

OFFICE OF THE YOUTH OMBUDSPERSON 2025 SURVEY FINDINGS OVERVIEW

The Office of the Youth Ombudsperson (OYO) 2025 youth surveys identified several cross-cutting themes across the child welfare and juvenile justice placements:

- Youth generally reported feeling safe, but qualitative responses revealed ongoing concerns regarding peer violence, staff interactions, and restraint practices.
- Juvenile justice involved youth reported higher exposure to restrictive practices, including seclusion and limitations in school attendance due to behavior.
- Child welfare youth reported greater autonomy in personal belongings and daily routines but experienced more disruptions in school enrollment and attendance as well as placement-related educational continuity.
- Across both systems, youth reported gaps in communication regarding rights, particularly related to mail, medical care, and disciplinary procedures.
- Youth in both systems identified education, housing, and employment support as primary post-placement needs.
- Religious and cultural needs, particularly among Muslim youth as well as youth with specific hair and hygiene needs, were inconsistently met across both placement systems.

These findings reflect differences in placement types, policy implementation, and facility-level practices and underscore the need for continued oversight, youth-centered planning, and consistent enforcement of regulatory standards.

Methodology and Limitations

The Office of the Youth Ombudsperson collects voluntary survey data from youth who are in a Philadelphia contracted residential placement, congregate care facility, to better understand their experiences, needs, and reported conditions of care. While completing the surveys, youth are informed of their right to remain anonymous. This data is obtained during the OYO facility visits and programming sessions.

In 2025, OYO conducted visits to 22 residential placement locations, including 19 child welfare (CW) and 3 juvenile justice (JJ) facility locations. During these visits, 65 youth participated in programming, and 34 completed

voluntary surveys. OYO acknowledges that staffing constraints, geographic distance of facilities, and voluntary participation limited the number of youths engaged in our 2025 programming.

Survey participation is optional, and youth are informed that declining participation does not affect their access to the OYO's services or support. Due to participation being voluntary and based on program attendance, the sample is non-random, small, and therefore not statistically representative of all youth in residential placement in Philadelphia. Findings are therefore descriptive and reflect only the experiences of participating youth.

How Are Percentages Calculated?

Unless otherwise noted, percentages in this report are based on the number of youth who answered a specific question, not the total number of youth surveyed.

For example:

- 16 youth may have been surveyed.
- Only 13 youth may have answered a particular question.
- If all 13 youth answered "Yes," the chart would show 100%.

This means that 100% of responding youth answered "Yes," not necessarily 100% of all surveyed youth.

This report integrates multiple sources of information, including:

- Anonymous youth survey responses
- Survey-related disclosures reported to OYO during Know-Your-Rights trainings
- ChildLine reports filed under mandatory reporting requirements
- OYO observations during programming

Survey findings are presented as quantitative indicators and youth statements are clearly distinguished to avoid conflation.

Data Handling and Confidentiality

All survey responses have been de-identified. No personally identifiable information is included. Qualitative quotes are presented in de-identified form and used only to provide context for aggregate findings.

Survey Percentage Calculation

Survey response rates varied by question because youth were permitted to skip questions they did not wish to answer. Unless otherwise noted, percentages presented throughout this report are calculated using the number of youth who responded to each question rather than the total number of youth surveyed.

For transparency, the total number of youth surveyed, the number of youth who responded to each question, and response rates are reported in Appendix A. Readers should interpret findings in the context of the response rate associated with each survey item.

Example: If 13 of 13 responding youth answered "Yes" to a question, the reported percentage is 100%, even if only 13 of 16 surveyed youth responded to that question.

Interpretive Boundaries

This report does not make legal findings of noncompliance. It presents descriptive findings that may indicate areas for further review. Comparisons across placement types are observational, not reflective or indicative of youth experiences across all residential placement facilities.

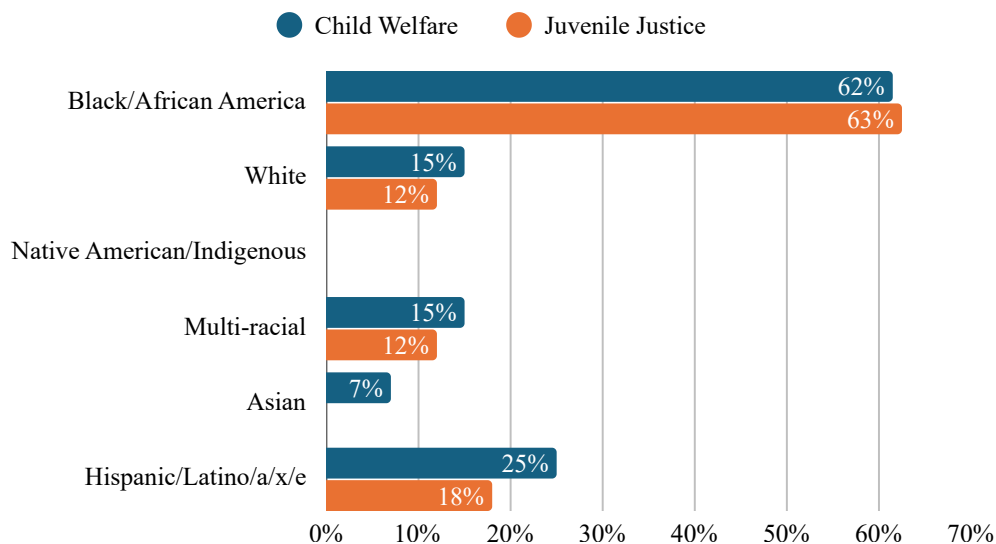
Scope Limitations

Findings reflect youth who were present during OYO programming presentations and chose to participate in completing the survey. Youth who were absent, declined participation, or were in non-visited settings, including behavioral health (BH) placements, are not represented. Therefore, findings should be interpreted as partial and context specific.

Youth Demographics

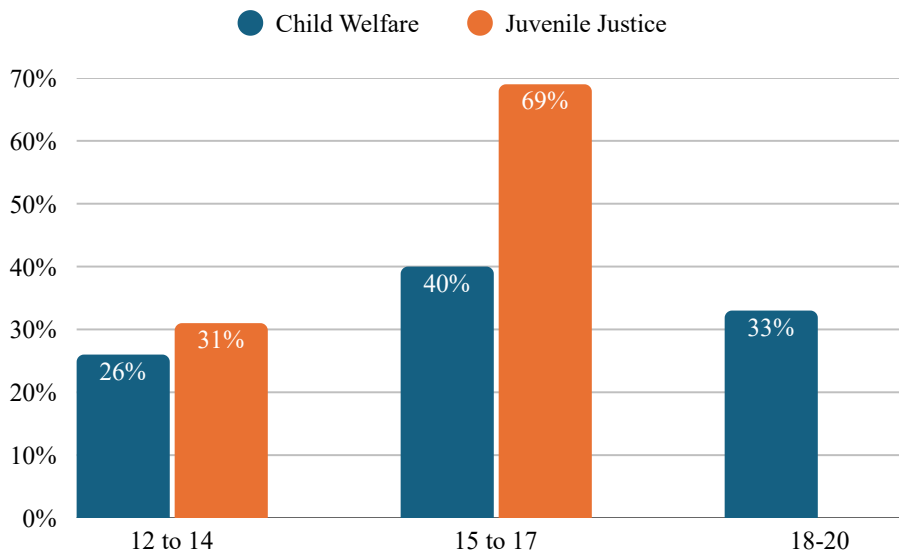
As mandated by Executive Order No. 5-22, the OYO team provides operational oversight over the City's child welfare, juvenile justice and behavioral health systems with respect to youth residential placements. This oversight includes monitoring and collecting data as it relates to issues and trends regarding the quality of care provided to youth in residential placements, demographics, and demographic disparities. Collecting this demographic information helps us better understand youth who are placed and assessing whether their care is equitable across race, gender identity, religion, and other identities.

