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Same Bang, Less Buck: A Cost-benefit Analysis of South Carolina's Youth Courts

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Abstract

While youth courts experience tremendous growth nationwide, their utility is largely unproven, particularly in state-level contexts. This study conducted a cost-benefit analysis of South Carolina's youth courts. The study found that while youth courts and family courts produced comparable recidivism rates, youth courts were substantially less expensive for comparable adjudications. The relative efficiency of youth courts, however, was neither monolithic nor guaranteed. Individual youth courts displayed considerable variation and some youth courts were not as efficient as their traditional family court counterparts. Inefficient youth courts had low caseloads, typically resulting from inefficient or immature referral systems and a reliance on borrowed courthouse resources.

Youth courts have spearheaded a therapeutic jurisprudence movement which has recast America's justice system. Nationwide over the last decade, specialized courts and diversion programs have dramatically burgeoned with youth courts, drug courts, and domestic violence courts adding at least 800 (National Youth Court Center, 2005), 1,400 (Fox & Huddleston, 2003; National Criminal Justice Reference Service, 2005), and 200 tribunals (National Center for State Courts, 2005), respectively. The impetus for these innovative justice programs has resulted, at least in part, from an increased awareness of the justice system's inadequacies in handling certain problems. Juvenile courts have been broadly criticized for inter alia, where there is clustering high-criminality juveniles and thereby fostering criminal behaviors in impressionable juveniles through social learning and imitation processes (National Research Council and Institute of Medicine, 2001). There is also the labeling of juveniles as criminals that perniciously transforms self-perceived identities through a process of self-internalization (Lemert, 1974). Additionally, there is the disconnection of juveniles from family and social contexts, which both stunts individual development and reduces conventional order attachment (Chamberlain & Mihalic, 1998).

Emotionally intelligent justice systems (Sherman, 2003), like youth courts, attempt to provide a criminological sound therapeutic expertise to recalcitrant situations like delinquency treatment. Thus, guided by criminological theory, youth courts explicitly eschew clustering, labeling, and disconnecting, while still aggressively tackling offender problems on an individualized therapeutic basis. Youth courts are grounded in

parens patriae wherein the court acts in the best interests of juveniles. Best interests are determined according to multiple factors specific to offenders and their offenses and, within youth courts, pursued through various models of justice. In general, youth court programs involve proceedings wherein young people are sentenced by their peers in, typically, either a school or courthouse setting with the cooperation of state agencies such as departments of education and juvenile justice.

A key issue in the continued success of the youth court implementation is efficiency, and youth courts are relatively unproven entities. While youth court programs are touted as a viable alternative to traditional family court-based adjudication and disposition of juvenile delinquency cases, their utility is largely uncertain, and many state-level youth court programs have not been assessed. In particular, few or no studies have analyzed a large set of state youth courts and compared the relative benefits flowing there to the benefits derived from more traditional juvenile justice approaches.

This study performs a cost-benefit analysis of South Carolina youth courts, comparing annual per-child adjudication expenses in youth courts and family courts. Youth courts were assessed collectively and individually in comparison to their traditional family court counterparts.

Method

Sample

Youth courts in South Carolina. The youth court movement in South Carolina emerged from a forged partnership between the South Carolina State Department of Education's Character, Honor, Accountability, Nobility, Commitment, and Education Project (CHANCE) and the South Carolina State Bar Association's Law Related Education (LRE). Project CHANCE is a truancy abatement and delinquency prevention

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initiative. Project CHANCE originates from the conception that youthful offenders are less likely to commit more offenses when judged delinquent by their peers. This philosophy is derived from the extant literature praising the process known as peer-reinforced norming.

The Law -related Education Act of 1978 was endorsed with the intention of providing students with knowledge and skills pertaining to the guiding principles of legal process and the legal system. Drawing from this focal curriculum, LRE in South Carolina provides students with a variety of opportunities to learn about abstract legal concepts and issues including citizenship, our governmental history, and their function in a multi-faceted society.

