IN A GALAXY FAR, FAR AWAY THERE WAS A PERFECT YOUTH COURT

YOUTH COURT IMPROVEMENT:

PROGRESS AND POSSIBILITIES

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WHAT IS AOC?

Mississippi's Administrative Office of Courts handles all nonjudicial business of state courts. The youth court division manages the court improvement project, youth court support funds appropriated by the legislature, and policies and procedures for youth courts.

THE POWER OF COLLABORATION

FOSTER CARE AND ADOPTION TASK FORCE

In 2023 the Foster Care and Adoption Task Force worked together to propose legislation focused on youth court reform. As a result of its efforts, several changes were made to Mississippi Youth Court law during the 2024 legislative session including adding the right to appointment of counsel for indigent parents in TPR proceedings, redefining reasonable efforts and neglect, and considering the preference of a child 14 and older in a TPR proceeding.

- (l) “Neglected child” means a child:

- (i) Whose parent, guardian or custodian or any person responsible for his care or support, neglects or refuses, when able so to do, to provide for him proper and necessary care or support, or education as required by law, or medical, surgical, or other care necessary for his well-being; however, a parent who withholds medical treatment from any child who in good faith is under treatment by spiritual means alone through prayer in accordance with the tenets and practices of a recognized church or religious denomination by a duly accredited practitioner thereof shall not, for that reason alone, be considered to be neglectful under any provision of this chapter; or
- (ii) Who is otherwise without proper care, custody, supervision or support; or
- (iii) Who, for any reason, lacks the special care made necessary for him by reason of his mental condition, whether the mental condition is having mental illness or having an intellectual disability; or
- (iv) Who is not provided by the child’s parent, guardian or custodian, with food, clothing, or shelter necessary to sustain the life or health of the child, excluding such failure caused primarily by financial inability unless relief services have been offered and refused and the child is in imminent risk of harm.

CORE FOUR

- OSPD
- COUNCIL OF YOUTH COURT JUDGES
- CPS
- DYS
- Facilitated by AOC

Work Groups, include other partners—Attorney General's Office, mental health, education, Medicaid….

Access to Justice
Appeals
GALs
MYCIDS
Services
Structure and Processes (currently working on intake)

FOUR SYSTEMS ASSESSMENTS

MYCIDS Audit
Juvenile Justice Assessment
Child Welfare Assessment
Crossover Youth

MYCIDS AUDIT

The legislature mandated that AOC conduct a MYCIDS audit. AOC engaged Core Technologies and The Virtus Solution to:

