



FISCAL POLICY CENTER TOOLKIT

How to Calculate the Average Costs of Detaining a Youth

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Introduction

At a time when state and local governments face extreme fiscal challenges, it is imperative that reformers have access to credible and informed estimates of the costs of juvenile justice processing. Although some jurisdictions and organizations have been able to complete in-depth cost-benefit analyses of juvenile justice expenditures, such extensive analyses can be expensive and time consuming. Nonetheless, reformers can arm themselves with valuable information on the costs of juvenile justice system processing by doing some basic research and calculations. The National Juvenile Justice Network's (NJJN) Fiscal Policy Center's toolkit series shows readers how to use available budget data and processing statistics to estimate costs for different stages of the juvenile justice system.

About this Toolkit

This toolkit demonstrates how to calculate the average costs of housing a youth in detention.¹ There are numerous ways to calculate the cost of detention, and detention administrators across states and even within states may arrive at their costs through different methods. This toolkit will help readers understand what components are typically included in a detention cost estimate, why one would or would not choose to include these elements, and what additional costs and revenues could be incorporated in the calculation of costs to detain youth. We will then walk the reader through a basic cost calculation method, using the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC) in Chicago, Illinois, as an example.

How to Use this Toolkit

Reformers can use the cost estimates described here in a variety of ways, including:

- to initiate more complex cost-benefit analyses aimed at understanding the effects of detention policies on society, communities, and individual youth in the juvenile justice system;
- to compare the cost of detention in their jurisdictions with the cost of community-based alternatives;
- to help in assessing the cost implications of proposals to construct more detention beds or limit the funding for alternatives; or
- to begin a discussion with local policy makers about ways to cut costs by reducing the use of youth detention.

¹ Detention centers are short-term, secure, or non-secure facilities for youth who are awaiting trial, sentencing or post-adjudication placement in a juvenile correctional facility.

Basic How-To

To estimate the average cost of detention for a youth:

1. Divide the annual costs of operating a detention facility by the average daily population, to obtain the average annualized cost per detention bed.
2. Divide the result by 365 days to obtain the average *daily* cost of detention for a youth ((annual expenditure/average daily population)/365).
3. Multiply the result by the average length of stay (if available) to obtain the approximate cost of an average stay in detention.

WE USE THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION:²

- annual costs of operating a detention facility
- average daily population
- average length of stay

In situations where the average length of stay is not readily available, the average daily cost of detention for a youth, obtained in step two above, is itself a valuable cost estimate, and is very useful when compared to the cost of alternatives to detention. Note that detention administrators typically include operating expenditures for staff salaries, pension and fringe benefits, supplies and services, contractual services, and other related costs (e.g., maintenance costs) in their total annual expenditure. They may also include costs associated with the provision of medical and mental health care and education services, although in some jurisdictions, costs associated with the provision of education may be treated as fixed costs that are excluded from the total expenditure (see page 11 for a discussion of excluding education costs). This toolkit demonstrates how to locate information on these expenditures and discusses issues that you may want to consider when using these data to calculate detention costs.

In addition, reformers may choose to incorporate other detention costs and revenues, such as capital improvement costs, in their estimates (see “Additional Detention Costs and Revenues Associated with Detention Center Operation,” on page 3). Keep in mind that including these additional costs and revenues is likely to result in cost estimates that are different from the ones reported by a detention facility. Alternatively, excluding these costs and revenues will simply result in a conservative estimate of the costs of detention.

² The “annual costs of operating a detention facility” correspond to detention-related spending in a given year. The “average daily population” is the sum of the number of youth in detention each day for a year, divided by the number of days in the year. “Average length of stay” is the average (mean) amount of time (in days) that a youth remains in detention in a given year. It is calculated as the sum of occupied beds each day for a year, divided by the number of bookings (admissions) in a year.

