated by the vertical “Total” column, the likelihood of the imposition of a Level 3 disposition increased as the seriousness of the offense classification increased (also see Figure 3). Similarly, the likelihood of the imposition of a Level 3 disposition increased as the delinquency history level increased. Dispositions for juveniles with Low delinquency history levels who were adjudicated of Minor offenses (Class 1-3 misdemeanors) comprised the largest group – 1,250 (or 39%) of the 3,185.

**Table 4**  
**Dispositions by the Dispositional Chart for Juveniles Adjudicated Delinquent**

Offense Classification	Delinquency History Level			Total
	Low 0-1 Point	Medium 2-3 Points	High 4+ Points	
<b>Violent</b> A-E Felonies	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 11 (6%) Level 2: 129 (73%) Level 3: 37 (21%) n = 177	Level 3 Level 2: 18 (72%) Level 3: 7 (28%) n = 25	Level 3 Level 2: 14 (44%) Level 3: 18 (56%) n = 32	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 11 (5%) Level 2: 161 (69%) Level 3: 62 (26%) n = 234 (7%)
<b>Serious</b> F-I Felonies A1 Misd.	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 532 (51%) Level 2: 503 (49%) n = 1,035	Level 2 Level 1: 17 (9%) Level 2: 175 (91%) Level 3: 1 (<1%) n = 193	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 3 (1%) Level 2: 156 (77%) Level 3: 44 (22%) n = 203	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 552 (39%) Level 2: 834 (58%) Level 3: 45 (3%) n = 1,431 (45%)
<b>Minor</b> 1-3 Misd.	Level 1 Level 1: 1,206 (97%) Level 2: 44 (3%) n = 1,250	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 46 (26%) Level 2: 131 (74%) n = 177	Level 2 Level 1: 2 (2%) Level 2: 88 (95%) Level 3: 3 (3%) n = 93	Level 1/Level 2 Level 1: 1,254 (83%) Level 2: 263 (17%) Level 3: 3 (<1%) n = 1,520 (48%)
<b>Total</b>	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 1,749 (71%) Level 2: 676 (28%) Level 3: 37 (1%) n = 2,462 (77%)	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 63 (16%) Level 2: 324 (82%) Level 3: 8 (2%) n = 395 (13%)	Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 5 (1%) Level 2: 258 (79%) Level 3: 65 (20%) n = 328 (10%)	Level 1/Level 2/Level 3 Level 1: 1,817 (57%) Level 2: 1,258 (40%) Level 3: 110 (3%) N = 3,185 (100%)