Race/Ethnicity



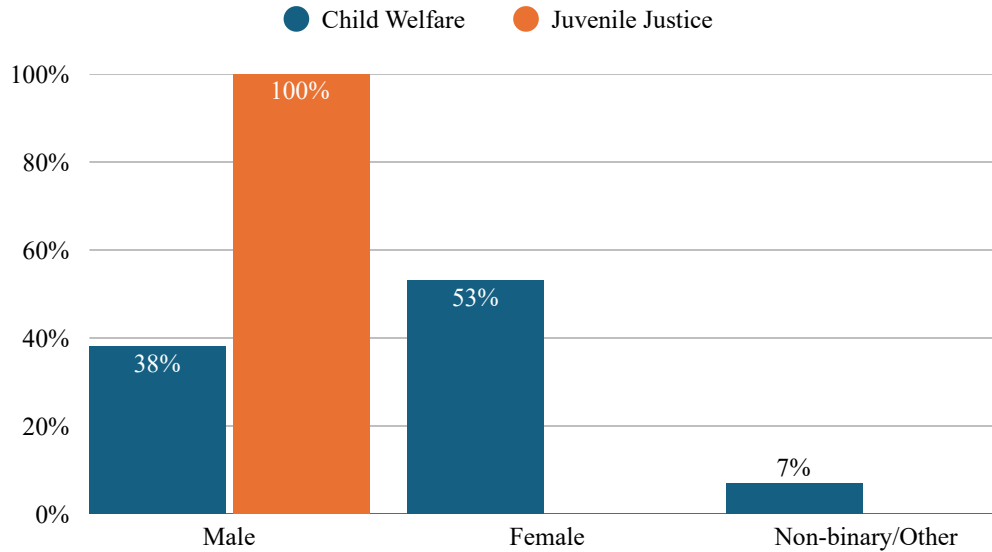
Note: Percentages shown in this chart are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Age Range



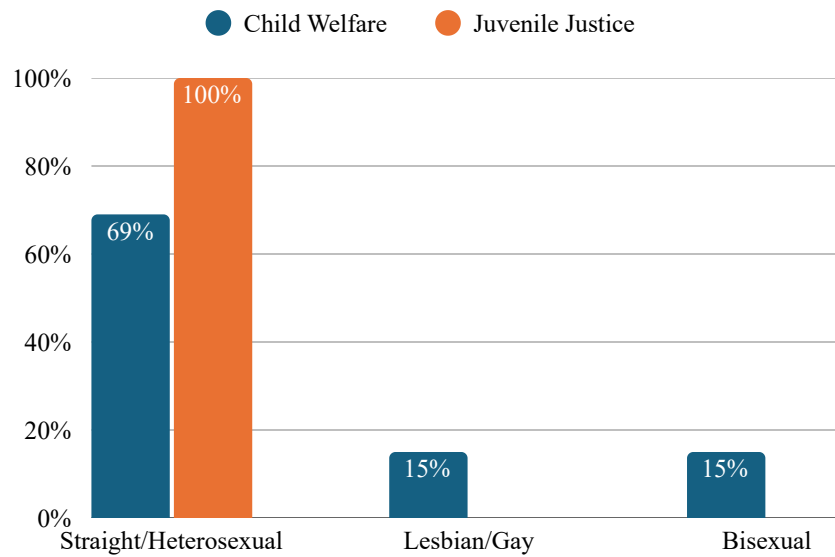
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Gender Identity



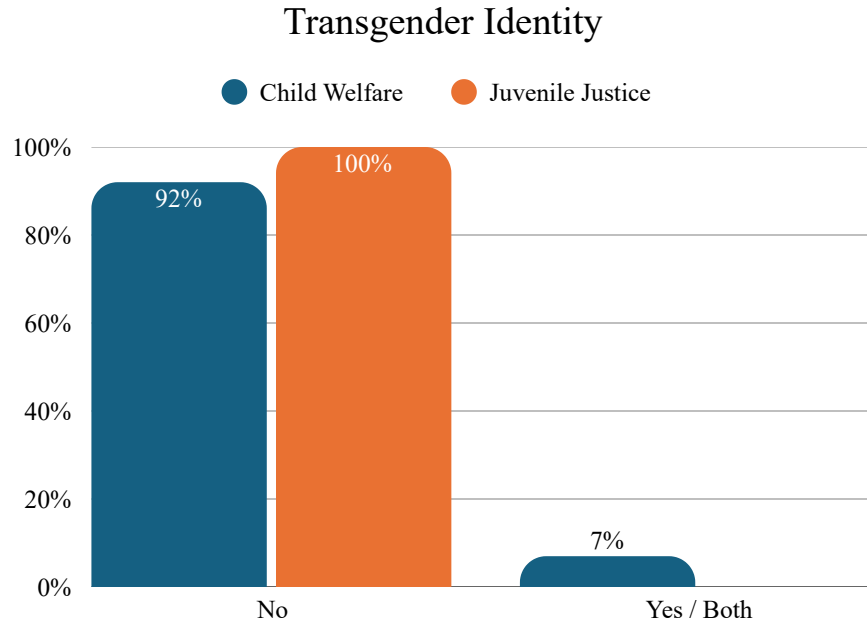
Note: Percentages shown in this charts are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Sexual Orientation

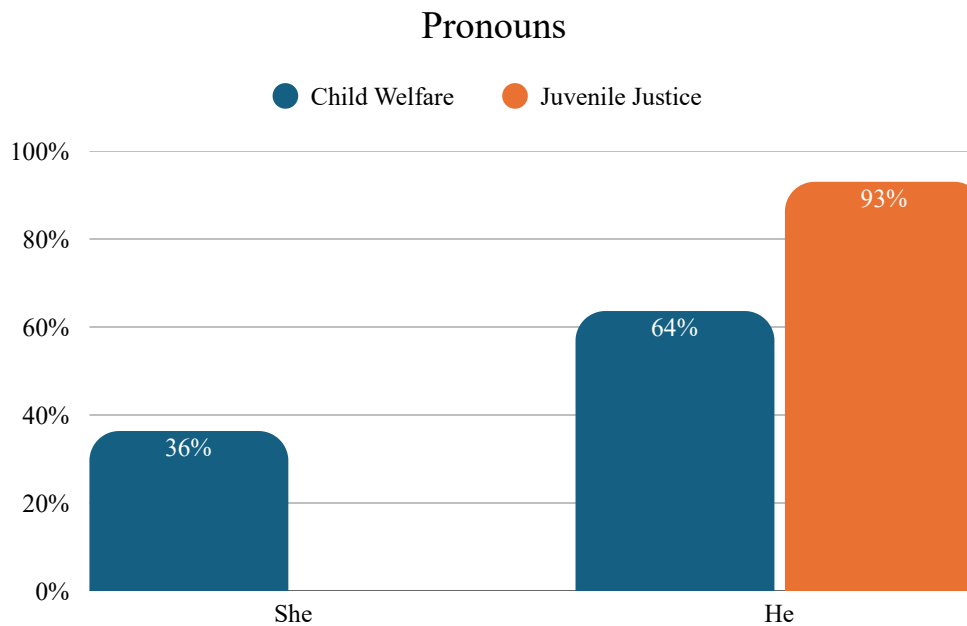


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question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