ADDITIONAL COSTS AND REVENUES ASSOCIATED WITH DETENTION CENTER OPERATION

Operating a detention facility requires a physical plant, staff, and services such as food and laundry. Most operating budgets will include these basic costs. Costs for education, health, and mental health services may also be included in the facility's operating budget or they may be part of budgets for external agency providers. In addition, the following costs and revenues can be considered when determining the actual costs of facility operation. Although these may be difficult to obtain, they are real costs, and excluding them will result in a conservative estimate of the costs of detention.

Capital Improvement Costs

Detention facilities have to regularly maintain and improve their physical plant, such as by building a new gym or renovating a wing of a building. These costs will be unlikely to appear in a detention center's budget, and are more likely to appear in a jurisdiction's capital budget.^a These are real costs associated with operating a facility, although they may vary significantly by year and may be difficult to track down. Indeed, you will likely need to contact the department or agency responsible for maintaining capital budgets in order to locate this information.

Other Costs of Doing Business

These additional costs, such as the costs to manage payroll, train new employees, or purchase equipment, may be included in the budget for the "parent" agency that is responsible for operating the detention facility (e.g., the sheriff's office, the probation department) instead of the operating budget for the detention facility.

Capital Costs of Construction

When a facility is first built, the jurisdiction has to raise revenues to fund it, which is usually done through bonds. Taxpayers then pay off these bonds for many decades. The annual expense of paying back this borrowed money is a real, on-going cost for the facility. However, determining this annualized expense may be complex.

Revenues

In addition to the costs of operation, a facility may generate revenues or have other income streams. These revenues may appear as offsets, or income, in the facility's budget, or may be rolled into the jurisdiction's general fund.^b These revenues may include:

- fees charged to house detained youth from other jurisdictions
- lunch subsidies such as school breakfast and lunch program funds provided by the federal Department of Education, which may appear in the operating budget along with other sources of federal funding or in a separate state or federal budget
- federal or state program grants, which may appear as income, although detention administrators may not include them in their own average daily cost estimates

^a The capital budget is the budget associated with acquisition or construction of major capital items, including land, buildings, structures, and equipment. Funds for these projects are usually appropriated from surpluses, earmarked revenues, or bond sales. For example, in Cook County, Illinois, the capital budget is the responsibility of the Cook County Office of Capital Planning and Policy. See <http://bit.ly/103BOtd>.

^b The general fund refers to revenues accruing to the state or locality from taxes, fees, earned interest, and other sources that can be used for the general operation of state or local government. General fund revenues are not specifically required in statute or in state constitutions to support particular programs or agencies.

How to Calculate the Average Costs of Detaining a Youth

STEP ONE: DETERMINE WHICH AGENCIES HAVE THE INFORMATION YOU NEED

In order to calculate the cost of detention, you will need to consider the following issues.

Who operates youth detention facilities?

First, you must determine which agency or agencies (i.e., state, county, or city) are responsible for operating youth detention facilities. Since the administration of detention varies by state—and even within states—this will determine, in part, where you will have to search for detention information.

What services are offered, and by whom?

Detention facilities are typically required to provide services to meet the needs of youth (e.g., health, mental health, and education services). These may be the exclusive responsibility of the agency that operates the detention facilities (e.g., the Department of Juvenile Services or Sheriff's Department) or the services may be provided by agencies outside the detention center (e.g., the Department of Education, Department of Health) and in the latter case, the costs for providing the services will be found in the external agencies' budgets. To obtain as complete a picture of detention costs as possible, then, you will need to identify the services offered to youth in detention, the agencies responsible for providing the services, and the source or sources of cost data on those services.

What is the best method for locating data?

It is always advisable to start your data collection by contacting the government agency responsible for managing the detention center and speaking with budget officers, facility administrators, or researchers to see if they calculate per diem rates themselves or can provide the budget and statistical data that you will need to calculate the rates yourself. In addition, detention staff can indicate what costs and revenues they consider relevant to calculating the costs of confining a youth in their facility, tell you whether other agencies or organizations offer services to detained youth, and clarify whether the cost of those services is included in the operating budget for the detention center. If outside agencies provide services to youth in detention, and the cost of those services is not included in the detention center's budget, you should also plan to contact the outside agencies directly to locate relevant budget information.

