Estimate of the number of juvenile offenders who would be housed at OJC, given the reversal of "Raise the Age"

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Summary

With the reversal of "Raise the Age" legislation coming into effect on Friday, 19 April 2024, the Orleans Parish Sheriff's Office and other stakeholders have expressed an interest in estimating the impact of this legislative change to the jail population. We have prepared such an estimate using methods used by the Bureau of Justice Statistics.

We estimate that the average daily jail population would increase by 26 people with the addition of 17-year-old detainees, based on observations of juvenile arrests and adult jail population over the last 15 months. This represents an increase of 2.3% in the average daily jail population of 1,141 people.

This estimate is constrained by several factors that we were unable to account for in the calculations. More details about the limitations of the estimate are presented below.

Data sources and methods

The calculation uses figures drawn from two sources: 1) OPSO data tables, including tables based on IMFLDR and jail population snapshots; and 2) New Orleans Police Department's electronic police report tables (EPR), which contain cases, including custodial arrests, for which a report was filed.

The estimate is based on the average length of stay for people who were released from the jail between 1 January 2023 and 31 March 2024 (a total of 456 days) and the average daily jail population for the same time interval. To estimate the number of 17-year-olds who would be admitted to the jail, rather than to JJIC, we queried the EPR tables using the following criteria:

- Youth was 17 years old at the time of arrest; and
- The arrest disposition was "Hold for court" or "Referred to juvenile court or juvenile probation"; and
- The arrest took place between 1 January 2023 and 31 March 2024.

Excluded from tabulation and analysis are youths who were released by NOPD to their parents or guardians; cases in which the matter was handled within NOPD and the youth was released; and youths who were referred to the Department of Youth and Family Services, another law enforcement agency, or to adult criminal court.

The estimate was generated using a method "borrowed" from the Bureau of Justice Statistics for estimating average daily population when daily jail counts are unavailable. We can operationalize the estimate as:

$$\frac{(\sum jail\ admissions * Average\ length\ of\ jail\ stay)}{Number\ of\ days\ in\ the\ time\ interval\ of\ interest}$$

This calculation addresses the question: If the people admitted to the jail during a given time interval were to stay in jail for the average length of stay for the people released during the same time interval, what would the estimated jail population be?

Our queries to the EPR table yielded 246 arrests involving youths aged 17 years at the time of arrest who were held for juvenile court or referred to juvenile court or juvenile probation. The average length of stay for adults who were released between 1 January 2023 and 31 March 2024 was 48 days (N = 10,111 releases; standard dev. = 163.3). There are 456 days between 1 January 2023 and 31 March 2024. Thus:

$$\frac{(246\ youths\ aged\ 17\ at\ time\ of\ arrest * 48\ days\ average\ length\ of\ stay)}{456\ days}$$

This calculation yields 26 youths who would be detained in OJC daily, instead of JJIC. The average daily jail population between 1 January 2023 and 31 March 2024 was 1,141 people (standard dev. = 90.9). Thus:

    1,141 people, on average, detained in the jail.
    +   26 youths detained in OJC rather than JJIC.
    1,167 people, on average, detained in the jail each day.

Limitations

This estimate is not predictive; rather, it is a point-in-time estimate that only considers observations of jail population, lengths of stay, and arrests of 17-year-olds during a 15-month period from January 2023 through March 2024. The estimate does not account for the upward trend of average daily jail population that we have observed over the past 15 months nor the day-to-day fluctuations in jail population.

In addition, the estimate is constrained by our current access to JJIC data. A more robust estimate might have resulted if we had been able to consider the youths' most serious charge as determined by the juvenile judge at first appearance, since we have observed in the adult jail population a higher average length of stay for people with violent felonies as the most serious charge at jail admission.