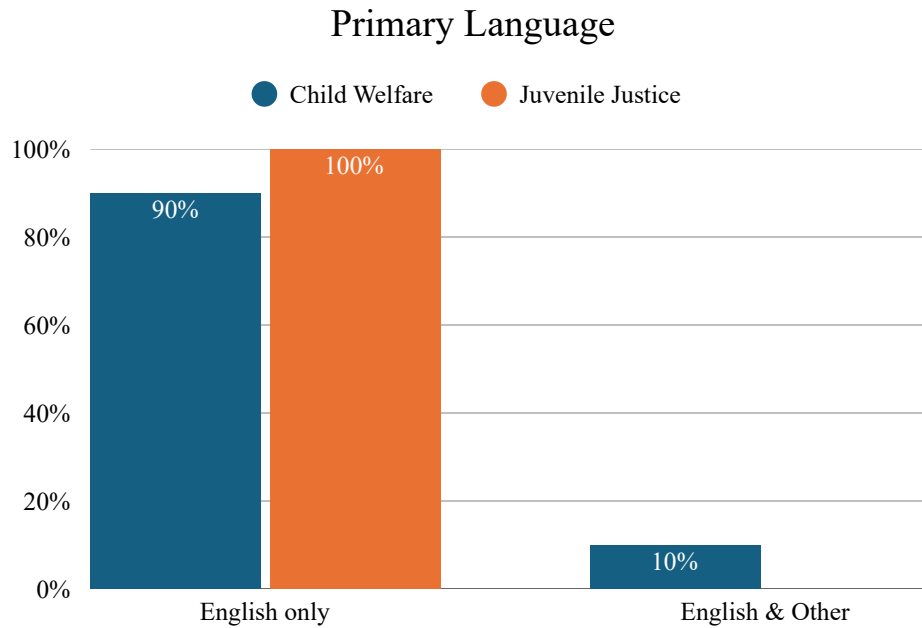


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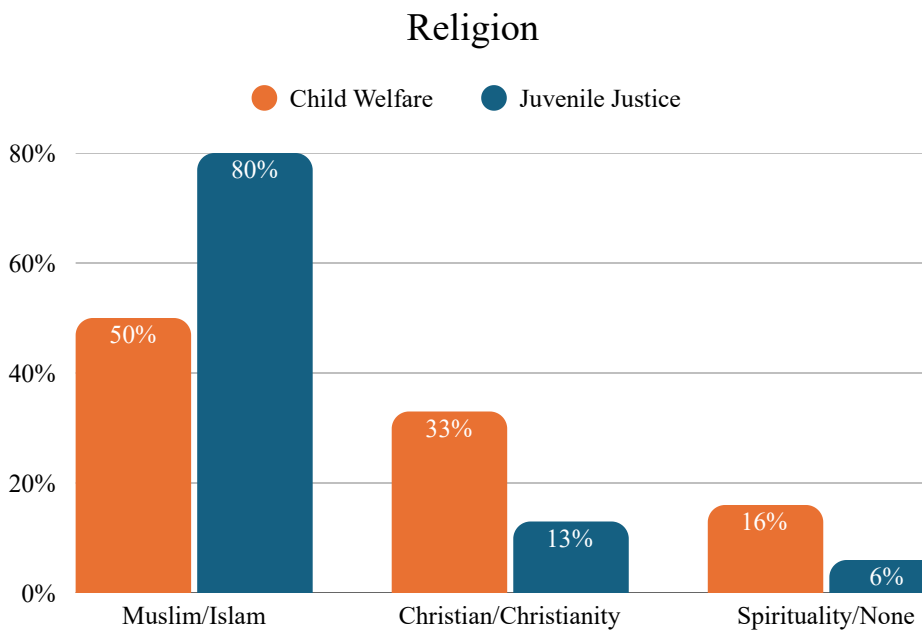


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Youth Voice + Interpretation (Demographics):

The charts above provide the demographic data collected through our survey and offer a snapshot of the youth who participated during OYO's 2025 programming and facility visits. While not statistically representative of all youth in care, the data helps highlight patterns and inform our understanding of the populations most impacted by residential placement.

The 2025 findings reflect the **continued overrepresentation of black youth** in both child welfare and juvenile justice systems, consistent with longstanding concerns regarding racial disparities across systems. A notable number of youths across both systems identified as Muslim, especially in juvenile justice settings. This trend, observed during both surveys and site visits, reinforces the importance of **culturally and religiously responsive care**, including appropriate accommodations for diet, prayer, and personal items. The three juvenile locations we visited were all-male placements, none of the survey participants identified as female assigned at birth. Girls in placement are a growing population. Therefore, the OYO team plans to visit more girl's juvenile justice placements in the coming year to assess their unique needs.

On par with demographic information pulled from the City's youth residential placement information repository, youth in child welfare and juvenile justice settings tend to be between the ages of 15 and 17. This concentration of youth in residential placement reflects a need to design services that align with the developmental realities of this stage of adolescence. Additionally, though a small portion of youth identified outside of the gender binary or described expansive sexual orientations, these responses were limited. However, it remains important that all youth, regardless of how they identify are treated with respect, dignity, and fairness in their placements.

OYO will continue to collect demographic data annually to monitor for disparities, strengthen oversight, and advocate for practices that reflect the needs and identities of youth in care.

Survey Data

SECTION 1 – ChildLine Questions (Youth Safety & Mistreatment)

There are multiple regulations that govern and protect child safety and wellbeing for youth in placement. According to § 3800.32(b), facility staff may not abuse, mistreat, threaten, harass or subject youth to corporal punishment. Youth are entitled to receive three meals and one snack a day, and providers should have available additional provisions of meals for youth who are still hungry and request additional food. See § 3800.161; § 3800.162(a). As such, meals

may not be withheld as a form of punishment.

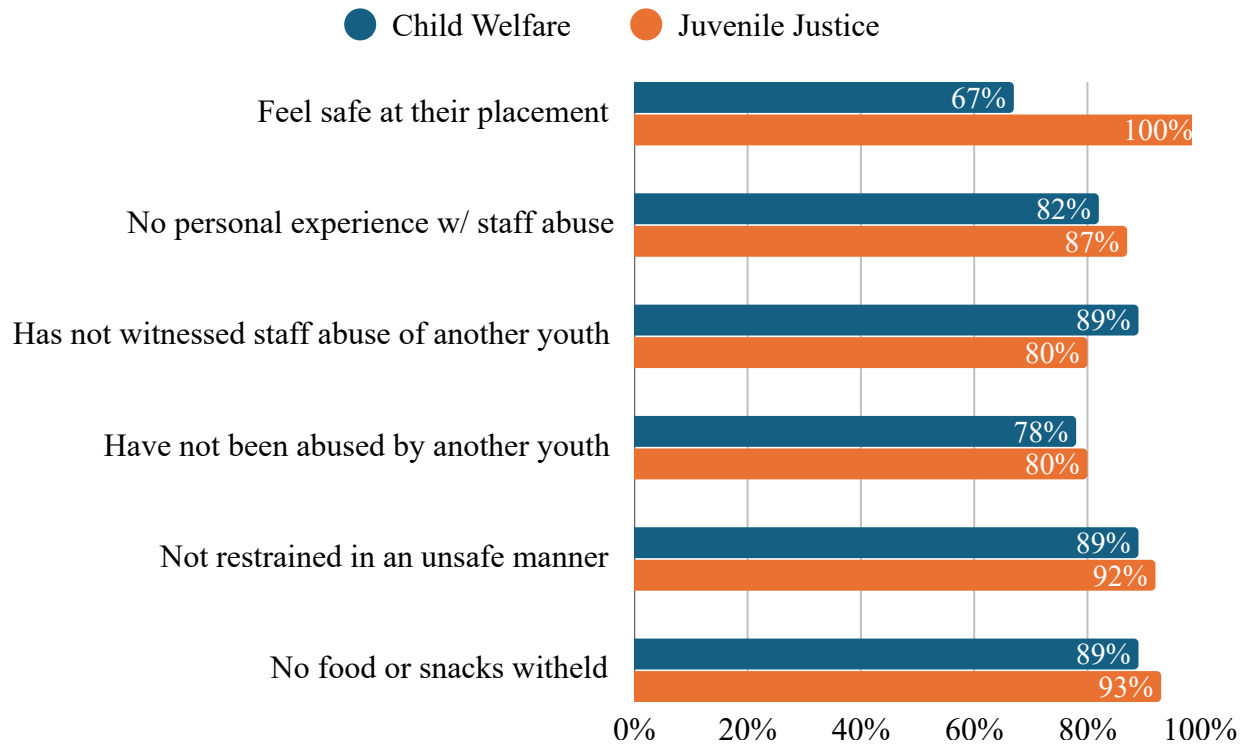
As it relates to peer-to-peer abuse, intimate sexual contact between children, consensual or otherwise, is a reportable incident. See § 3800.16(6). Additionally, there are staffing ratios in place to ensure adequate supervision during awake and sleep hours and limitations on how many youths can be together in one group at a given time to reduce the likelihood of adverse peer interactions. See § 3800.57; § 3800.274; § 3800.283.