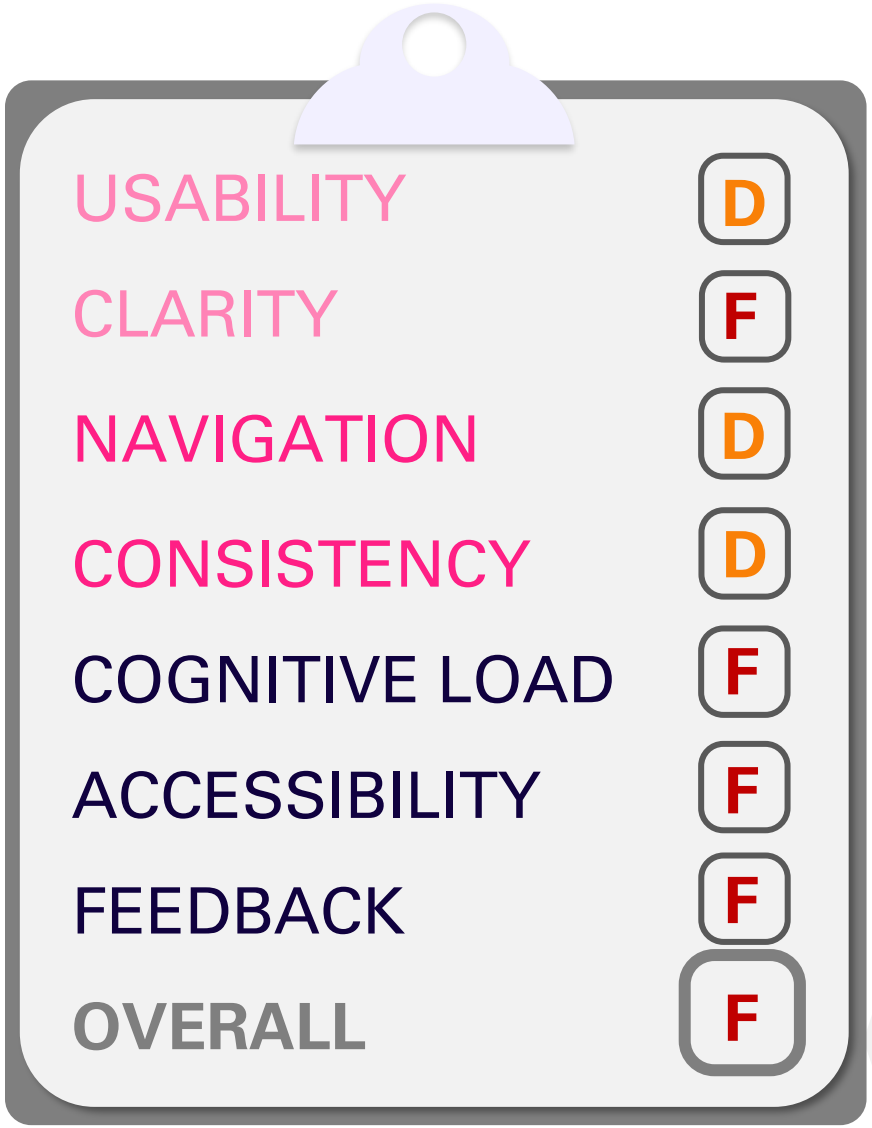
analyze and audit the MYCIDS platform by performing an end-to-end application assessment of youth court technology across several domains including functionality & solution completeness; user experience & accessibility; architecture & scalability; system performance; data quality; security & vulnerability; maintenance and development practices; operational efficiency; and costs of ownership.

KEY FINDING NUMBER 3

Key Finding #3

MYCIDS access is not consistent across Youth Court user groups, particularly defense, effectively hindering defense's ability to perform duties in multiple counties.

MYCIDS UI/UX Report Card



MYCIDS is not intuitive, resulting in inefficient use and high dependence on outside help or workaround strategies.

The interface offers little visual clarity, making core functions hard to locate or distinguish, especially under pressure.

Navigation is unintuitive, forcing users to rely on memory and trial-and-error to locate key features or complete tasks. The lack of clear structure and orientation increases training needs and contributes to confusion.

Inconsistent interaction patterns and lack of standard usage enforcement across jurisdictions undermine the experience

The system overwhelms users with dense, flat data structures and provides no assistive design patterns to reduce effort.

MYCIDS was not designed with accessibility in mind, excluding users with visual or cognitive limitations and reducing access flexibility.

The system fails to communicate effectively with users, contributing to low confidence, high support needs, and workflow mistakes.

Despite many pockets of functional utility, MYCIDS fails across nearly all modern design principles for usability. It actively **hinders user performance**, **increases errors**, and **requires excessive training** and workaround behaviors. A modernized, user-centered redesign is critical to supporting consistent, confident use statewide.