Note: This process may require several phone calls in order to locate the individuals who have knowledge about detention center data and budgets. Be prepared to maintain careful records regarding the individuals you contact and the data sources you locate. These records will help tremendously when it is time to calculate costs or answer questions about the sources of your cost data. In addition, you may find much of the information you need on departmental or agency websites. However, if the detailed department-level information you require is still not readily available after contacting the appropriate government budget offices or agency administrators and scanning available websites, you may need to make a public records request. (For information on how to make a public records request, see the Fiscal Policy Center toolkit, “How to File a Public Information Act Request,” at <http://bit.ly/SJqVuu>.)

STEP TWO: LOCATE BUDGET INFORMATION

To calculate the total annual expenditure on detention in your jurisdiction, you will need to locate budget data. As noted above, you may need to review several different budgets to construct a complete picture of the annual detention expenditure in your jurisdiction. For example, in Cook County, Illinois, the Cook County Office of the Transitional Administrator³ is responsible for managing and operating the juvenile detention facility; the Cook County Health and Hospitals System offers health services to detained youth; and the Chicago Public Schools provide education services within the facility. Thus, in order to estimate annual detention expenditures that include all relevant services in Cook County, you must extract budget information from three different budgets. The following sections describe how to do this.

First: Find the total annual operating budget for the agency responsible for operating detention facilities.

If you have been unable to obtain budget information by contacting the detention administrators or budget officers, you can search the internet for financial/budget reports. Use keywords such as:

[your state/county/city/name]

plus

“annual budget,” “youth detention center annual budget report,” “juvenile detention center annual budget report,” “annual fiscal report,” and/or “annual budget report.”

Budget summaries may be found in any of the following types of documents: an annual report, a fiscal report, a budget report, or an annual financial report. They may be labeled in a variety of ways, such as:

- Department of Juvenile Justice budget summary;
- Department of Juvenile Justice fiscal report;
- Department of Juvenile Services annual report; or
- state or county accountability report.

³ In 1999, the ACLU filed a class action lawsuit, *Doe v. Cook County*: No. 99 C 3945 (N.D. Ill. 1999), regarding inadequate conditions of confinement at the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center (JTDC). After a series of federal court orders, Cook County entered into a settlement agreement in the lawsuit. This agreement, reached on August 14, 2007, provided for the appointment of a transitional administrator and the creation of the Office of the Transitional Administrator (OTA). The OTA is empowered with the authority to bring the JTDC into substantial compliance with the aforementioned federal court orders.

Once you have identified the appropriate department-level budget report link, follow it and search for annual juvenile services spending on detention facilities. Look for the summary budget sheet, which will include total costs for such things as staff salaries, pensions and benefits, supplies and services, contractual services, and other related expenditures. Record the total amount appropriated for the year you are studying.

Note that the budget may have several different column headings, such as “Actual Budget,” which reflects actual costs incurred in a given year; “Operating Budget,” which is functionally equivalent to the “Actual Budget;” “Appropriated Budget,” which is the approved allocation for a given year; and “Requested Budget,” which is the budget amount that was sought, but not necessarily approved, in a given year. In general, the actual, operating, or appropriated budget figures will be most useful for calculating detention costs, since they reflect what was actually expended or appropriated in a given year, while the “requested budget” is least reliable, since it reflects budget figures that have not been approved. Be careful to indicate which budget category you select (e.g., actual, operating, appropriated) and be sure to collect data from the same budget category and the same budget year for all agencies (e.g., Department of Juvenile Services, Department of Education) that provide services to youth in detention. (See page 17 for a discussion of what to do when budget years do not align.)

REMEMBER

When you contact detention center staff to discuss the budget, ask about which costs and revenues they include in their calculation of per diem rates and clarify whether these costs and revenues are included in the detention center’s budget or appear in a separate budget or fund.

