



COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY | JUSTICE LAB

## Implementation of Phase 2 of Vermont's "Raise the Age" Law

Lael Chester

VT Senate Committee on Judiciary  
March 19, 2025

**Emerging  
Adult  
Justice  
Project**

[eajustice.org](http://eajustice.org)

# The Emerging Adult Justice Project

## Who we are:

Research project within the Columbia Justice Lab dedicated to informing and driving developmentally appropriate and equitable justice responses that support and appreciate young people on their paths to adulthood.

## What we do:

- Publish and promote high-impact research reports defining the challenges facing emerging adults and innovative approaches to address those challenges
- Provide research and guidance to localities enacting change in their justice systems
- Partner with specific sites to assess and implement reforms

**Emerging  
Adult  
Justice  
Project**

# ACT 201: “Raise the Age” (RtA)

- Enacted in 2018
- Gradually raises the upper age jurisdiction of Family Court from the 18<sup>th</sup> to 20<sup>th</sup> birthday
- 18-year-olds included in July 2020 (Phase 1)
- 19-year-olds delayed until April 2025 (Phase 2)
- Purpose: **PUBLIC SAFETY**



RESEARCH

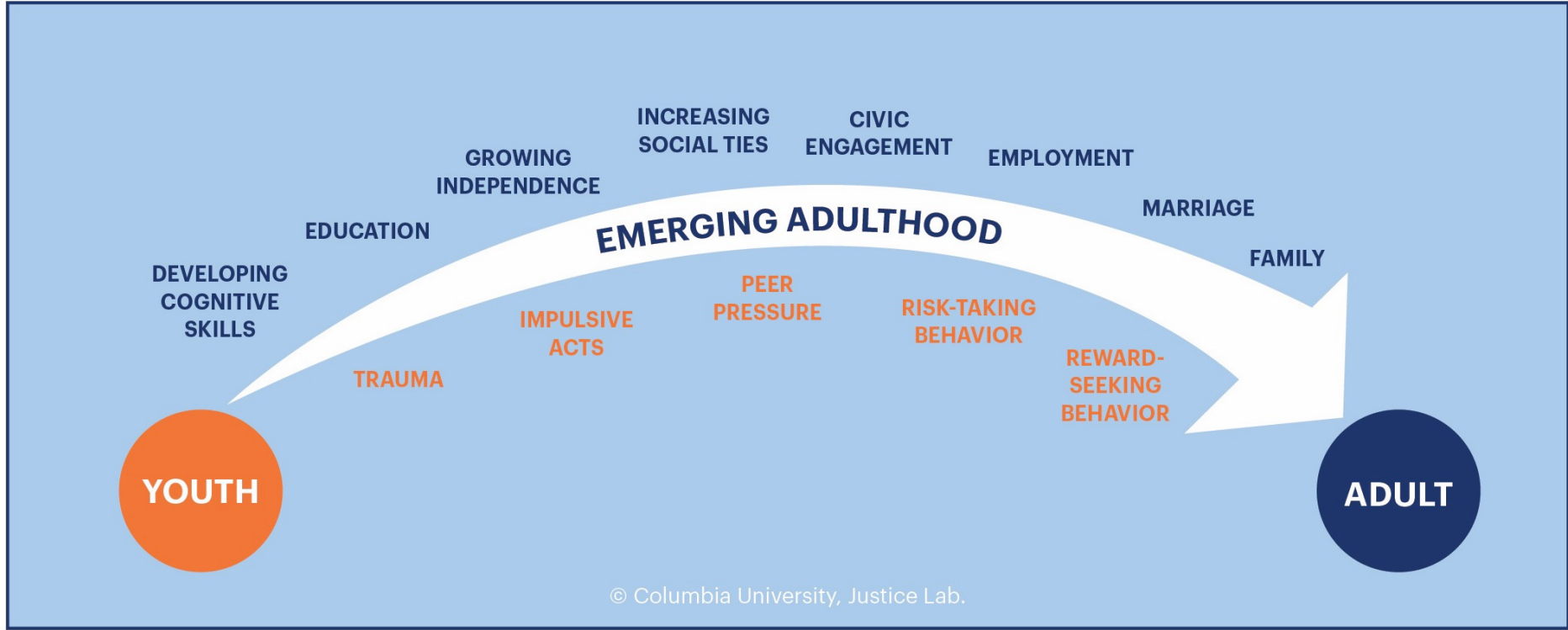
*MIND THE GAP*

PRACTICE  
& POLICIES

**Emerging  
Adult  
Justice  
Project**

[eajustice.org](http://eajustice.org)

# Developmental factors and milestones in transition to adulthood



© Columbia University, Justice Lab.