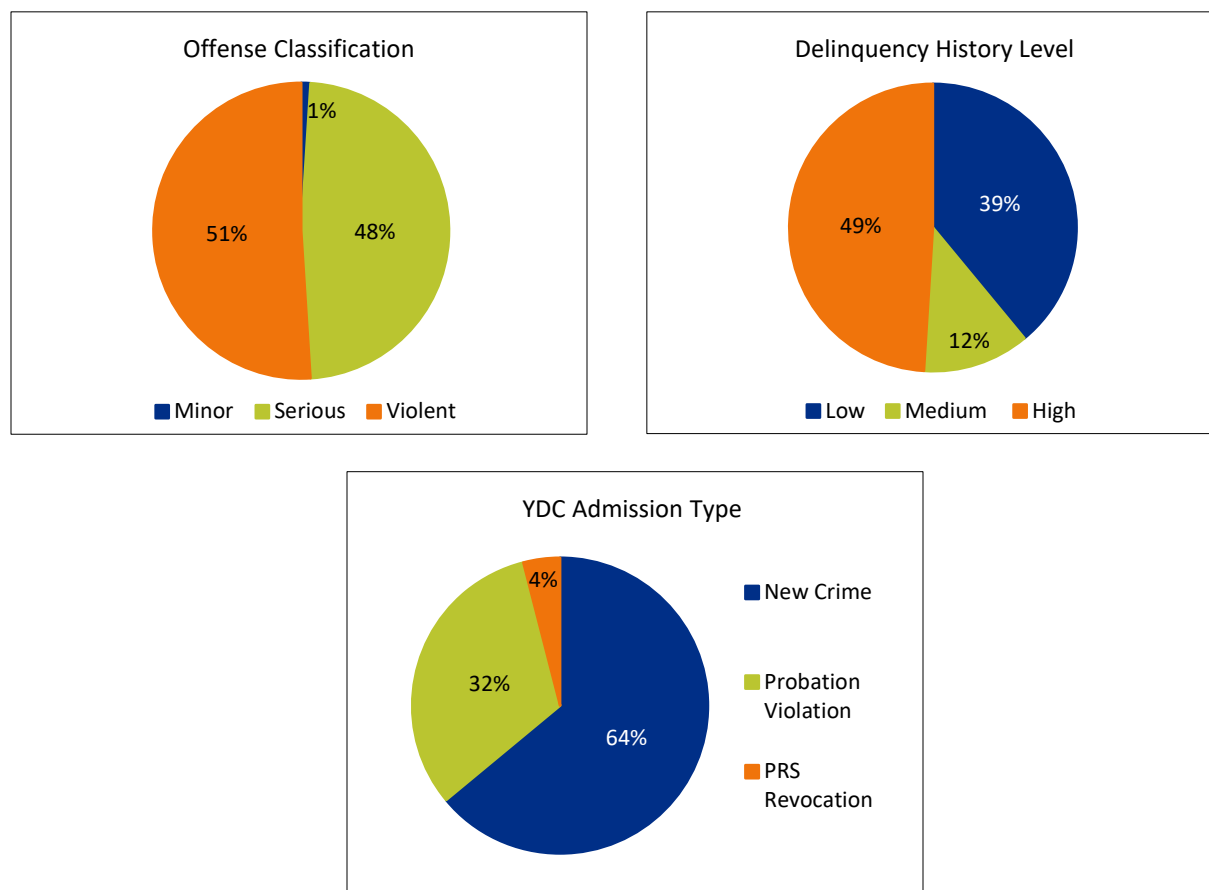
Note: In FY 2025, there were 113 dispositions (or 4%) with a disposition not specified by the dispositional chart. However, certain provisions of the juvenile code allow a judge to impose a disposition other than those specified by the chart. Under G.S. 7B-2508(e), judges may find “extraordinary needs” and impose a lower level disposition. Under G.S. 7B-2508(d), juveniles adjudicated delinquent for an offense with a previous Level 3 disposition may be committed to a YDC. Under G.S. 7B-2508(g), juveniles adjudicated delinquent for a Minor offense with four or more prior adjudications may be committed to a YDC. Finally, under G.S. 7B-2508(g1), juveniles adjudicated of an offense that the court finds beyond a reasonable doubt was committed as part of criminal gang activity as defined in G.S. 7B-2508.1 shall receive a disposition one level higher than would otherwise be provided for the class of offense and delinquency history level (1 juvenile in FY 2025).

SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2025 Disposition Simulation Data

## Resident YDC Population on June 30, 2025

The committed (or resident) YDC population is the number of juveniles committed to a YDC on June 30, 2025, the beginning of the current projection period. Figure 4 shows the distribution of the 221 juveniles committed to a YDC on June 30, 2025, by offense classification, delinquency history level, and YDC admission type. Most committed juveniles (97%) were adjudicated with a felony as their most serious offense; 51% were adjudicated of a Violent offense, 48% of a Serious offense, and 1% of a Minor offense. Nearly half (49%) of juveniles had a High delinquency history level, 12% had a Medium delinquency history level, and 39% had a Low delinquency history level. Overall, 64% were committed to a YDC due to a new crime (i.e., new delinquent complaint), 32% for a probation violation, and 4% for a revocation of PRS.

**Figure 4**  
**Resident YDC Population**



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2025 Disposition Simulation Data