JUVENILE JUSTICE ASSESSMENT

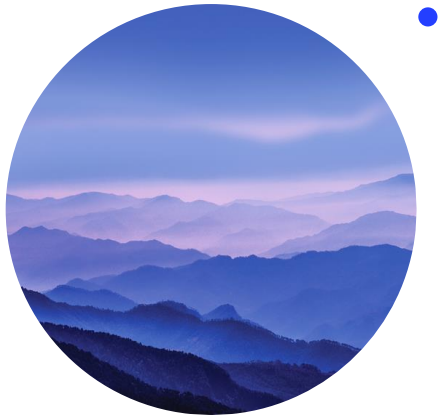
- Council for State Governments Justice Center

JUVENILE JUSTICE ASSESSMENT

A comprehensive initiative to improve youth courts and juvenile justice policy, practice, and funding statewide and to align the youth court system with research and best practices thereby improving community safety, reducing justice by geography, maximizing state and local resources, and resulting in better outcomes for youth and families.

KEY FINDING NUMBER ONE

The variation in the types of courts that handle youth justice cases and their level of specialization leads to differences in how these cases are handled and in the adoption of research-based policies and practices.



Jurisdiction: delinquency heard in county or chancery with no clear rationale other than county size/funding.

Judicial Officers: full time judges in county court and primarily part-time referees in chancery court youth courts with substantial differences in qualifications, training, and resources.

Structure/Process: intake facilitated by court staff or DYS through formal assessment processes or by county workers largely at judicial direction/discretion. Judicial officers report that the basic structure of court operations and delinquency proceedings vary widely across the state.

KEY FINDING NUMBER TWO

Most youth referred to the juvenile justice system have committed status and minor misdemeanor offenses, and there is no consistent approach/criteria to intake and diversion decisions across the state.

KEY FINDING NUMBER 3

Mississippi lacks statewide policies, practices, and tools to guide research-based, cost-effective detention decisions, and the use of detention varies statewide.

KEY FINDING NUMBER 4

Courts lack the tools and policies needed to make research-based decisions that can best protect safety as well as the evidence-based services needed to reduce recidivism.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

Establish a more consistent, dedicated court structure, operations, policies and procedures, and training requirements for handling delinquency cases statewide.

Formalize a research-based cost-efficient intake model for delinquency referrals including use of risk and needs screening tools, diversion of youth who commit low-level/first time offenses, and pathways to services funded across youth/family service systems.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

3. Conduct risk assessments pre-disposition, establish best practice dispositional guidelines including for the use of out of home placement, and focus supervision/services on youth who are a public safety risk.

4. Develop public safety criteria to guide detention decisions; limit the use of detention as a sanction/disposition; and establish a statewide alternatives to detention strategy.

SUGGESTED IMPROVEMENTS

5. Partner across state agencies to maximize existing funding/services (e.g. Medicaid, Family First, etc.) for community-based services for higher risk youth, and establish a dedicated juvenile justice funding stream to implement and expand evidence-based programs and practices for this population.

CROSSOVER YOUTH

A multidisciplinary team from Mississippi consisting of representatives from the Administrative Office of the Courts, Youth Court Judge's Council, Department of Human Services, Department of Child Protection Services, Attorney General's Office, the Office of the State Public Defender, and judges representing two local communities participated in a system assessment in Washington, D.C. on June 5, 2025. The assessment was facilitated by Georgetown University's Center for Youth Justice (CYJ) at the McCourt School of Public Policy and utilized the OJJDP Best Practices Rubric for Integrated Systems (herein "the Rubric") to gather information related to interagency collaboration at the infrastructure and frontline levels across Mississippi to support dual system youth.

What's often referred to as the foster care-to-prison pipeline shows children growing up in foster care are more likely to enter juvenile detention or adult incarceration. According to research from Chapin Hall at the University of Chicago, over 50% of foster children will face arrest, conviction or detention by the juvenile legal system by the age of 17. And if a child has experienced five or more placements in foster homes, their risk of being involved with the criminal legal system increases to 90%.

Protocol: *Note: Some of the following recommendations may be predicated on the ability to expand or reform Mississippi's existing information sharing legislation.

Adopt a statewide crossover target population definition for which a protocol can be developed.

Develop a process by which CPS and DYS are able to make timely inquiry about a youth's status with CPS or DYS, including the identification of the youth's social worker or probation worker, to enable swift identification and collaboration at the earliest point of crossover.