As it relates to restraints, facility staff administering restraints must utilize certified Safe Crisis Management or other approved crisis intervention or behavior management training. See § 3800.58(5). Most group homes employ a “hands last” approach to the use of manual restraint as a restrictive procedure. As such, restraints must be used as a last resort, only when youth are at imminent risk of causing harm to themselves or others. They must be performed in the safest way possible, and for the shortest time possible. The position of the manual restraint or the staff person applying a manual restraint shall be changed at least every 10 consecutive minutes. See § 3800.211(d). Restraints that result in an injury, trauma, or illness of a child requiring inpatient treatment at a hospital qualify as a reportable incident under § 3800.16(3).

Held by these same rules, juvenile placements are permitted to use restrictive procedures such as restraints after exhausting deescalation efforts. In juvenile placements, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) and related facility policies require protection from abuse and violence and require that any use of force be limited, reviewed, and documented. See PREA National Standards: 28 CFR Part 115.

For these reasons, the survey asked youth safety questions about physical, emotional, and sexual abuse by staff and/or peers, experiences with restraints, and whether they have experienced loss of privileges or access to basic needs as a form of punishment.

Youth Safety & Treatment



Note: Percentages shown in this chart are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth Voice + Interpretation:

The chart above shows that most youth who responded to the survey reported feeling safe in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems at the time of the survey.

Among youth in child welfare placements, a portion reported feeling unsafe. Survey responses also indicate that some youth experience peer conflict, including physical altercations. Two youth respondents reported experiences that included being hit, grabbed, spoken to in a disrespectful manner, or made to feel uncomfortable through staff interactions. Additionally, some youth in group home settings reported experiencing peer-to-peer harm. Survey responses suggest that while many youths report that staff intervene and attempt to de-escalate situations, youth experiences may vary. As it relates to food access, most youth did not report food being withheld; however, a small number of responses, along with broader OYO engagement, suggest that access to food outside of designated times may be limited in some instances.

Although all youth in juvenile placements who responded to the safety question

reported feeling safe, responses to other survey questions, as well as youth comments captured through the survey, suggest that some youth experience **concerns related to peer conflict, staff interactions, restraints, and food access**. A small number of youths reported experiencing or witnessing restraints that caused discomfort or injury and that may not have been perceived as necessary at the time.

Given the regulatory standards governing safety, restraint, and supervision, even a small number of concerning responses warrants attention. While the survey sample is limited and not representative, these findings may suggest variability in how safety-related practices are implemented across placements. OYO filed ChildLine reports for all disclosures of abuse and neglect reported through survey responses.

SECTION 2 – Right to be Treated in a Fair and Respectful Way

According to § 3800.32(c), youth in residential placements have the right to be treated with fairness, dignity and respect. Youth may not be discriminated against because of race, color, religious creed, disability, handicap, ancestry, sexual orientation, national origin, age or sex. *See 3800.32(a)*. Additionally, under §3800.33(a-c), a child may not be deprived of specific or civil rights. Their rights, such as visits with their family, may not be used as a reward or sanction. However, youth may lose non-essential privileges such as recreation time, access to electronics, or planned outdoor activities as a behavior management measure, provided such loss is non-retaliatory.

Youth in residential placements have the right to be treated with dignity and to be free from excessive, retaliatory, or harmful discipline. This includes protection from prolonged time in seclusion without mandated supervisory checks and other monitoring requirements. Seclusion refers to the practice of placing a youth alone behind a locked door where they are physically prevented from leaving. A locked room includes a room with any type of door-locking device, such as a key lock, spring lock, bolt lock, foot pressure lock or physically holding the door shut. See 3800.206. Seclusion in non-secure placements is strictly prohibited; it can only be used in facilities where secure care is provided. See 3800.273(6); § 3800.274. We have not seen evidence of the use of seclusion in child welfare settings. In these settings, youth’s bedroom doors are not locked from the outside and are designed to model community-based, home-like environments. In the rare instances where youth are separated from others for safety, this is typically exclusion, not seclusion, and must still comply with regulation § 3800.212.

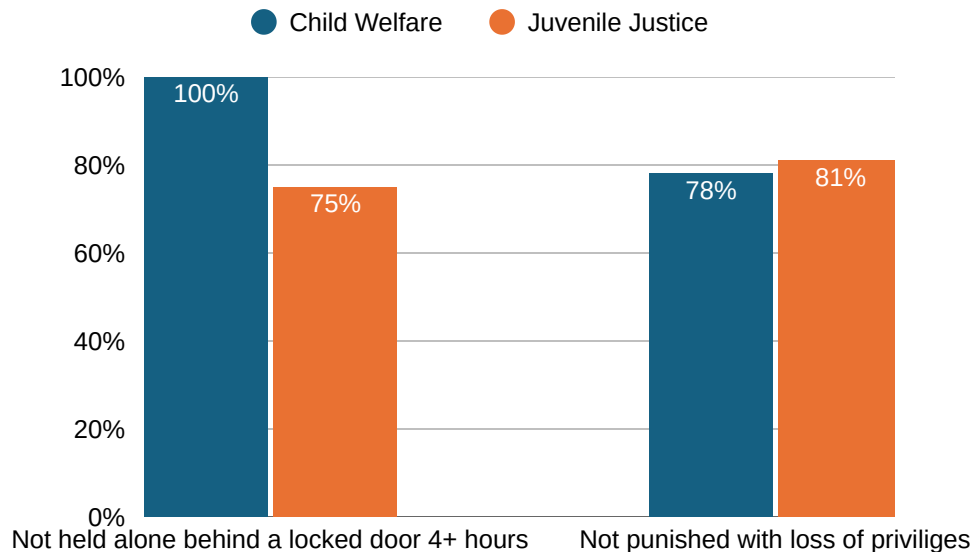
In juvenile justice placements, seclusion is allowed only under specific, time-limited circumstances, such as when a youth poses an immediate safety threat to themselves or others. According to § 3800.274, the use of seclusion requires prior oral or written authorization from supervisory staff for each

instance. Seclusion may last no more than four hours unless a licensed physician, physician's assistant, or registered nurse examines the child and provides written orders to continue it. Additional examinations and written orders are required for each subsequent four-hour period. If seclusion is interrupted and resumed within 24 hours, it is considered a continuation of the original seclusion. While in seclusion, the child must be observed by staff at least every five minutes, have their physical needs addressed promptly, and be checked at least every two hours by supervisory staff who are not the primary observer. Seclusion may not exceed eight hours within a 48-hour period without a written court order, and any room used must meet regulatory safety standards. Mechanical restraints cannot be used while a youth is in seclusion.