Cook County Example. NJJN staff located the Cook County budget online and searched the site using the keywords “Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center budget.” Staff located the detention center’s budget under the public safety portion of the County’s budget and extracted the total appropriated expenditure for Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 from the summary budget sheet. We observed that the total expenditure included costs for personnel services, contractual services, supplies and services, operations and maintenance, rental leasing, and capital equipment, but did not include health and pension benefits. Since we wanted to include these fringe benefits in the total costs, we contacted the JTDC to determine where we would find the appropriation for health and pension benefits. We learned that fringe benefits are paid separately by Cook County at a rate of 30% of total salaries. Thus, to calculate health and pension benefits, we needed to find the amount appropriated for salaries (\$28,242,999), which was listed under “personnel services” in the detention center budget, and then multiply that figure by 30%.⁴ This resulted in a total cost of \$8,472,900 for health and pension benefits for detention center staff. We added that amount to the total appropriated expenditure for the detention center to obtain the total JTDC operating expenditure in FY 2011 (Table 1, below).

⁴ For health and pension benefits, see also the Open Data portal for Cook County Government, “President’s Office—Juvenile Temporary Detention Center Cost Comparison,” at <http://bit.ly/12oh3K3>.

TABLE 1	
Juvenile Temporary Detention Center Appropriated Expenditure Cook County, IL, FY 2011	
Personnel Services	\$33,031,562 ^a
Health and Pension Benefits ^b	\$8,472,900
Contractual Services ^c	\$9,439,448
Supplies and Materials	\$4,360,000
Operations and Maintenance	\$218,400
Rental Leasing	\$33,257
Capital Equipment	\$321,458
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$55,877,025

Source: Cook County Board of Commissioners, “2011 Cook County Annual Appropriation Bill,” pp. R-63 and R-64, available at <http://bit.ly/Ycg3dW>.

^a This figure includes \$28,242,999 for salaries and wages of regular employees, and \$4,000,000 in overtime compensation.

^b Health and pension benefits are paid by Cook County at a rate of 30% of salaries and wages, or \$8,472,900 (.30 x \$28,242,999) for JDTC staff in FY 2011.

^c Includes contractual mental health services provided by the Isaac Ray Center.

Then: Find the annual health and mental health expenditures for the detention facility.

If agencies outside the detention facility (i.e., state, county or city health services agencies, or private contractors) are responsible for providing health and mental health services to detained youth, you may need to obtain budgets for these providers and include their detention-related expenditures in your calculation of the cost of detention. Note that any of the following service delivery and payment scenarios are possible, so it is important to identify both the providers and their budgetary responsibilities:

- The agency that operates the detention center may pay for all health and mental health services for detained youth.
- The detention center may pay for some services, while the costs of other services are the responsibility of an outside provider.

- The cost of health and mental health services may be paid entirely by agencies or providers outside the facility.

You will want to contact the detention center directly in order to determine what agencies and organizations fund health and mental health services for detained youth and what additional budget data you may need to collect. Be aware that the detention facility may have a contractual agreement with an outside provider or providers and that these contractual expenditures may be included under the heading “contractual services” in the facility’s operating budget. In that case, you will *not* need to add cost data from the outside source, because it is already included in the facility’s operating expenditure.

In the event that an external agency provides and pays for health or mental health services for detained youth, you should contact the agency directly to obtain information on detention expenditures. You can also search the internet to locate the appropriate budget report link for the provider and follow the link to search for annual detention center expenditures using key words such as:

[your state/county/city/name or name of a specific provider]

plus

“juvenile health and human services,” “health and hospital system,” “health grant fund,” “treatment services,” “diversion services,” “rehabilitative services,” and/or “contractual services.”

Budget summaries for health and mental health services may be found in any of the following types of documents: an annual report, a fiscal report, a budget report, or an annual financial report. Reports for government agencies may be labeled in a variety of ways, such as:

- Department of Rehabilitative Services annual report;
- Department of Health and Human Services accountability report;
- Health and Human Services Treatment budget report; or
- Juvenile Justice Human Services.