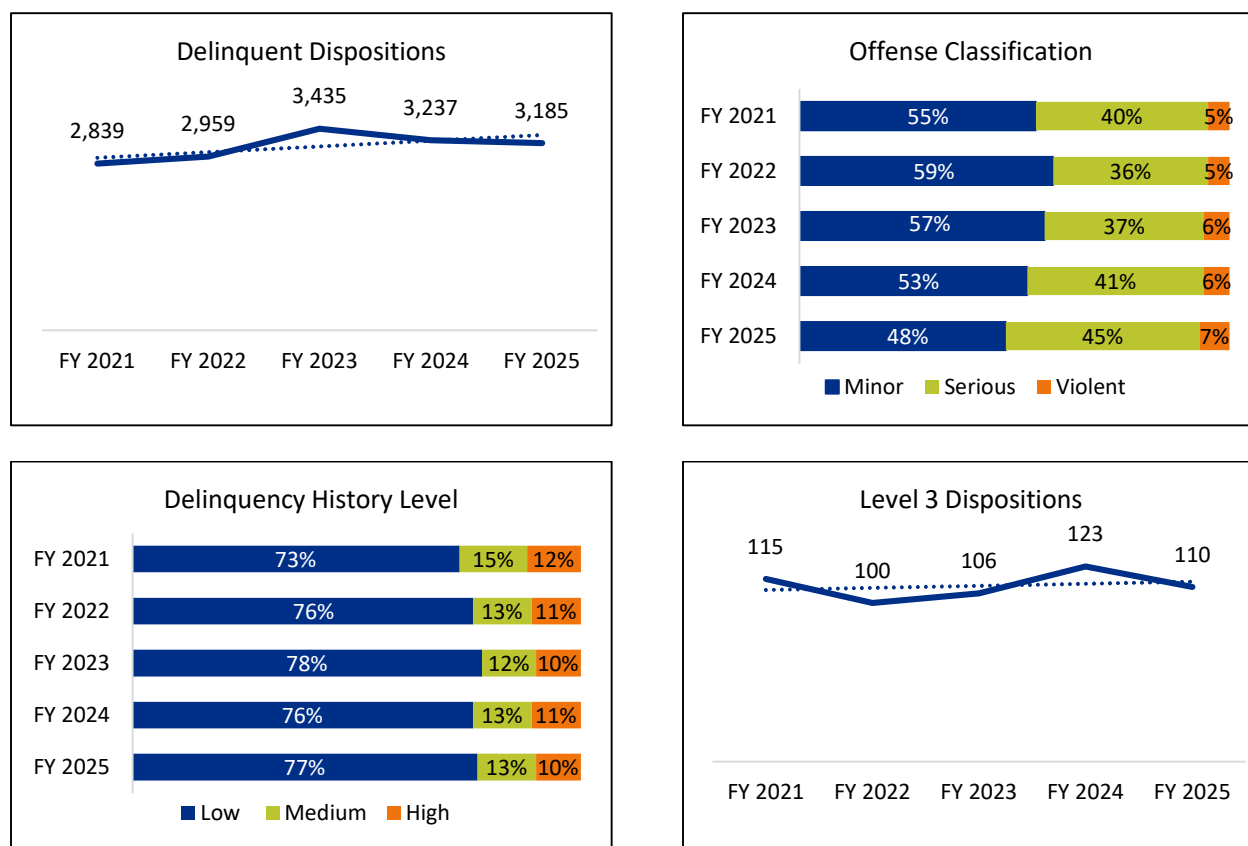


## Juvenile Justice Trends

Changes in the juvenile justice system that affect the number of YDC admissions, the number of YDC releases, and/or the YDC length of stay directly impact the accuracy of the projections. This section highlights juvenile justice statistics showing the year-to-year variations in key components used to produce the projections.

Compared to FY 2021, delinquent dispositions have increased (see Figure 5). Delinquent dispositions had the greatest increase (16%) from FY 2022 to FY 2023 and have since declined (2% from FY 2024 to FY 2025). The distribution by offense classification shifted over the past five years. The percentage of juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense has decreased, while the percentage of juveniles adjudicated of Serious and Violent offenses has increased. Delinquency history level trends have been relatively stable; most juveniles had a Low delinquency history level (see Figure 5). The number of Level 3 dispositions fluctuated between a low of 100 in FY 2022 and a high of 123 in FY 2024, with a 11% decrease in the number of Level 3 dispositions from FY 2024 to FY 2025 (see Figure 5).

**Figure 5**  
**Juvenile Disposition Trends**



SOURCE: NC Sentencing and Policy Advisory Commission, FY 2021 - FY 2025 Disposition Simulation Data

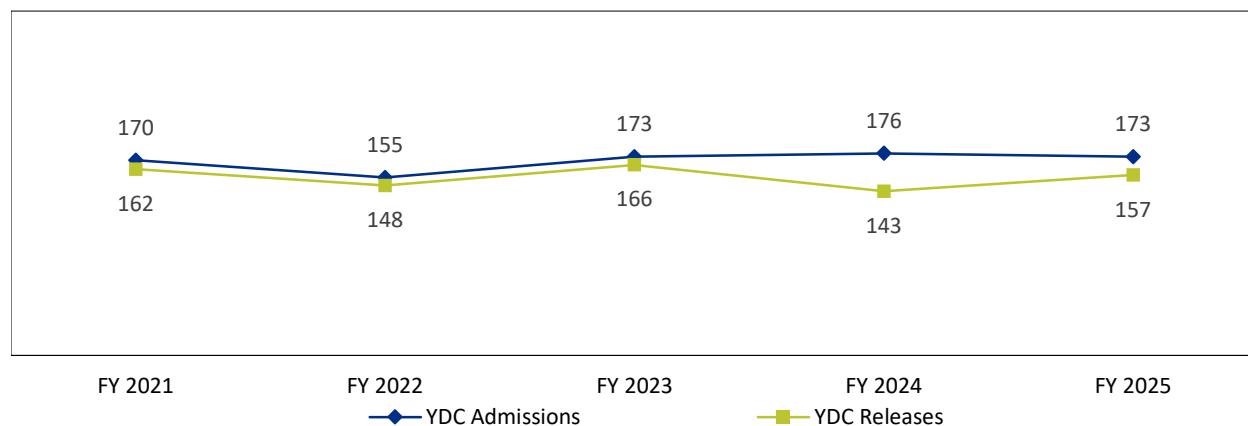
Over the past five years, YDC admissions have been relatively stable with the exception of FY 2022, while the YDC releases have fluctuated (see Table 5). From FY 2021 through FY 2023, the difference between the number of YDC admissions and YDC releases was smaller than in FY 2024 and FY 2025 (see Figure 6). In FY 2025, YDC admissions decreased by 2% and YDC releases increased by 10%; the average number of YDC admissions per month was 14 and the average number of releases per month was 13.