Under the Prison Rape Elimination Act, juvenile facility standards (28 CFR Part 115), isolation or separation of youth must be used only when absolutely necessary for safety, is closely monitored, and ended as quickly as possible to reduce risks of abuse and harm. Facilities are required to maintain adequate staffing and close supervision to ensure youth are observed and remain safe while in seclusion. Similarly, national guidance from organizations such as the National Juvenile Detention Association and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention states that seclusion should be used only in emergency situations when a youth poses an immediate risk of harm, after less restrictive de-escalation strategies have failed, and for the shortest duration possible with continuous sight and sound supervision. These national frameworks emphasize that prolonged isolation can be harmful to adolescents and therefore require strong oversight, documentation, and post-incident review whenever seclusion is used.

For these reasons, the survey asked youth about their experiences with seclusion, forms of discipline experienced, and whether basic rights were ever restricted.

Fair Treatment & Respect



Note: Percentages shown in this chart are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth in juvenile justice placements reported more experiences related to restrictive disciplinary practices than youth in child welfare settings.

Youth Voice + Interpretation:

Survey responses revealed differences in disciplinary practices between placement types. Youth in child welfare placements did not report experiences consistent with seclusion. However, 22% of youth reported loss of privileges, most commonly including Wi-Fi access, home passes, and participation in activities and outings. While these restrictions may be used as part of behavior management, they raise considerations about the potential impact of limiting access to normative developmental experiences, including opportunities to engage in activities and maintain family connections.

In contrast, youth in juvenile justice placements reported more restrictive conditions.

Approximately one in four surveyed youth (25%) reported being held in a room alone for more than four hours. While survey responses reflect youth perceptions and do not independently confirm whether regulatory definitions of seclusion were met, these responses are consistent with experiences that youth may interpret as prolonged room confinement.

Qualitative survey responses provide additional context, with one youth stating, “They punish me with keeping me in my room or extending my time here.” This suggests that some youth may experience or perceive room confinement as both a

disciplinary measure and as connected to the length of their stay.

Youth Voice

“*They punish me with keeping me in my room or extending my time here.*”

— Juvenile Justice Youth

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OYO’s broader engagement and observations during Know-Your-Rights presentations provide additional context, indicating that youth in juvenile facilities may, at times, lose access to in-person school attendance as part of disciplinary practices. In these instances, youth may receive worksheets or other limited instructional materials while confined to their rooms. While facilities may view this as a temporary alternative, this approach may differ from full classroom instruction in terms of engagement, quality, and access to academic support.

Taken together, these findings suggest differences in how discipline is experienced across placement types. While most youth did not report restrictive practices, the presence of these responses highlights the importance of continued review to ensure that disciplinary approaches are developmentally appropriate, trauma-informed, and aligned with applicable laws, regulations, and best practices.

SECTION 3 – Right to Have a Plan (Case Planning & Reentry Supports)

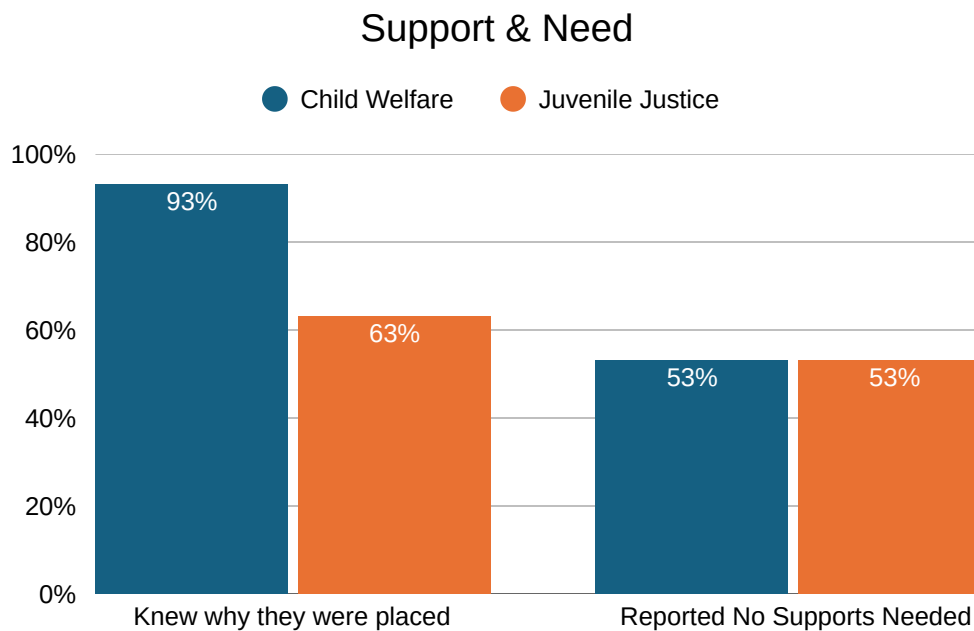
Youth in residential placements have the right to understand why they are placed, participate meaningfully in case planning, and receive resources and guidance to support a successful return to their families and communities. According to § 3800.230, prior to the transfer or discharge of a child, the facility shall inform, and when possible, discuss with the child’s parent and, if applicable, the child’s guardian or custodian, the recommended transfer or discharge. As a best practice, the Philadelphia Department of Human Services’ Scope of Services states that residential facilities should initiate discharge planning early, ideally upon admission, and ensure that youth are involved in shaping their own future.

In child welfare settings, this planning often falls under permanency planning, which includes identifying long-term goals for family reunification, adoption, or independent living. Youth are entitled to receive support around education, housing, mental health, school enrollment, employment assistance, and legal advocacy, and they should be directly involved in team meetings where decisions about their future are made.

In juvenile justice settings, reentry planning focuses on the youth’s criminogenic needs and transition back into their community, ideally with continuity of care and support from probation officers, education liaisons, and behavioral health teams.

Similar to child welfare settings, this process should include plans for stable housing, school re-enrollment, employment assistance, and maintaining relationships with family or other supportive adults.

For these reasons, the survey asked youth whether they understood why they were placed and whether they felt they needed additional support to plan for life after placement. Youth were also asked to identify specific areas of support, such as reconnecting with family, education, employment, housing, or academic assistance.



Note: Percentages shown in these charts are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth Voice + Interpretation

Most youth who responded to the survey reported understanding why they were placed, though a portion of youth in both child welfare and juvenile justice settings indicated that they did not fully understand the reasons for their placement or continued stay. These responses suggest that while many youth report some awareness of their placement circumstances, experiences may vary in terms of communication, engagement, and clarity throughout the planning process.

When asked whether they needed additional support in planning for life after placement, nearly half of youth in child welfare placements and a majority of youth in juvenile justice placements reported that they did not need additional support.

However, among youth who identified additional needs, the most commonly selected areas of support included employment, housing, education, and reconnecting with family. Because youth were permitted to select multiple responses, these findings reflect the range of supports youth identified as important to their transition and future planning.

Survey comments provided additional context. Some youth expressed a desire to reconnect with family members, while others identified the need for academic support or greater clarity regarding their placement and future goals. These responses suggest that, while many youth appear to have some understanding of their placement and future planning, a portion of youth may still experience unmet needs related to communication, permanency planning, education, and transition preparation.

These findings reinforce the importance of compliance with § 3800 regulations and DHS Scope of Services related to individualized service planning, discharge planning, and youth engagement. Facilities should ensure that youth understand their Individual Service Plans (ISPs), permanency or reentry goals, and available supports. Youth should also have regular opportunities to engage with their care teams and receive meaningful, developmentally appropriate support related to education, housing, employment, and family connection.