Youth court programs throughout the state are funded at the local, state, and federal level. While Project CHANCE and LRE characterize the brief his-tory of South Carolina's youth court movement, the var-ious programs differ and do not necessarily emphasize a uniform strategic approach to delinquency and related social problems. The Mt. Pleasant youth court program is the oldest in the state and dates to 1995. This was fol-lowed by highly individualized others until the South Carolina's Department of Education funded Project CHANCE initiative more than doubled the state's opera-tive youth court programs to the current total of 21.

Design

The basic premise of cost-benefit analysis (CBA) is the weighing of monetary benefits and costs. A growing body of economic analysis has analyzed the efficiency (Welsh & Farrington, 2000) and comparative efficiency of crime prevention/treatment strategies (Crew, Fridell, & Pursell, 1995; Greenwood, Model, Rydell, & Chiesa, 1996; Roman & Harrell, 2001). There are two primary strands of economic analysis in what has been loosely referred to as cost-benefit analysis: 1) Cost and cost-effectiveness analysis studies, which assess eco-nomic costs alone; and 2) Cost-benefit analysis studies, which assess costs and benefits, and are featured in this study. Both forms of analyses use methodological tools to allow for rational quantitative comparisons between alternative uses of resources (Welsh & Farrington, 2000, p. 119; Knapp, 1997, p. 11). Prior application of cost-benefit analysis in juvenile justice contexts has suggested a net benefit to community-based interven-tions (Robertson, Grimes, & Rogers, 2001).

CBA typically results in a ratio, which is calculated by dividing the benefits by the costs. For example, a cost-benefit ratio of 1.50 would indicate that, for each dollar spent on a publicly funded program, the public would receive \$1.50 worth of services. For this approach to be successful, we must have both a common unit of measurement (such as money) and a common temporal period, to reduce inflationary factors. Creating a cost-benefit ratio facilitates determination of a net benefit, which is the sum of the value of present benefits minus the present value of costs. For example, the net

benefit of a \$1 funded program that returned \$1.50 was 50 cents of returned services.

There are some methodological concerns in apply-ing cost- benefit analysis in a restorative justice context. Such an economic approach may minimize non-eco-nomic or problematically measured benefits flowing from restorative justice approaches, such as decreased use of incarceration, minimization of labeling, positive peer pressure, juvenile continuity in the community, decreased family court caseload, community service, and victim closure (Harrison, Maupin, & Mays, 2001). Likewise, the present study does include certain intangi-ble effects flowing from crime, such as the intangible or indirect costs of victimization. Nonetheless, such an omission, was typical of cost-benefit analyses in crimi-nal justice contexts (Welsh & Farrington, 2000, p. 128), as many methodologists question the validity of such cos-calculations (Zimring & Hawkins, 1995).

The key cost-benefit analysis regarding youth courts concerns their efficiency relative to family courts. The key goal of juvenile justice programs is to reduce recidivism (Gray, 1994). If youth courts produce compa-rable recidivism rates to family courts at a reduced cost, then, in the absence of other more efficient alternatives, it would be economically rational to continue, or even increase, the use of youth courts. In other words, if we get the same result with reduced expenditure through youth courts, then we should opt for that approach.

Results

Recidivism

Our research findings strongly suggested that youth courts achieve recidivism rates comparable or superior to family court recidivism rates. Over a one-year period, following adjudication, out of 2,062 adjudicated juve-niles, only 90 recidivated, for a recidivism rate of 4.4%. Ridge View High School's youth court was censored from this recidivism rate because of its high number of respondents (5,000) and its atypical, non- juve-nile-offense method of calculating recidivism. We have some concerns over the thoroughness of state record keeping with regard to recidivism. Meaning, there was often a lack of communication or careful follow-up of supervised youths, and it was occasionally unclear whether the youth court coordinator diligently checked on reoffending after youth court supervision had termi-nated. As a further caveat, this study deliberately included youth courts that were implemented in 2004, meaning that a full-year subsequent to adjudication could not elapse in every case.

Comparing the youth court recidivism rate to that of other South Carolina juvenile justice initiatives was rendered problematic due to the failure of South Carolina's Department of Juvenile Justice (SCDJJ) to calculate recidivism rates for juveniles under community supervi-sion (Smith, 2002). Efforts are underway, under Ameri-can Prosecutors Research Institute (2005) supervision,

to calculate comparable community supervised juveniles but final figures were unavailable for use in this report. However, according to an unofficial disclosure from a Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) source, a preliminary analysis of 2,145 juveniles was conducted, and the recidivism rate was 9% during the period of community supervision.

