



Part of the project “One Girl Many Systems” supported by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF)  
Prepared by WA Center for Court Research, Department of Children, Youth, and Families  
& WA Justice for Girls Coalition

### What is a status offense?

Status offenses are behaviors that are prohibited under law only because of an individual’s status as a minor. They are problematic, but noncriminal in nature.

In Washington State, status offenders are placed in a discrete statutory category recognizing the unique aspects of status offenses as compared to other juvenile offenses. In 1995, Washington passed the Becca Laws (E2SSB 5439, Chapter 312, Laws of 1995), designed to empower parents, schools and courts to intervene with youth engaging in high-risk behaviors.

Youth can be petitioned to the court as non-offenders through three different petitions (collectively known as Becca petition): Truancy, At-Risk Youth (ARY), and Child in Need of Services (CHINS).

**Truancy:** Truancy refers to habitual, unexcused absences from school, which exceeds the number allowed under state law. In Washington State, youth with seven unexcused absences in a month, or ten in an academic year, must be petitioned to court.

**At-Risk Youth:** Youth who are not under the control of a responsible adult, can be petitioned to court and be ordered to stop their at-risk behaviors (running away, drug abuse, etc.).

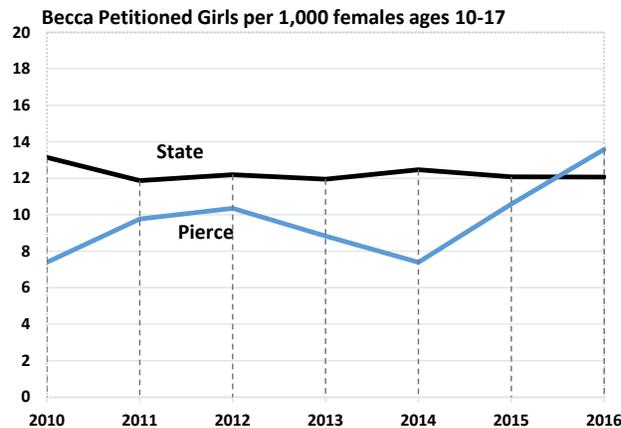
**Children-in-need of services:** These petitions allow parents or youth to request assistance from the court in situations where families are having intense conflict and an out of home placement or court authority is needed.



### Overall, the status offense referral rates for girls in Pierce increased 84% between 2010 and 2016

In 2016, 581 girls were petitioned to family and juvenile courts in Pierce County for status offenses. In 2016, girls accounted for almost 50% of all status offense cases petitioned to the courts, as compared to 31% of all delinquency cases.

In 2010, the status offense referral rate in Pierce was 7.4 girls per 1,000 girls ages 10-17 in the population, compared with 13.15 for the State. Between 2010 and 2016, the net change in the status offense referrals rates in Pierce was 84% (from 7.40 to 13.59). For boys, this increase was 65.5% (from 8.30 in 2010 to 13.74 in 2016).



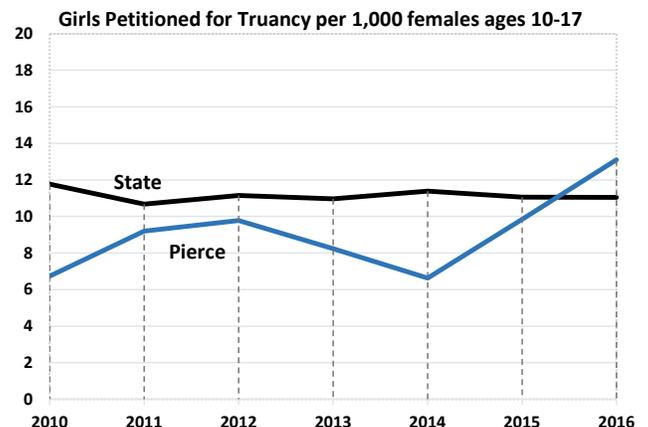
**Note:** When a youth is referred to juvenile court for a status offense, the court may decide to divert the youth away from formal system processing, or the court may decide to process the juvenile formally by filing a petition. Only petitioned cases are included in the analyses.