SECTION 4 – Right to Access a High-Quality and Appropriate Education

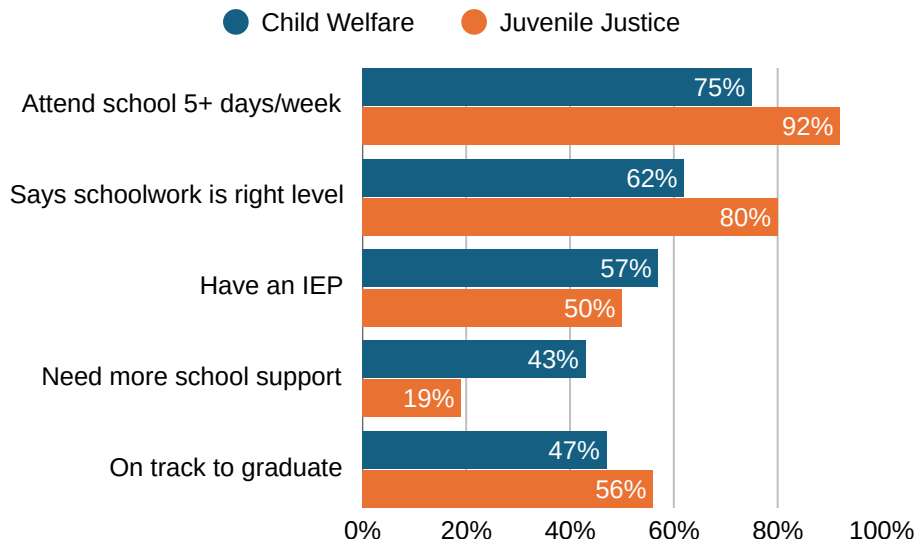
All youth in residential placements have the right to attend school regularly and receive an education that matches their learning level and needs. Under § 3800.229, each child who is of compulsory school age shall participate in a Department of Education-approved school program or an educational program under contract with the local public school district.

Under the right to a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE), youth are entitled to instruction aligned with their grade level and access to special education services when eligible. The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) requires that youth continue attending their school of origin unless a Best Interest Determination (BID) determines otherwise. Transportation barriers, missing records, and administrative delays should not prevent youth from attending school.

In child welfare placements, youth may experience disruptions due to placement changes, distance from their school of origin, and delays in enrollment or record transfers. In juvenile justice placements, youth typically attend school onsite, with structured schedules that must meet state educational standards.

For these reasons, the survey asked youth about school attendance, instructional format, academic level, IEP status, need for support, and whether they feel on track to graduate.

Education



Note: Percentages shown in this charts are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth Voice + Interpretation:

Most youth who responded reported attending school while in placement. Youth in juvenile justice settings consistently reported attending school daily, while most youth in child welfare placements also reported regular attendance, though a portion indicated that they do not attend school daily.

Survey responses suggest variation in educational experience beyond attendance. Some youth reported needing additional academic support, and not all youth reported feeling on track to graduate. A portion of youth also indicated uncertainty about whether they have an IEP or other academic supports.

“*I would say I don't have a learning disability but it's hard to pay attention*”

— Child Welfare Youth

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Survey comments reflected concerns about grade placement, academic progress, and the ability to meet graduation requirements. These responses suggest that while youth may be enrolled in school, their experiences with instruction, academic progress, and support may differ.

OYO observations provide additional context, suggesting that youth in child

welfare placements may experience missed school days due to enrollment delays or transitions. In juvenile justice placements, youth assigned to restrictive levels may receive alternative instruction such as worksheets or in-room assignments instead of full classroom participation.

While these practices may be intended to maintain educational continuity, they may not provide the same level of instruction or engagement as a full classroom setting. Taken together, survey responses and observations suggest the need for continued coordination across agencies to support **educational continuity, credit recovery, and access to appropriate academic supports.**

SECTION 5 – Right to Stay Connected and Have Privacy

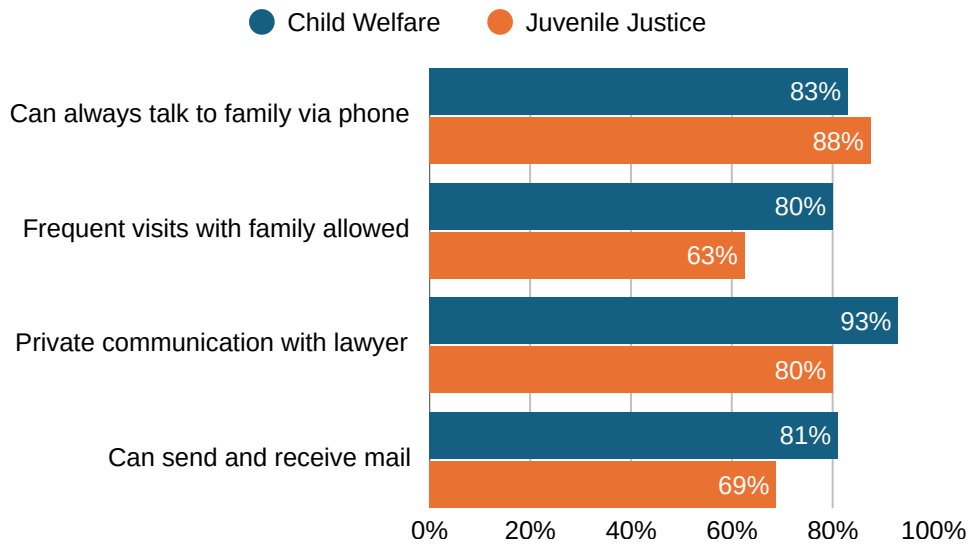
Under 55 Pa. Code § 3800.32, youth in residential placements retain important privacy and communication rights intended to help them maintain meaningful connections with family, community, and trusted adults. Youth have the right to communicate with others by telephone, subject to reasonable facility policies and any applicable court or contracting agency instructions, to send and receive mail, and to visit with family at least once every two weeks unless restricted by court order. See § 3800.32(e–g).

Outgoing and incoming mail from attorneys and government officials may not be opened or read by staff, and youth must be able to communicate and meet privately with their attorney and clergy. See § 3800.32(g)(1–2). Youth are also protected from unreasonable search and seizure, with any searches conducted according to reasonable facility policies. See § 3800.32(i).

These rights are critical because research consistently shows that youth who maintain stable, nurturing relationships with supportive adults develop stronger attachments and healthier social and emotional outcomes than youth with limited adult support. Maintaining family connection is also a key component of permanency planning and successful reentry.

For these reasons, the survey asked youth about the frequency and methods of contact with family members, attorneys, and social workers to better understand whether youth in placement are able to exercise these rights and maintain supportive relationships.

Privacy & Staying Connected



Note: Percentages shown in this charts are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth Voice + Interpretation:

Most youth who responded to the survey reported being able to communicate and maintain contact with their families. In child welfare placements, a large majority of youth reported being able to speak with and visit their families as often as they would like. In juvenile justice placements, responses reflected more variation, with some youth reporting consistent access and others indicating limitations.

Absent a court order restricting contact, maintaining family connection and supporting reunification should remain a priority, and staff should actively facilitate and encourage this connection. Survey responses suggest that while access is often available, the consistency and ease of that access may differ depending on placement type and facility location.

Most youth also reported being able to communicate with their attorneys. However, a small number of youths indicated that these conversations may not always occur in private. Given the legal importance of attorney-client privilege and the regulatory requirement that these communications remain confidential, even a small number of responses indicating concerns about privacy is notable and warrants attention.

Survey responses related to mail access revealed additional variation. While many youths reported being able to send and receive mail, a small number of youth reported not receiving mail or expressed uncertainty about whether they were

permitted to do so. Some youth also indicated that staff may review their mail, raising concerns about confidentiality and consistency with regulatory protections.