This sample was not methodologically pure, however. The sample blended individuals supervised in the community either after probation or after juvenile arbitration. Not only did the community supervision styles reflect different juvenile justice approaches, but the supervision lengths typically varied. In that, probationary juveniles typically were supervised for 18 months, whereas juvenile arbitration participants often left supervision within six months. Nevertheless, for comparison purposes, the youth court rate compared favorably to that of established community supervision programs in South Carolina.

South Carolina's youth courts approach approximated the recidivism success of juvenile arbitration programs, which likewise employed restorative justice techniques. According to SCDJJ's (2004) Community Juvenile Arbitration Programs Fiscal Year 2003-2004 Outcomes Report, of 3,342 offenders, 2,539 offenders successfully completed juvenile arbitration supervision, whereas 295 offenders failed to comply or participate, 116 received a new offense, and 392 were dismissed from the program for unspecified reasons. This information indicated a community supervision failure rate of 24.0% over six months (the typical duration of juvenile arbitration supervision); hence, in recidivism terms, only 3.5% of arbitrated youths recidivated over 6 months.

Despite the methodological inconsistencies in DJJ's recidivism calculations, the best available rates suggested that South Carolina youth courts achieved recidivism success comparable, if not superior, to other available juvenile justice approaches. Assuming then that youth courts achieved comparable recidivism rates to family court, this study considered the cost-benefit ratio of using youth courts instead of family courts. A cost-benefit ratio greater than 1 suggested greater economic utility of youth courts.

Cost calculations

For purposes of this study, the common unit of measurement was dollars. The cost was the annual expenditure per child per youth court. The benefit was the annual family court expenditure per child. The cost-benefit ratio was determined by dividing the benefits by the costs, with a higher ratio indicating a greater public return for money invested. Considering that youth courts may represent an alternative institution able to reduce family court workloads, the net benefit of youth courts was the annual expenditure per child per family court less the annual youth court expenditure per child.

We calculated statewide annual family court expenditure per child and both statewide and court-specific annual youth court expenditures per child.

In this portion of the study, we estimated the annual per-child expenditure of family courts. Each of South Carolina's 46 counties has a family court, which meets weekly to handle family court cases. While several family courts may operate simultaneously in a county, typically only one was handling juvenile cases in any particular week. To that end, we calculated one juvenile court cost per county for each year. At these court meetings, there was typically one family court judge, one clerk of court, one court reporter, at least one Department of Juvenile Justice staff member, at least one prosecutor, at least one public defender, and at least one sheriff's deputy.

Cost calculation of these family court services was problematic, however, because family court services varied from county to county. This was so as different counties may have had more than one family court judge, as well as different staffs on hand, depending on volume and county funding. While all family courts were presided over by one judge, some courts had three full-time family court prosecutors and two full-time family court public defenders, whereas others had only one part-time family court prosecutor and one part-time family court public defender. Exact cost-benefit estimation was further complicated by the fact that different buildings may have incurred different costs, depending on a wide range of factors, including location, property values, building size, and increased staff security.

To address these methodological difficulties, we had strategically eliminated some costs from consideration, which included overhead costs and salary-related retirement costs. Overhead costs included building costs, paper costs, and jail transportation costs. The omission of such cost calculation was justified on several bases. First, every court, youth court or otherwise, would have building costs. Many youth courts used donated court space, thus saving program money. However, if youth courts expanded in use, such courts may have likewise demanded their own facilities. Just as in the case of donated youth courts, family court building costs were multipurpose, serving a variety of domestic law areas. Therefore, there was a public need to fund and maintain these courtroom spaces independently of juvenile court functions. In terms of salary-related retirement costs, such costs were proportionally related to salaries in South Carolina and were thus unnecessary for inclusion.

This study ignored costs associated with incarceration; hence, costs may have artificially inflated the net benefit of youth courts. Forms of community supervision predominate in family courts, yet such courts must also face youth-court-ineligible species of offenders, such as sex crimes or seriously violent crimes. The costs of these most serious offenders were not borne by youth courts, and incarceration was an expensive intervention practice. While youth court advocates touted the bene-

fits of youth court as an alternative to incarceration, few such proponents advocated the complete elimination of juvenile incarceration. Separating incarceration costs provided a clearer picture of the relative costs of youth court supervision and community-based family court supervision (such as probation and home detention).

