



Maryland Dataset Guide

Data. We are awash in it. Sometimes it feels like we are drowning in it.

The Maryland Dataset Guide is intended to keep you afloat. It is a practical introduction to common sources of data about young people and crime in our state — sources that are frequently cited, often confusing, and sometimes intentionally misleading.

No dataset is perfect. Our goal is to help you discern when the data you encounter has been used responsibly. And to help empower you to use that data too.

Four main datasets dominate discussion of youth justice in Maryland: Two of them — the National Incident Based Reporting System (NIBRS) and the Uniform Crime Report (UCR) — are national datasets that include information about our state. A third major dataset, from the state's Department of Juvenile Services (DJS), presents only Maryland data, with breakdowns from each of its counties. (The newly created [Commission on Juvenile Justice Reform and Emerging and Best Practices](#), launched in 2024, has also been tasked with reviewing and reporting on "All Juvenile Services, Facilities, and Programs in the State.") The fourth category comprises local datasets published by county- or municipal-level officials, usually police and prosecutors.

Each of these datasets is described below, along with a discussion of their strengths and weaknesses as tools for meaningful discussion of youth safety.

But first, a short overview of the limitations that can apply to any youth justice data:

Data Limitations

- Comparing youth justice data from different datasets is nearly impossible. Unlike in the adult system, offenses within youth systems are not always clearly delineated. This makes comparing data about similarly named offenses from different sources akin to comparing apples to oranges.
- Asynchronous timeframes add uncertainty to data comparisons. Two sources may appear to cover the same year, for example, but if one source uses a calendar year (Jan-Dec) and the other uses a fiscal year (July-June), know that they are different.

- WATCH OUT FOR COVID! Most reported crimes nosedived during the pandemic. Lockdowns, social distancing, and other responses to the disease created unusual deviations in activity that are reflected in the crime data. Any comparisons using 2020, 2021, or early 2022 as baseline will show distorted outcomes. To be credible, claims about trends or changes over time must have a baseline from 2019 or earlier.

Uniform Crime Reports (UCR)

The Uniform Crime Report (UCR) is a legacy dataset — which means it's been around a long time (since the 1930s). Maryland used UCR data from 1975 through 2020, which is about the time the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) decided the program needed an upgrade (see NIBRS, below).

Because it consistently collected crime data from across the nation over many decades, the UCR is useful for comparing old data with old data (for example, comparing homicides in 2000 with homicides in 2015).

Limits:

UCR suffers from several weaknesses. Among these...

- It tracks only 21 offenses.
- Just one offense from each incident is recorded. If, hypothetically, someone assaulted a person and then stole their car, only the assault would be counted, leaving car thefts under-reported.

Specific challenges for youth data:

- UCR's online dashboard cannot be used to find juvenile data.
- The dataset is no longer up to date.

Example: [BPD report double-digit crime reduction](#), WBAL News Radio, July 9, 2024

Access the [UCR Dashboard](#)

National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS)

The National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS) is the FBI's upgrade on the UCR and has become the national standard for crime data since January 2021. It records data on 49 offenses and, unlike its predecessor, includes information about separate offenses within the same incident as well as a wide array of details (like information about victims, known offenders, weapons, etc.).

NIBRS is the best data source for accessing up-to-date, state-wide and county-level data for incidents involving adults.

KEY BENEFITS OF NIBRS	NIBRS FAST FACTS
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Detailed, high-quality data that provide a more complete and accurate picture of crime• Additional context to understand victimization and offending• Standardized data to compare crime across jurisdictions• Can be used for tactical or strategic analysis at the local, state, and national levels	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Includes up to 10 offenses per incident• Creates profiles of victims and offenders• Provides detail on the context of crime• Offers insight into incidents involving multiple offenses• Collects data on 52 crimes across 24 offense categories

Limits:

- Many jurisdictions are still transitioning to NIBRS. Montgomery County, for example, switched to NIBRS in 2022. That means NIBRS 2021 statewide Maryland data is incomplete.
- Moderate differences between UCR and NIBRS result in more reports for low-level offenses.
- NIBRS cannot compare year-over-year crimes (for example, August 2023 v. August 2024).

Specific challenges for youth data:

- Age data is not universally collected and shared by all agencies. Only about half of age data is available for car part theft charges, for example. Even less age-related data has been reported for other charges.

Example: [Crime data discrepancy: BPD's past and present reporting not matching up](#), Fox45 News, November 1, 2023

Access the [NIBRS Dashboard](#)

Data from the Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS)

The Maryland Department of Juvenile Services (DJS) is a state agency charged with managing, supervising, and treating young people in Maryland's juvenile legal system. It is involved in nearly every stage of the system, from intake through re-entry. Every year since 2011, it publishes a comprehensive Data Resource Guide (DRG) covering the previous fiscal year. The DRG focuses exclusively on youth 17 and younger and is presented both in aggregate and county-by-county.

Critics routinely accuse the agency of presenting its data in self-serving ways. However, no credible evidence has been presented to support this claim — which could just as readily be made of other data providers (see Local Datasets, below).

DJS data does have its limits, however.

Limits:

- DJS data is published only once per year, which makes tracking changes over the course of the year impossible.
- The annual Data Resource Guide is voluminous and overwhelming. More frequent release of data throughout the year, in a more searchable format, would be a significant improvement.
- There is no online dashboard for DJS data. Instead, it is published as an immense collection of online PDFs.

Specific challenges for youth data:

- None. DJS data is ideal for individuals under age 18.

Example: [11 News Investigates examines process DJS follows when it comes to monitoring juvenile offenders](#), WBAL TV 11, Oct 17, 2024.

Access the [DJS DataResource Guides](#)

Local Datasets (e.g., Baltimore City, Montgomery County, Prince George's County)

In some, usually larger, jurisdictions, local officials may publish data about their operations. These local datasets — typically produced by police and prosecutors — can provide a useful impression of conditions in a particular place at a particular moment. They are, however, far less reliable for tracking changes over time or comparing one jurisdiction to another.

Limits:

Most local jurisdictions lack resources for collecting and publishing their own youth justice data. Those that do can present only information from the portion of the system that they can see. Police, for example, may share data about youth arrests, but not information about kids diverted to alternative programs or services outside the legal system—as that decision is made by DJS staff.

Local data can also be affected by jurisdictional complexity. When, for example, a city police force operates within a county with its own police force (for example, Tacoma Park and Rockville, in Montgomery County), data from either force is likely to present only a portion of activity within the region. For these reasons, the [UCR Dashboard](#) is a better source of local data

because it compiles all crime reports to all law enforcement agencies serving a county or Baltimore City. However, as stated above, it does not break down reports of crime by age, and is not a reliable source of youth-specific data.

Example: Baltimore City State's Attorney Dashboard

-This dataset is very limited. Data starts in 2022, and appears to be limited to firearms crimes only, which makes it difficult to determine trends in youth related activities.

Example: [New data shows Baltimore juvenile crime rates soar over 200% in three years](#)

Fox45 News, July 26th 2024. [Note: this is a manipulative use of data that compares an anomalously low rate—recorded during the pandemic—to more recent numbers that are comparable to pre-pandemic rates.]

Access [Office of the States' Attorney for Baltimore City](#) Data