In juvenile justice placements, geographic distance from Philadelphia may also affect in-person visitation, as many facilities are located outside the city. While this does not necessarily reflect a violation of policy, it may create practical barriers that limit the frequency of family contact.

Overall, survey responses suggest that while many youths are able to maintain communication with family and legal representatives, there may be inconsistencies in how these rights are implemented or understood. These findings highlight the importance of clear communication of rights, consistent facility practices, and ongoing staff training to ensure that youth communication and privacy rights are upheld in accordance with § 3800.

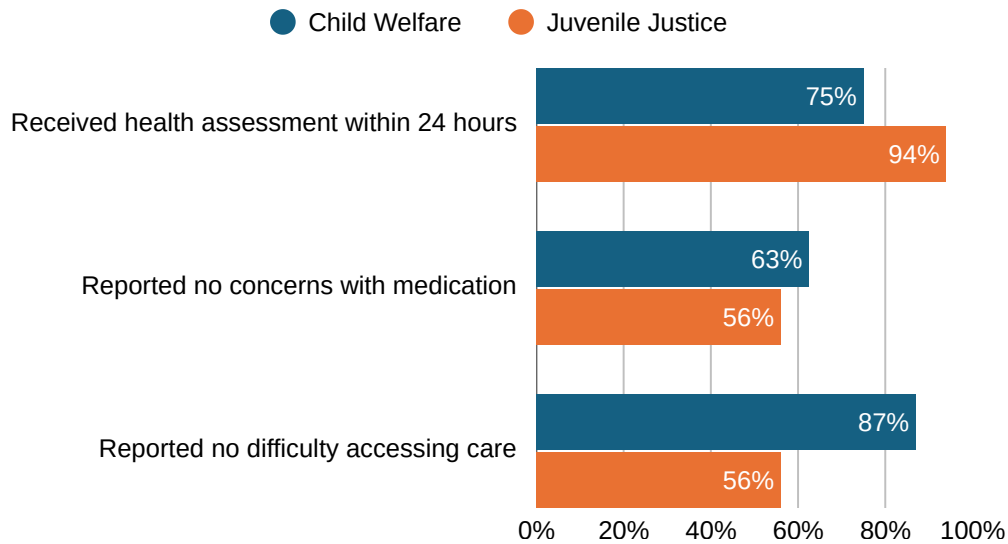
SECTION 6 – Right to Access Health Services

All youth in placement must receive prompt medical care upon admission and throughout their stay. Under § 3800.141(a), a child must have a written health and safety assessment within 24 hours of admission. If the assessment identifies a health or safety risk, a written plan to protect the child must be developed and implemented within 24 hours after the assessment is completed. See § 3800.142. Within 15 days of admission, a child must have a full health examination and annually thereafter. See § 3800.143.

Youth are also entitled to appropriate medical, dental, mental, and behavioral health services, including emergency care. Youth have the right to be free from excessive medication. See § 3800.32(m). Youth should also be informed about prescribed medications and their effects, have access to age-appropriate health information, and, where applicable, be supported in making decisions about their own care. Youth ages 14 and older may consent to their own mental health treatment, while parents, guardians, or providers may also authorize care for youth under 18, with a formal process available for youth to challenge decisions through the court. See *Youth Rights Guide, Getting Health Services*, pg. 16.

The survey asked youth whether they spoke with staff about their medical history and any needs within the first 24 hours of placement, whether they had concerns about medications or treatments, and whether they experienced problems accessing needed medical or mental health care.

Health Services



Note: Percentages shown in this charts are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth Voice + Interpretation:

Most surveyed youth reported that they spoke with someone about their health needs when they entered placement. This was especially true among youth in juvenile justice placements, where initial screening may occur before or during placement through the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center or related intake processes. Most child welfare youth who responded also reported receiving this type of initial health discussion, though a small number reported that this did not happen or that they were unsure.

Most youth reported they did not think their medical treatment or medications were inappropriate or excessive. However, a small number of survey responses reflected concerns or uncertainty. Similarly, most youth reported they did not have problems accessing needed medication, treatment, medical care or mental health care, though some responses indicated difficulty or uncertainty.

Because the survey sample is small, these findings should not be read as system-wide conclusions. Still, they suggest that access to care is not only about whether services are available, but also whether youth understand their care, feel heard, and know how to ask for help. Survey comments reflected concerns about medication effects, requests not being taken seriously, or not fully understanding treatment. These concerns point to the importance of youth-centered communication in discussions about their healthcare.

OYO’s interpretation is that facilities should continue to ensure timely intake screening, access to appropriate care, and clear communication with youth about medical and mental health treatment. Youth should be supported in understanding their medications, asking questions, raising concerns, and participating in decisions about their healthcare to the extent permitted by law and appropriate to their age and development.

Most youth who responded to the survey reported speaking with someone about their health needs when they entered placement. Youth in juvenile justice placements appeared more likely to report completing intake screenings at entry, which may reflect structured intake processes that occur while youth are held at the Philadelphia Juvenile Justice Services Center (PJJSC).

“*I ask the nurse for sleep meds, but I think she refused.*”

— Juvenile Justice Youth

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At the same time, a notable number of youth, particularly in juvenile justice placements, reported difficulty accessing healthcare services or feeling unheard when raising concerns about their care. Some youth described confusion about medications or frustration with how requests were handled. One juvenile justice youth shared, “I ask the nurse for sleep meds, but I think she refused.” A child welfare youth explained, “Meds make me tired and weak in the morning.”

“*Meds make me tired and weak in the morning.*”

— Child Welfare Youth

”

These responses suggest that youth concerns may not only relate to access to services, but also to **communication, trust, and understanding**. Youth should be informed about their healthcare, understand the purpose and effects of medications, and have opportunities to ask questions and participate in decisions about their care.

SECTION 7 – Right to Keep Money and Belongings Safe

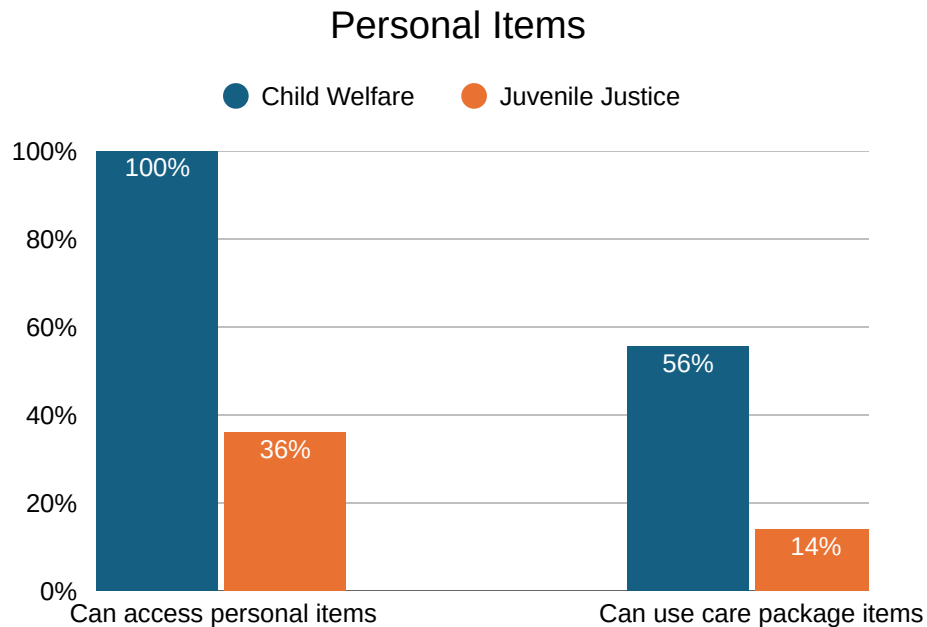
Youth in non-secure residential placements retain important rights related to personal dignity, property, and privacy. Money earned or received by a child remains the child’s personal property, and facilities must maintain a separate accounting system documenting deposits and withdrawals without commingling youth funds with facility funds. For youth expected to remain in placement longer than 30 days, facilities must maintain an interest-bearing account, with any interest tracked and applied to the individual child. All funds must be returned to

the child upon discharge or transfer. Facilities and staff are strictly prohibited from borrowing or using a child's money. See § 3800.18.