Each graph above depicts status referral rates based on only Becca petition (truancy, at-risk youth, and children-in-need of services) for girls ages 10-17 in Pierce County as well as statewide for each year between 2010 and 2016. Youth who were referred to juvenile court through both offender matters and Becca Petitions are not included in this analysis.

### Truancy trends parallel the status offenses trends

The majority of status offender girls are petitioned to the court for truancy (86%-90%). In 2010, the truancy referral rate in Pierce was 6.73 girls per 1,000 girls, compared with 11.77 for the State. Although the number of girls petitioned for truancy in Pierce has been on the decline from 2012 to 2014, their numbers are growing since then. In 2016, 560 girls (or 13.10 girls per 1,000) were petitioned to family and juvenile courts in Pierce County for truancy, compared with 11.05 girls per 1,000 for the State. This is a 95% increase since 2014 (from 6.63 to 13.10). For boys in Pierce, the truancy referral rates increased 71% (from 7.8 in 2010 to 13.34 in 2016).

**Note:** Some courts may be more aggressive than others in the prosecution of truant youth due to a number of barriers to providing effective truancy prevention programs, including funding, lack of partnership with multiple school districts in their jurisdiction.



### What are common reasons girls become court-involved?

Court data show that girls are more likely to enter the juvenile justice system if they:

- Are living in poverty;
- Have a dysfunctional family;
- Have been exposed to violence in the community;
- Have a history of running away;
- Have experienced sexual, physical abuse and/or child neglect;
- Feel disconnected from school or have experienced poor academic performance;
- Have mental health issues;
- Have been exposed to domestic violence (e.g., verbal intimidation, yelling, heated arguments, and threats of physical abuse).

### Race/ethnicity of court-involved girls

Although the majority of probation-involved girls in are White, African-American and Native-American girls are over-represented among girls on probation, compared with the general female youth population.

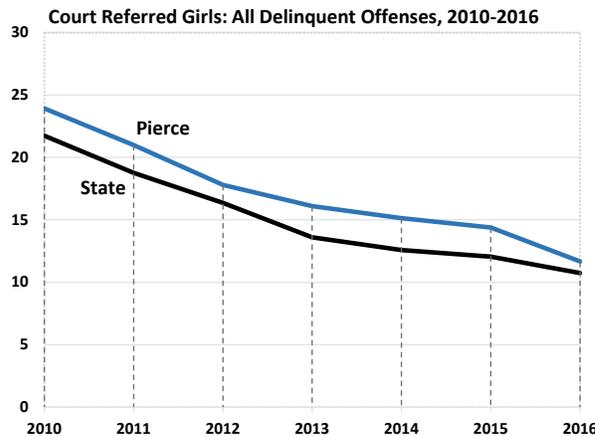
	Court-involved girls	Girls in WA population
African American	14.5%	4.1%
American Indian/Alaska Native	6.4%	1.9%
Asian	1.4%	8.6%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	2.2%	0.8%
Hispanic	12.6%	12.4%
White alone, not Hispanic	62.5%	69.5%



### Delinquency referral rates for girls in Pierce decreased between 2010 and 2016, but are higher than the state average

In 2010, 1,038 girls were referred to family and juvenile courts in Pierce County for delinquent behavior, which corresponds to the rate of 23.93 girls per every 1,000 girls ages 10-17 in the population, compared with 21.92 for the State. Delinquency referral rates for girls declined from 23.93 to 11.67 per 1,000 girls between 2010 and 2016, or by 51%. Among the girls referred to the court in 2016, 44% were referred for misdemeanors against property, 34% for misdemeanor against a person, 22% for violations of public order and 15% for drug law violations. For boys in Pierce, the delinquency referral rates decreased 44% (from 46.02 in 2010 to 25.8 in 2016).