Once you have identified the appropriate department-level or provider budget report link, follow the link and search for annual juvenile detention center spending (i.e., including staff salaries, pensions and benefits; supplies and services; contractual services; and other related expenditures). Record the total detention-related expenditure. Be sure to gather the data from the same year and budget category (e.g., appropriations) as the data you have collected on the detention facility’s operating expenses.

Cook County Example: NJJN staff contacted staff at the JTDC to determine who provides and pays for mental health and health care for detained youth. We learned that the detention center has a contractual agreement with an outside provider to provide mental health services in the facility. The cost of these services is included in the detention center’s budget under “contractual services.” On the other hand, medical services at the JTDC are provided and funded by the Cook County Health and Hospitals System. NJJN staff searched the Cook County budget online using the keywords “Cook County Health and Hospitals System” and located a budget report that contained the appropriated expenditure for the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center. We extracted information on the total costs for medical services, including salaries, pension, fringe benefits, and administrative costs, provided to youth in the JTDC in Fiscal Year 2011 (Table 2).

TABLE 2	
Cook County Health and Hospitals System Appropriated Expenditure for the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, FY 2011	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$4,409,179^a

Source: See Cook County Board of Commissioners, “2011 Cook County Annual Appropriation Bill,” pg. D – 40, available at <http://bit.ly/Ycg3dW>.

^a This figure includes salaries, pension, fringe benefits, and administrative costs. Health and pension benefits are paid by Cook County at 30% of total salaries for staff of the health and hospitals system.

Next: Find the annual education expenditure for youth in the detention facility.

All youth of mandatory school age who are placed in custody or supervision are required to be enrolled in a school program. These services may be provided by:

- the detention facility, which may seek reimbursement for the services from the local school system or systems responsible for educating youth when they are in the community;
- an outside provider that is included in the detention center’s budget (e.g., under “contractual services” or “education services”); or
- an agency or provider in the community (e.g., school district, county/city agency, or non-profit organization) that includes expenditures for detention education in its own budget.

To clarify which agency or organization is responsible for delivering education services to detained youth, who pays for those services, and whether education expenditures are included in the detention facility's calculations of the costs to detain a youth, it is wise to speak with detention center staff directly.

If you plan to include education expenditures in your estimate of detention costs (see sidebar at right), and education costs are *not* included in the detention center's budget, you will need to obtain the external education provider's budget. You should start by contacting the education provider directly. In addition, you may search the internet to find the appropriate budget report link for the provider, and follow the link to search for the annual juvenile justice education services budget.

To search the internet or state/county budget for financial/budget reports that show detention education expenditures, use keywords such as:

[your state/county/city/name or education provider's name]

plus

“Department of Education,” “Department of Juvenile Justice Educational Services,” “Division of Educational Services,” “education grant fund,” “public school budget,” “alternative school program fund,” “juvenile justice education services,” or “contractual educational services.”

Budget summaries for juvenile justice education services may be found in any of the following types of documents: an annual report, a fiscal report, a budget report, or an annual financial report.

EXCLUDING THE COST OF EDUCATION SERVICES FROM THE COST OF DETENTION

In this report, we show you how to find budget data on education services for youth in detention and how to include it in your estimate of total detention costs. After all, youth are educated in detention year-round, which can involve considerable administrative costs associated with screening youth and obtaining and transferring records.

You may decide, however, that since school-aged youth are required to receive education services regardless of their detention status, it is appropriate to treat education costs as fixed costs that should be excluded from your calculation of the costs of detention. Moreover, when education costs are paid for, or reimbursed by, local education agencies, the detention facility itself may not include education expenditures in its calculation of per diem costs.

Before you exclude education costs, you should first contact officials at the detention facility to discuss whether they include the cost of education in their calculation of per diem rates. If it still seems reasonable to exclude education expenditures from your calculations, be sure to subtract any education costs that are included in the detention facility's budget from the total expenditure for the facility, and indicate that education expenses are not included in your estimate of total detention costs.