As it relates to clothing and personal belongings, youth have the right to clean and appropriate clothing, and their belongings are protected from unreasonable search and seizure, subject to reasonable facility policy and safety considerations. See § 3800.32.

In child welfare placements, youth are generally allowed to keep personal items unless doing so would create a safety concern. These may include hygiene products, cultural or religious items, and items received from family. Youth are typically able to keep belongings in their rooms and maintain a level of autonomy consistent with a home-like setting.

In juvenile justice placements, facilities operate under stricter security protocols. Youth may not be permitted to keep personal items in their rooms or on their person, and items may be stored and distributed by staff. Certain items may be restricted as contraband depending on facility policy. For these reasons, the survey asked youth whether they could access their personal items and whether they could receive and use items from care packages.



Note: Percentages shown in this charts are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth Voice + Interpretation:

Survey responses indicate differences in youth experiences across placement types. Youth in child welfare placements consistently reported access to personal belongings and money. In juvenile justice placements, responses were more varied, with youth reporting a range of experiences including access, restricted access, or access dependent on facility rules.

Responses related to care packages also varied. Most youth reported that they do not receive care packages, while a portion of youth reported receiving them. Among those who reported receiving care packages, responses indicated that access to those items may be limited or dependent on facility policy.

A small number of youths in child welfare settings reported that they were unable to use items from care packages or that restrictions were not always clearly explained. These responses suggest that youth may not always have a clear understanding of policies related to personal property.

These findings reflect the differences in operating environments between child welfare and juvenile justice settings. While juvenile justice facilities must consider safety and security in restricting certain items, these restrictions should be clearly communicated and applied consistently.

Overly broad or unclear restrictions may impact youth's sense of autonomy, comfort, and identity. Facilities should aim to balance safety requirements with the need to provide youth with a sense of normalcy and personal dignity, particularly as it relates to culturally relevant items and personal belongings.

SECTION 8 – Right to Have Personal Needs Met (Hygiene, Nutrition & Religious Rights)

Youth in residential placement have the right to practice the religion or faith of their choice, including private meetings with religious leaders and, when safe and appropriate, offsite visits. See § 3800.32(j). Youth are entitled to clean, comfortable clothing that fits their age, gender identity, and the season, as well as hygiene items that meet their medical, gender, cultural, and personal needs. See § 3800.32(o).

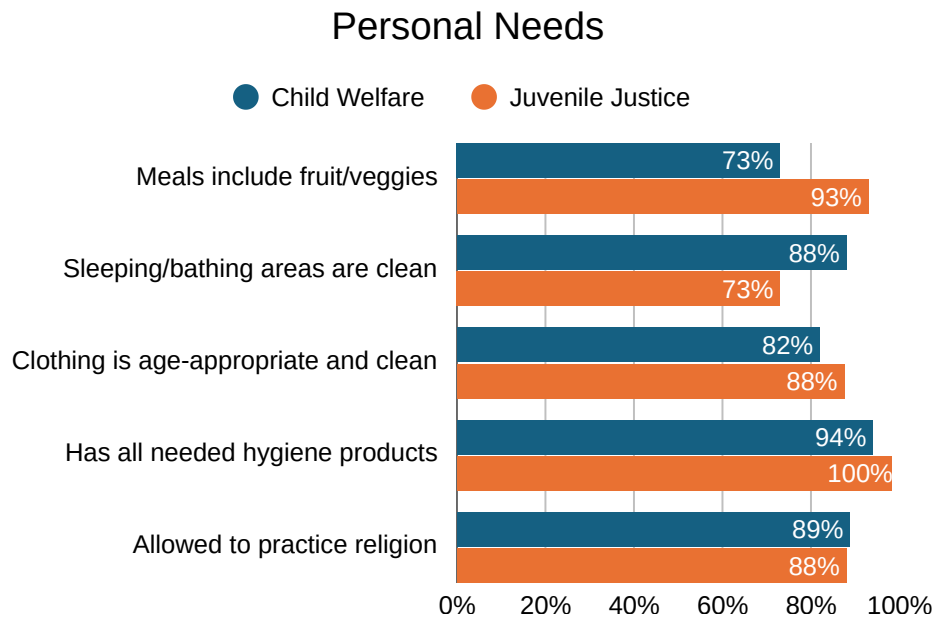
The Youth Rights Guide further explains that youth have the right to personal care and hygiene items that meet their gender, gender identity, sex, ethnicity, and cultural needs, as well as the right to food that accommodates medical, religious, or vegetarian preferences. The guide also emphasizes that youth must have time and opportunity to meet daily hygiene needs, including showering, brushing their teeth, and maintaining clean clothing and bedding.

Youth are also guaranteed three meals and at least one snack daily, with access to water at all times. See § 3800.161. Additional food must be available for youth who request more food, and accommodations for medical, religious,

vegetarian, or other dietary needs must be provided when required. See § 3800.162. Meals must include appropriate food groups, including dairy, protein, fruits and vegetables, and grains, unless otherwise recommended by a medical provider. Meal alternatives must be available for youth with special health needs, religious beliefs, or dietary preferences. See § 3800.163.

In juvenile justice settings, uniforms are typically provided and laundered by staff, meals are provided on a set schedule, and youth may request special hygiene products through facility staff or their care team. In child welfare settings, youth may have more access to household routines, including some ability to use appliances or have input into groceries, although facilities may still limit access to medication, razors, or products containing alcohol for safety reasons.

The survey asked youth whether meals include fruits or vegetables, whether food and mealtimes respect diet, religion, or medical needs, whether living spaces are clean, whether clothing and linens are washed weekly, whether youth have appropriate clothing, whether they are missing hygiene products, and whether they are allowed to practice their religion or faith.



Note: Percentages shown in this charts are based on youth who responded to each survey question. Response rates varied by question. See Appendix A for the total number of youth surveyed, number of respondents, and response rates associated with each survey item.

Youth Voice + Interpretation:

Overall, most surveyed youth reported that their basic needs are being met. Most youth reported that meals include fruits or vegetables and that food and mealtimes respect diet, religion, and medical needs. Most youth also reported that

their living spaces are clean, clothing and linens are washed weekly, clothing fits and is appropriate, and hygiene products are available. Most youth also reported that they are able to practice their religion or faith if they choose.

At the same time, a small number of survey responses identified concerns related to food, cleanliness, hygiene products, religious practice, or access to culturally appropriate personal care items. Survey comments included requests for more hair products, special shampoo, or religious clothing options. These comments are important because personal care, cultural identity, religion, and dignity are connected. Meeting basic needs is not only about minimum compliance; it is also about whether youth feel respected and able to maintain their identity while in placement.

In juvenile justice settings, safety and security considerations may shape access to certain items. However, facilities should ensure that restrictions are clearly explained, individualized where possible, and balanced against the importance of cultural, religious, gender-related, and personal dignity needs. In child welfare settings, facilities should continue to support youth access to age-appropriate hygiene products, cultural items, religious accommodations, and food routines that reflect youth needs and preferences.

These findings suggest that most youth report having their basic needs met, but continued attention is needed to ensure that nutrition, hygiene, clothing, cleanliness, and religious accommodations are consistently provided in ways that are respectful, culturally responsive, and aligned with regulatory standards.