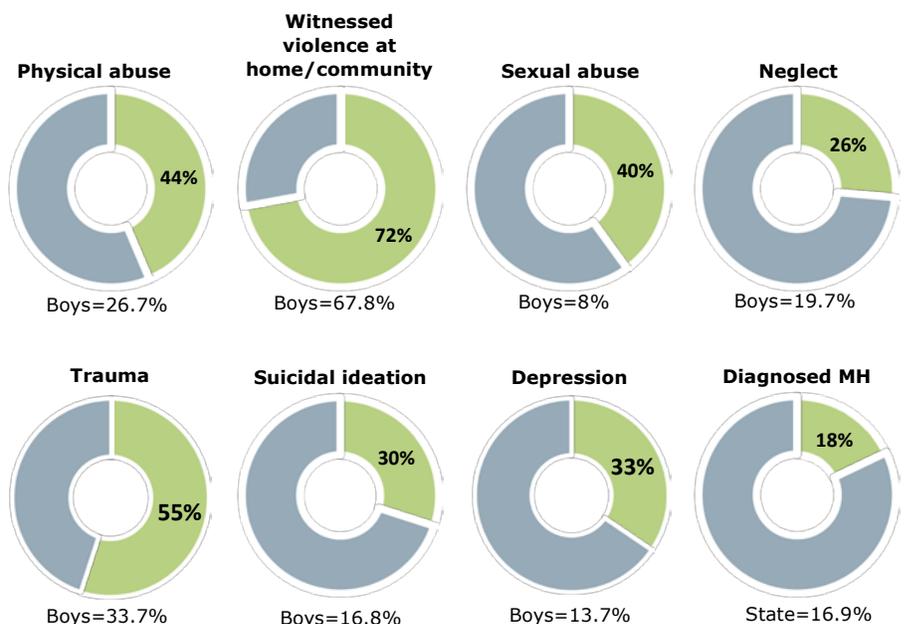
### Between 2010 and 2016, delinquency referral rates for girls dropped 51%, from 23.93 to 11.67



**Delinquency referral** represents a girl referred to court on an offender matter at least once any time between 2010 and 2016. This does not automatically indicate that a referral has been formally processed, nor does it imply the outcome of the case (deferred, diverted, dismissed, or found guilty). All of these cases are included.

### Characteristics of girls sentenced to probation in Pierce

While probation-involved boys and girls share many of the same challenges, some issues are particularly unique to girls. One of the realities girls involved with juvenile justice face is a higher exposure to violence either as victims or witnesses. Among 140 girls eligible for treatment programs in Pierce in 2014-2015, a high percent witnessed violence at home or in the community and are victims of violence across a number of categories, including physical abuse, sexual abuse, and child neglect.



### School safety and truancy

Results from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provide detailed statistics about school safety in 2015 using a nationally representative sample of youth in grades 9-12:

- 7.8% students reported being in a physical fight on school property;
- 5.6% reported that they did not go to school on one or more days in the 30 days before the survey because they felt unsafe at school;
- 4.1% reported carrying a weapon (gun, knife or club) on school property on one or more days.
- 6.0% reported being threatened or injured with a weapon on school property;
- 20.2% reported being bullied on school property and 15.5% reported being bullied electronically.

Previous research found that children who perceive their schools to be unsafe and fear of being bullied or harassed are more likely to skip school.

Source:  
<https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/iscs15.pdf>

### Availability of Drugs

The availability of alcohol, marijuana, and other drugs at school or in the community is a major contributing factor to students' opportunities to use these substances.

Previous research have shown that girls using substances are at higher risk of truancy, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout.



### Approximately 20% of girls in 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade do not feel safe at school

In 2016, approximately 20% of girls in 10<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade in Pierce County did not feel safe at school. These estimate is 3-4% points higher than the estimate for the State. Our analysis of student survey responses to HYS revealed that 15% of girls in 10<sup>th</sup> grade and 14% of girls in 12<sup>th</sup> grade in Pierce missed school because they did not feel safe.

	Pierce County			Statewide		
	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Gang member	4%	3%	3%	3%	3%	3%
Carried a weapon to school	2%	4%	5%	3%	3%	4%
Gangs at school	11%	20%	18%	10%	17%	13%
Don't feel safe at school	17%	21%	18%	16%	17%	15%
Missed school because did not feel safe	11%	15%	14%	10%	12%	12%

The data in this table are based on a sample from Healthy Youth Survey conducted in fall 2016. The state sample includes 4,765 6<sup>th</sup> grade girls, 4,204 8<sup>th</sup> grade girls, 5,227 10<sup>th</sup> grade girls and 3,875 12<sup>th</sup> grade girls who completed the survey.