Once you have retrieved the budget data, search for information specifically related to education services in detention facilities and record the total detention-related expenditure. Relevant budget categories may be labeled in a variety of ways, such as:

- teacher and aide salaries and benefits;
- materials and supplies;
- other classroom expenses;
- instructional support services;
- school administration services; and/or
- other operating costs.

Remember to collect data from the same budget category and year as the data you have collected on operating costs and health and mental health expenditures.

Cook County Example: Table 3 shows the total FY 2011 expenditure for education services in the JTDC. To locate the data, NJJN staff contacted JTDC staff, who indicated that the Chicago Public Schools operate the Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School in the detention facility. NJJN staff then searched the Chicago Public Schools website using the keywords “Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School budget” and located budget data for the school. We then extracted data on the total FY 2011 appropriated expenditure, including costs for staff salaries, pensions, fringe benefits, and administration.

TABLE 3	
Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School Appropriated Expenditure, FY 2011	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$8,267,811

Source: See Board of Education of the City of Chicago, “Proposed Budget Chicago Public Schools 2011-2012,” pg. 122, available at <http://bit.ly/15YfSb0>.

Finally: Calculate the total detention center expenditure.

Once you have located all detention-related costs, add them together to determine the total annual expenditure for youth detention.

Cook County Example: Table 4 shows that in FY 2011, it cost a total of \$68,554,015 to operate the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, including the provision of health, mental health, and education services.

TABLE 4	
Total Annual Cook County Temporary Detention Center Expenditure, FY 2011	
Juvenile Temporary Detention Center	\$55,877,025
Health and Hospitals System	\$4,409,179
Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School	\$8,267,811
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$68,554,015

STEP THREE: LOCATE DETENTION STATISTICS ON AVERAGE DAILY POPULATION AND AVERAGE LENGTH OF STAY

Detention statistics are typically included in annual reports that provide an overview of the juvenile justice system (e.g., Department of Juvenile Justice Annual Report, Juvenile Justice Annual Statistical Report). These statistics should include information on average daily population (i.e., the average number of detained youth on any given day in the calendar year) and average length of stay (i.e., the average number of days that a youth is detained). Some facilities do not calculate average length of stay; in that case, you can still use average daily population to calculate the cost per youth per day.

The reports may be labeled in a variety of ways, such as:

- department budget summary;
- department annual statistical report;
- juvenile admissions report; or
- state or county accountability report.

Cook County Example: To locate detention statistics for Cook County, NJJN staff contacted the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center administrators directly. That search led us to FY 2011 data for the JTDC, from which we extracted the information shown in Table 5.

AVERAGE DAILY POPULATION VS. DETENTION CAPACITY

You can calculate the average cost of detaining a youth based on average daily population or the facility's capacity (total number of beds). Estimates based on average daily population will fluctuate depending on the year (e.g., calculated costs will be higher when the population rate is under the rated capacity). You may wish to calculate costs using both population and number of beds, especially if there is a substantial difference between the two. But it is wise to select one estimate and stick to it, to avoid confusion.

If you need to compare "apples to apples," detention facilities may base their calculations on their bed capacity. Alternatively, rates based on the average daily population can either underscore the wasted expense of keeping an almost empty facility open, or help demonstrate a reduced level of support for detained youth in a facility that is over capacity. (For more on this issue, please go to pages 17-18.)

TABLE 5	
Juvenile Temporary Detention Center Statistics for Cook County, Illinois, FY 2011	
Average Daily Population	288
Average Length of Stay (in days)	43.24

Source: Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, Office of Resident Advocacy & Quality of Life, March 21, 2013.

STEP FOUR: DO THE MATH

In order to calculate the average costs of detaining a youth, follow these simple steps:

1. **Calculate the average annual cost per youth (or, average annual cost per occupied bed):** Divide the total annual detention expenditure by the average daily population.
2. **Calculate the average cost per youth per day:** Divide the average annual cost per youth by 365 days ((annual expenditure/average population)/365).
3. **Calculate the cost of an average stay in detention:** Multiply the total average cost per youth per day by the average length of stay.