To calculate costs, we determined the statewide average salary cost of processing juveniles through family court for one year, and then divided this total by the number of processed juveniles during that year. The end total represented the statewide average annual per-child cost of juvenile adjudication in family court.

According to a South Carolina Court Administration source, family court judges were paid a salary of \$113,862 per year. Judicial training was estimated at \$600 per year, based on state-sponsored Continuing Legal Education (CLE) training, a figure which included \$200 for course costs, \$250 for hotel expenses, \$100 per diem costs, and \$ 50 mileage. While bar membership costs varied, bar membership was approximately \$300 per year. Multiplying the family court judicial cost of (\$113,862 + \$600 + \$300) \$114,762 by the percentage of work days allocated to juvenile justice practice (.3125) yielded a judicial cost of \$35,863.13.

Certain courtroom workgroup professionals always attended a family court judge, as these individuals necessarily followed the judge, we estimated costs based on the same judicial percentage of work days allocated to juvenile justice practice. The family court clerk was typically hired by the county clerk of court, an elected official, and made approximately \$28,000 a year (salaries varied considerably based on seniority). Typically, two sheriff deputies attended each judge and each made approximately \$28,000 a year. A court reporter was generally present and he/she made approximately \$40,000 a year. Multiplying each of these figures by .3125 yielded totals of \$8,750 ($\$8,750 \times 2 = \$17,500$) and \$12,500.

Each family court handling juvenile cases likewise required prosecutors and public defenders. Calculation of costs in this context was made difficult by the fact that some courts had full-time prosecutors and public defenders devoted to family court, whereas, in other courts, the prosecutors and public defenders may only spend one day a week working on juvenile cases. To resolve this issue, we again took the average of five counties, which included nine full-time solicitors, three full-time public defenders, and four part-time public defenders. As part-time public defenders split their time with other court responsibilities, each counted as 0.2, which reflected the percentage of the work week spent in one day of juvenile court. A division of all the totals by five produced a result of (9/5) 1.8 full-time solicitors per county and (3.8/5) 0.76 full-time public defenders per county.

The median family court solicitor salary was approximately \$45,000 per year. This figure was obtained by averaging the starting salaries of family court assistant solicitors from two counties and likely underestimated the actual salary of more experienced prosecutors. Like judges, prosecutorial CLE training involved approximately \$600 per year, and prosecutor bar dues were approximately \$300 per year. The resulting total was \$45,900 per year per full-time solicitor. Multiplying this total by 1.8 equaled an average of \$82,620 annual juvenile court solicitor cost per year.

The median family court public defender salary was approximately \$ 34,000, again taking the average of known salaries. Like judges and solicitors, public defender CLE training involved approximately \$600 per year, and bar dues were approximately \$300 per year. The resulting total was \$34,900, which, multiplied by the number of full-time public defenders per county (0.76) yielded \$26,524.00 in annual juvenile court public defender cost per year.

Department of Juvenile Justice Caseworkers and administrators attended each juvenile court session. These DJJ employees were full-time and were responsible for attendance in court, juvenile processing, evaluation, disposition recommendations, and community supervision. Again, different counties had different numbers of DJJ employees, and, to allow for one overall statewide, we took the sum of DJJ employees from five counties (38) and divided the result by 5, to reach a county average of 7.6 full-time DJJ employees per juvenile court. The average DJJ salary varied widely, based on position and experience, but the median was approximately \$32,000. Multiplying \$32,000 by 7.6 DJJ employees yielded \$243,200 in annual juvenile court DJJ costs per year. Significantly, the amount excluded reference to DJJ employees handling incarceration or institutionalized supervision, as previously noted.

One methodological concern at this point was the difference in youth court and family court supervision periods; in that, youth court supervision was typically shorter, terminating within six months and family court supervision, by contrast, often lasts 18 months. However, for both court systems, the salary costs associated with supervision was a fixed cost; meaning, in-court employees and staff remained on the same per-day salary and handle the same caseload. Therefore, no separate cost assessment was conducted for the difference in supervision length.