### Bullying and harassment is a public health issue

Bullying is considered a public health issue. In 2016, almost a third of middle school girls and quarter of high school girls were bullied at school. The largest number of bullying incidents involved teasing, name-calling, making critical remarks, or threatening. Approximately 1 in 6 middle school girls and 1 in 10 high school girls report being harassed due to their race or sexual orientation.

	Pierce County			Statewide		
	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Bullied at school	32%	26%	17%	31%	24%	19%
Harassed due to sexual orientation	14%	11%	8%	12%	9%	7%
Harassed due to race	16%	12%	8%	14%	11%	8%

### Availability of drugs in the community

In 2016, availability of marijuana exceeded availability of cigarettes among middle and high school students. About 20-30% of girls in grades 10 through 12 in Pierce County reported that alcohol and marijuana were easily available in the community. Girls in middle school are less likely than girls in high school to report that alcohol, cigarettes, and marijuana are easily available in community. Approximately a third of girls in grades 8 through 12 believe that the laws and norms in their community are favorable to drug use.

	Pierce County			Statewide		
	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Availability of drugs	19%	22%	29%	18%	22%	29%
Alcohol	11%	19%	28%	11%	19%	28%
Cigarettes	9%	16%	34%	9%	15%	33%
Marijuana	10%	30%	42%	11%	27%	40%
Laws and norms favorable to drug use	27%	32%	32%	25%	27%	27%



### Drug Use

Previous research has shown that girls using substances are at higher risk of truancy, delinquency, teen pregnancy, and school dropout.

Changes in a student's behavior, as a result of drug use, may manifest in the following:

- Change in school work, grades, and performance;
- Skipping school, sports events, practices, etc.;
- Change in mood, disposition, and attitude;
- Dropping out of previous teams, events, or groups;
- Adopting new friends/friendship groups, while abandoning old groups;
- Change in motivation, or may even have outrageous outbursts of anger and/or frustration;
- Feeling depressed, anxious, or out of sorts.

Source: <https://www.drugabuse.gov/>

### School-related problems

Previous research found that school related problems such as disliking school, receiving poor grades, not being able to keep up with schoolwork increases the likelihood of truancy, absenteeism, disciplinary problems, and dropping out of school.

Our data show that girls who come into contact with the juvenile probation, compared to boys, are more likely to have low grades, less likely to be close to a teacher, and less likely to stay in school or graduate.

Source: [2013 Truancy Research Brief](#)



### Past-month marijuana use was reported by 27% of girls in 12th grade in 2016

Life-time, past-month, and heavy use of marijuana is the lowest among 8th graders and it is the highest among 12th graders in 2016. Among 10th graders, 19% reported past-month use. Among 12th graders, 27% reported past-month use, which corresponds to about 1 in 4 high school seniors. Heavy use of marijuana (defined as consuming marijuana on 10 or more days in the past month) was reported by 9% of 12th graders, which corresponds to 1 in 10 high school seniors.

	Pierce County			Statewide		
	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Used marijuana at least once	9%	32%	46%	10%	29%	45%
Used marijuana during past 30 days	6%	19%	27%	7%	17%	25%
Heavy use of marijuana	1%	6%	9%	2%	5%	8%

### More than a third of girls are disengaged from school

Among 8th graders, 37% reported low commitment to school, which corresponds to about 1 in 3 middle schoolers. Among 12th graders, 44% reported low commitment to school and 49% reported academic failure, which roughly corresponds to about 1 in 2 high school seniors.

	Pierce County			Statewide		
	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>	8 <sup>th</sup>	10 <sup>th</sup>	12 <sup>th</sup>
Low commitment to school	37%	38%	44%	35%	39%	40%
Academic failure	41%	45%	49%	42%	44%	47%
Cut school in past month	22%	22%	33%	18%	21%	32%

### Only 52% of court-involved girls believe in their ability to succeed in life.

Probation involved girls, compared to boys, have higher rates of school disengagement, and are at a higher risk for not graduating from school despite the fact that a majority of them believe that education has value.