# Emerging Adult Justice (EAJ)

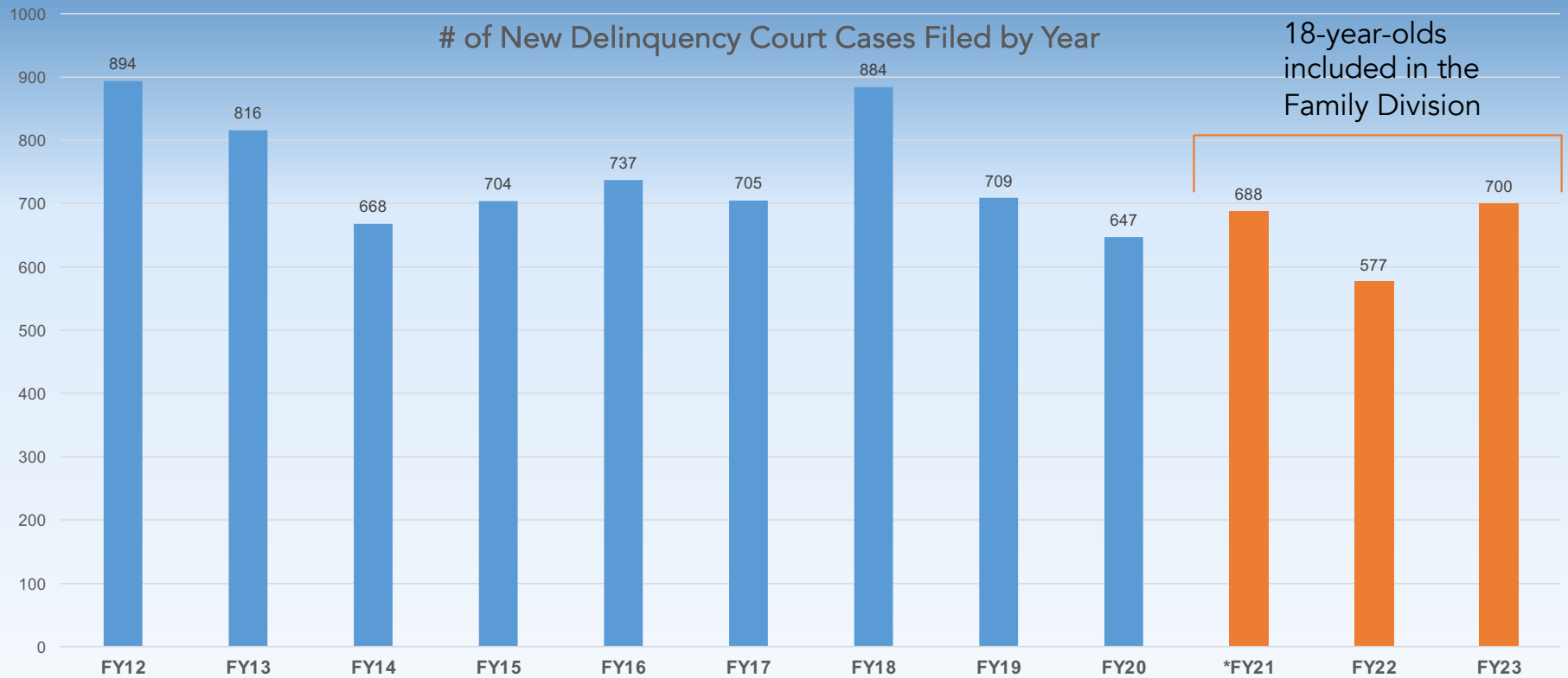
- Creating fair, effective and **developmentally appropriate** services, programs and opportunities for EAs
- Strengths-based, growth-focused approaches

**Positive EA outcomes = PUBLIC SAFETY**

# RtA Implementation PLAN

- > 1 year planning process led by DCF w/ input from all key stakeholders (and support from the Justice Lab)
- Plan submitted to the Legislature on Nov. 1, 2019
- Concrete recommendations, including investment in diversion to manage expected increase in caseloads
- *What's happened since?*

# Decline in # of filings for delinquency cases in the Family Division for all youth



Data for FY12-FY22 comes from DCF FSD Vermont's 2024 Annual Progress and Services Report found at <https://outside.vermont.gov/dept/DCF/Shared%20Documents/FSD/Reviews/APSR2024.pdf>.