Determine if a common multidisciplinary team (MDT) meeting structure can be established and utilized across the state, particularly to prepare for hearings, conduct case planning and service referral, and facilitate transition and case closure processes. If the state is amenable to such a structure, establish guidelines for its local development and use.

Establish a standard set of expectations (i.e., collaborative case management process) for how and when DYS and CPS should communicate, meet, attend hearings, and share information to inform case plans, service referrals, and related supports for dually involved youth.

Develop a standard for regular supervisory meetings between local CPS and DYS units to review crossover cases, foster interagency relationships, and resolve challenges that may arise between frontline workers. The aforementioned practices in the protocol domain should be operationalized in a state-level case management process that is implemented to include robust training and local level support.

Additional Projects

Upstream Shifts will synthesize reports and recommendations from four independent youth court systems assessments obtained by AOC into one actionable, multi-year strategic plan for statewide youth court improvements that prioritizes and sequences potential implementation activities.

Family Justice Group and AOC will have a two-year contract for FJG to provide support in furtherance of the successful implementation of the MS CIP five-year strategic plan.

Work with FJG will include opportunities to maximize federal title IV-E funding to support high quality legal representation and advance hearing quality across the state.

METEOR

- House Bill 38

- **SECTION 33.** Of the funds appropriated under the provisions of this act, Two Million Five Hundred Thousand Dollars ($2,500,000.00) shall be provided for the Youth Court Support Fund as created in Section 43-21-801, Mississippi Code of 1972, and administered by the Administrative Office of Courts.
- (a) As a condition of expending the funds provided in this section, the Administrative Office of Courts shall establish standardized intake procedures for Youth Courts and provide annual training to intake officers on these standardized procedures.
- (b) As a condition of a court receiving the funds provided in this section, the intake officer of the receiving court shall attend the Administrative Office of Courts' annual training on standardized intake procedures and the court shall provide the information necessary to complete the annual report on Youth Courts provided in Section 34.

HB 38

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- **SECTION 34.** It is the intention of the Legislature that the Administrative Office of Courts shall create an annual report on Youth Courts that includes but is not limited to the following for each Youth Court: (a) expenditures made by each Youth Court organized by major object; (b) the number of employees by job classification; (c) the number of active cases assigned; (d) the number of cases pending for more than a year; (e) the number of cases disposed of; (f) the number of youth adjudicated delinquent; (g) the number of children adjudicated neglected or abused; and (h) the number of days court was held. This report shall be submitted no later than 90 days after the conclusion of the fiscal year to the Governor, Lieutenant Governor, the Speaker of the House of Representatives, the Chairmen of the Senate and House Appropriations and Judiciary A Committees, and the Legislative Budget Office.

HB 38

- **SECTION 37.** Of the funds appropriated in Section 8, Two Million Dollars ($2,000,000.00) or so much thereof as may be necessary is provided for the employment of intake officers for Youth Courts pursuant to Section 43-21-351(2), Mississippi Code of 1972.

FIRST INTAKE POLICY

- As a condition on spending the Youth Court Support Fund appropriation, the Administrative Office of Courts (AOC) is now required by statute to establish standardized intake procedures for Youth Courts and provide annual training to intake officers on these standardized procedures. Accordingly, AOC has established the following policy for SFY 2025-2026, tailored to the limitations of MYCIDS and to court staffing in place at this time. AOC anticipates changes to this policy with a MYCIDS upgrade or successor system and as current local court personnel change, so that intake will become more uniform over time. Initially AOC intake officers will prioritize jurisdictions without an intake officer or that have a part-time intake officer, and work collaboratively with intake officers in courts with intake officers to ensure data is accurately, uniformly, and timely entered. Where there is no intake unit, intake officers whether AOC intake officers or local youth court intake officers will perform the functions of the intake unit.

QUESTIONS?

THANK YOU

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