**Table 5**  
**YDC Admissions and Releases**

Fiscal Year	YDC Admissions			YDC Releases		
	Total Number	Percent Change	Average Number Per Month	Total Number	Percent Change	Average Number Per Month
<b>2021</b>	170	21	14	162	-17	14
<b>2022</b>	155	-9	13	148	-9	12
<b>2023</b>	173	12	14	166	12	14
<b>2024</b>	176	2	15	143	-14	12
<b>2025</b>	173	-2	14	157	10	13

SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

**Figure 6**  
**YDC Admissions and Releases**



SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

From FY 2021 to FY 2024, the overall length of stay for committed juveniles remained fairly stable; however, in FY 2025, the overall average length of stay increased by 15% (see Table 6), with increases also for each offense classification. The average length of stay for juveniles adjudicated of a Violent offense was 16 months, the average length of stay for juveniles adjudicated of a Serious offense was 14 months, and the average length of stay for juveniles adjudicated of a Minor offense was 8 months.

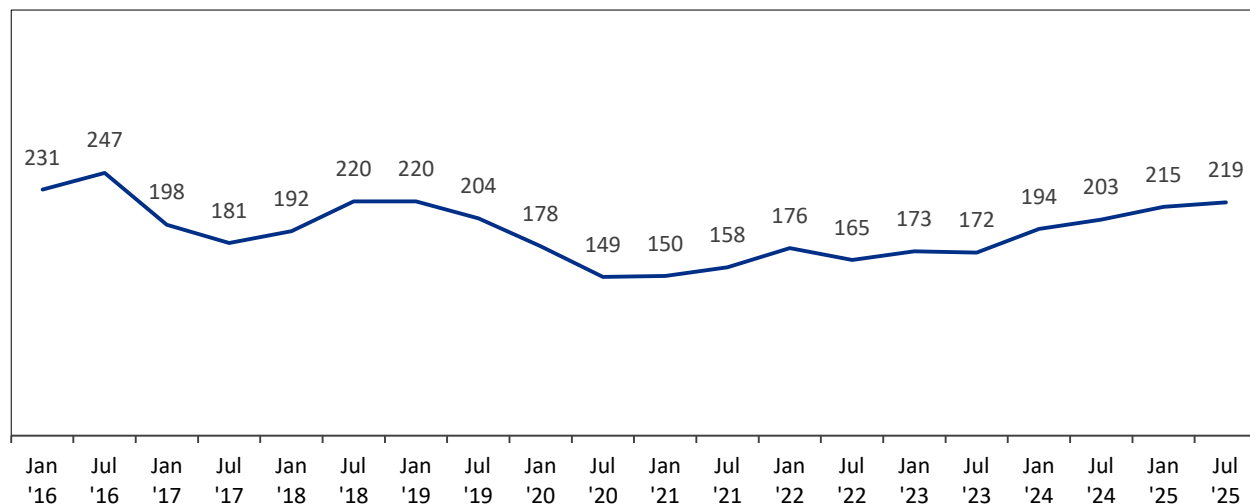
**Table 6**  
**Average Length of Stay for YDC Releases**

Offense Classification	Length of Stay (in Months) by Fiscal Year					% Change	
	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	FY 2024 to FY 2025	FY 2021 to FY 2025
<b>Violent Offense</b>	14	13	14	15	16	7	14
<b>Serious Offense</b>	12	11	13	12	14	17	17
<b>Minor Offense</b>	9	5	6	6	8	33	-11
<b>Overall</b>	13	12	13	13	15	15	15

SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

Figure 7 provides an examination of the YDC population on the first day of each month over the past ten years. Overall, the YDC population has decreased 5% from January 2016 through July 2025. The highest population was in July 2016 at 247 juveniles and the lowest population was during the COVID-19 pandemic (July 2020) at 149 juveniles. The YDC population in July 2025 (219 juveniles) was around pre-pandemic levels (FY 2019).

**Figure 7**  
**YDC Population Trends: January 2016 to July 2025**



SOURCE: NC Department of Public Safety, Division of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention, *Committed Youth Report*