Cook County Example: We used the total FY 2011 expenditure data for Cook County (shown below and in Table 4)—which include all basic services delivered through the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, plus health and education services—and the data on average daily population and average length of stay (shown in Table 5) to calculate the average costs to detain a youth.

First: Select the detention and services expenditure summary.

Total Annual Cook County Temporary Detention Center Expenditure, FY 2011	
Juvenile Temporary Detention Center	\$55,877,025
Health and Hospitals System	\$4,409,179
Nancy B. Jefferson Alternative School	\$8,267,811
TOTAL EXPENDITURE	\$68,554,015

Then: Divide the total annual detention expenditure by the average daily population.

Average Annual Cost per Youth in FY 2011	
Total Yearly Expenditure	\$68,554,015
<u>÷ Average Daily Juvenile Population</u>	<u>÷ 288</u>
Average Annual Cost per Youth	\$238,034.77

Next: Divide the average annual cost per youth by the number of days in a year.

Average Cost per Youth per Day in FY 2011	
Average Annual Cost per Youth	\$238,034.77
<u>÷ Number of Days in a Year</u>	<u>÷ 365</u>
Average Cost per Youth per Day	\$652.15

Finally: Multiply the average cost per youth per day by the average length of stay to obtain the average cost of a stay in detention.

Average Cost per Youth of a Stay in Detention in FY 2011	
Average Cost per Youth per Day	\$652.15
<u>x Average Length of Stay in Days</u>	<u>x 43.24</u>
Average Cost of a Stay in Detention	\$28,198.96

The final cost—\$28,198.96—represents the average cost per youth of a stay in the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center in FY 2011.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. How can I use information about what it costs to detain a youth in my jurisdiction to advance reform?

This toolkit will help you calculate the average costs to detain a youth in your jurisdiction, which can help you estimate the potential savings associated with policies that reduce the use of youth detention, or the estimated costs associated with policies that lead to the increased use of detention. Armed with the information, you can begin a conversation with corrections officials about how a reduction in the number of detained youth can translate into a reduction in detention expenditures.

2. What should I do if the data I locate correspond to different years?

It is always wise to contact the agencies responsible for preparing budget or statistical information and request data for the same year from each source. However, you may still end up with data from different years. For example, you may be able to locate information on average daily population for the most recent calendar year, but have budget data that correspond to the most recent fiscal year. Provided that year-to-year differences are minimal for each data source, this should have relatively little effect on your cost estimates. To verify that there is minimal variation between years, try to examine several years of data for each data source. If year-to-year differences are slight, it is reasonable to use data from different years in your calculations; just be sure to indicate the year for each data source when reporting your estimates.

3. Am I likely to obtain different cost estimates if I use the number of detention beds rather than the average daily population to calculate the average cost per youth per day?

If a detention facility's average daily population is higher or lower than its rated capacity (number of beds), the cost estimates obtained using the number of beds will be different from the cost estimates derived using average daily population. The following summarizes these differences.

- Per diem estimates based on average daily population will be *lower* than the estimates obtained using the number of beds when the average daily population *exceeds* the number of beds.

- Per diem estimates based on average daily population will be *higher* than the estimates obtained using the number of beds when the average daily population is *lower* than the facility’s rated capacity.

It is wise to calculate the average annual detention cost per youth (shown on page 16) both ways—with number of beds in the denominator of the formula and with average daily population in the denominator—especially if there is a substantial difference between the average daily population and a facility’s rated capacity (number of beds). One reason is that detention facilities may prefer to use number of beds in their per diem calculations, so it is useful to compare “apples to apples” when matching your estimates with theirs.

Another reason is that calculating costs both ways may help further your reform efforts: when the average daily population is consistently under the rated capacity, the difference between the two per diem rates will underscore the “wasted expense” of funding an underutilized facility. When the average daily population is consistently higher than the rated capacity, the difference in per diem rates can help demonstrate that overuse of detention is resulting in a reduced level of support for detained youth.