Data for FY23 comes from the VT Office of the Attorney General December 2023 Report to the Legislature On Court Diversion and Pretrial Services found at <https://legislature.vermont.gov/assets/Legislative-Reports/Pretrial-Services-Court-Diversion-Rpt-to-Gen-Assembly-12.1.23.pdf>.



# 6-year trend of increasing # of youths on probation for delinquency cases reverses and declines *after* Phase 1 of Raise the Age is implemented

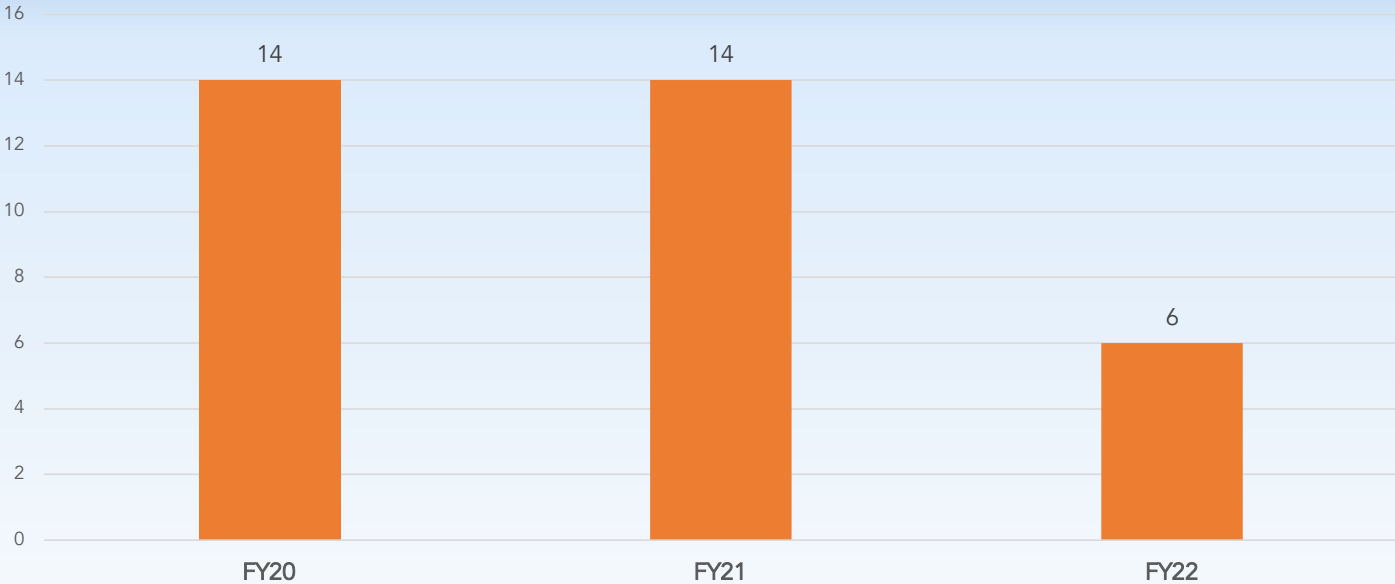
# of Youth on Probation (as counted on one day each year)



From DCF FSD Vermont's Annual Progress and Services Report 2024

# Decline in # of youths ordered to DCF custody due to a delinquency case PRE-disposition

# of Delinquency Cases Added That Involve an Order to DCF Custody Pre-Disposition



From DCF FSD 2024 Annual Progress and Services Report

# Decline in # of youths ordered to DCF custody due to a delinquency case POST-disposition

DCF Custody as a Result of Delinquency



From DCF FSD Vermont's Annual Progress and Services Report 2024

# VT plagued with data reporting problems

1. VT is not reporting relevant and useful caseload data.
2. VT has not designated a particular agency/entity with collecting data from all the different stakeholders and presenting the aggregate data in a user-friendly manner.
3. VT has not designated an agency or group to monitor implementation of RtA law.

*Yet the data that has been shared indicates a smooth implementation of Phase 1 of RtA in 2020 (with 18-year-olds) and a solid foundation for implementation of Phase 2 now.*

QUESTIONS?

Thank you!