4. The detention facility in my jurisdiction charges a fee to house youth from other jurisdictions. Can I simply use that fee as a proxy for the daily cost to detain a youth?

Probably not. To be certain, however, you should discuss the issue with the detention administrator in your jurisdiction. NJJN staff contacted detention staff in several jurisdictions that charge a fee to house detained youth from out of area. We discovered that these fees can actually be higher or lower than the daily cost the jurisdiction with the detention facility pays to house its own detained youth.

For example, a facility may charge a reduced rate (e.g., one that does not include fixed costs) for youth from other jurisdictions. Alternatively, the fee charged to house youth from outside the jurisdiction may be higher than the in-jurisdiction rate, because youth from outside the jurisdiction are in the facility to participate in expensive treatment programs. In addition, the standard fee charged to youth from outside a jurisdiction can fluctuate, depending on whether additional costs are added to the fee to cover expenses for such things as transportation, hospital care, prescription medications, or other medical or mental health care.

5. If policy changes I'm working on will reduce the number of youth detained in my jurisdiction, can I work through the toolkit and determine how much money the corrections agency will save?

This toolkit will help you calculate the average costs to detain a youth in your jurisdiction, which can help in calculating the potential savings associated with a reduction in the number of detained youth. Keep in mind, however, that corrections departments must maintain a budgetary cushion to accommodate fluctuations in the number of detained youth, so the decline in the use of detention would have to be substantial and persistent before it is likely to result in a significant reduction in detention expenditures. In addition, detention budgets are not defined solely by the number of youth who are detained; the budgets also provide for fixed costs such as building maintenance, utilities, and rental fees, which do not generally diminish even if fewer youth are detained. Hence, in order to estimate how a drop in the number of detained youth might translate into a reduction in detention costs, you will undoubtedly have to contact the corrections agency or agencies that operate youth detention facilities in your area to discuss how they factor in per diem rates when determining their budgets.

6. What other costs should I consider when thinking about the costs of youth detention?

The toolkit helps reformers calculate the costs to government agencies (and, thereby, to taxpayers) of housing a youth in a detention facility. But there are other “indirect” or “external” costs associated with youth detention. For example, research shows that youth who have been confined in detention are vulnerable to re-arrest, drug and alcohol abuse, school failure, developmental delays, and employment instability.⁵ These negative outcomes have both personal and economic consequences for the youth and for society. When reformers address the cost of detention, they need to consider the “indirect” costs of confinement along with the actual costs of confining a youth in a juvenile detention facility.

⁵ See Barry Holman and Jason Zeidenberg, *The Dangers of Youth Detention: The Impact of Incarcerating Youth in Detention and Other Secure Facilities* (Washington, D.C.: Justice Policy Institute) November 2006, available online at <http://bit.ly/18rA5CH>, and Richard A. Mendel, *Two Decades of JDAI, A Progress Report: From Demonstration Project to National Standard* (Baltimore, MD: The Annie Casey Foundation, 2009): 4, available online at <http://bit.ly/10trKcX>.

Conclusion

Growing budget shortfalls have intensified policymakers' interest in crafting cost-effective policies for youth in trouble with the law. Determining the true costs of juvenile justice processing is a critical part of these efforts. This toolkit provides a straightforward way to calculate the average costs of detaining a youth. Future toolkits in this series will focus on estimating the cost of processing youth at subsequent stages in the juvenile justice system, such as court processing and incarceration. Combined, these toolkits will help readers calculate the overall expense of sending a youth through the juvenile justice system.

Questions? Need Technical Assistance?

To get answers to questions about this toolkit—or if your organization is a member of the National Juvenile Justice Network (NJJN) and you need technical assistance with finding, analyzing or presenting budget data—please contact NJJN's [Fiscal Policy Center](#). The Fiscal Policy Center helps youth justice reformers use fiscal tools to promote the effective and appropriate treatment of youth in trouble with the law. Through trainings, technical assistance, and toolkits, the Fiscal Policy Center ensures that states and local jurisdictions receive the highest return for their public safety investments.

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