For fiscal year 2004, family courts handled 27,328 cases (SCDJJ, 2004). To determine an average number of cases handled per county, we divided this figure by the number of South Carolina counties (46), which yielded 594 cases (see Table 1).

Table 1.
Annual Statewide Family Court Costs

Family judge court	\$35,863.13
Clerk of court	\$7,750.00
Deputy sheriffs	\$17,500.00
Court reporter	\$12,500.00
Solicitors	\$82,620.00
Public defenders	\$26,524.00
DJJ employees	\$243,200.00
TOTAL	\$426,957.13
Cases per county per FY '03--04	954
ANNUAL STATEWIDE FAMILY COURT PER-CHILD EXPENDITURE: \$718.78	

In this section, we calculated the annual youth court per-child expenditure, both for individual youth courts and for the state as a whole. The calculations in this sec-

tion were considerably simpler than in the previous section; in that, we took allocated money for one year and divided that amount by adjudications during that year. In cases of youth courts existing less than one year, we prorated the adjudications proportionally to the rest of the year; that is, for six-month-operating courts, we artificially doubled the adjudications.

The biggest complication in calculating costs was youth court training expenses. Both adult coordinators and youth court volunteers received training, the cost of which varied according to the number of volunteers, training location, and trainer type. The following was a breakdown of potential costs, provided by South Carolina's Department of Education (see Table 2).

There were three main types of youth court training that youth volunteers and adult coordinators received site training, regional training, and National Youth Court Center (NYCC) training. The cost of these trainings varied based on the number of volunteers, the location of the training and whether full time staff or youth court trainers conducted the training. South Carolina's Department of Education graciously provided a general breakdown of costs associated with training type (see Table 2).

Table 2.
Youth Court Training Costs

Item	Site Training Site Coordinator, YC	Regional Training	NYCC Training National Youth Court
Conducted by	Trainer or SDE/SC Bar	YC Trainer, SC Bar, SDE	Center
Registration fee	N/A	N/A	\$150
Length of training	3-6 hours	3-6 hours	2 1/2 days
Lodging, per diem	N/A	N/A	\$150/3 nights & \$32/day * 3 days (out of state)
Transportation	N/A	\$100/bus (incl bus & driver)	\$350 (cost of flight)
# of attendees	20-30	100-120	N/A
Refreshments	\$7/attendee	\$7/attendee	Varies
Materials (can include copies of handouts, folders, pens, notepads)	\$50/training	\$100/training	Incl in registration cost

Youth court trainers have been trained by the South Carolina Bar and by the State Department of Education and were paid a stipend (from IOLTA funding) when conducting youth court trainings. For instance, one day's work of six to seven hours was compensated \$300, and a half day's work (two to three hours) was compensated \$150.

Each youth court had, or was scheduled for, at least one of each type of training. Typically, each court had

training once each month and served refreshments. Our inquiries revealed 224 site training sessions over 21, for an average of approximately 11 (rounding up). The

average court, then, had 10 site trainings and one regional training. The youth court coordinator was also typically sent for NYCC training. Each site training was (average 25 attendees * \$7/attendee + \$50 in materials) approximately \$225, for a total of \$2,250 per year. Each regional training must be assessed at one fifth of the trainer costs, due to the fact that multiple youth courts were in attendance. The total costs per regional training were estimated as ([25 attendees * \$7 for refreshments] + [\$300 / 5 for trainer] + [\$100 for bus] + [\$100 /5 for materials]) \$355. NYCC training totaled ([\$150 registration fee] + [\$546 lodging/per diem] + [\$350 flight])

\$1,046. The average annual training cost per youth court was calculated at $(\$2250 + \$355 + \$1046) \$ 3,651$. Some courts, however, had training costs built in to overall funding, and separate estimates were unnecessary.

Incarceration savings

The reported youth court benefits did not include incarceration savings. The exclusion of incarceration costs altogether was somewhat problematic because increased utilization of youth courts ultimately would reduce incarceration costs in two primary ways. First, youth courts themselves did not have the authority to impose incarceration, so community supervision failures did not directly lead to extreme direct costs. Second, youth court community supervision failures, as a worst-case scenario, would result in a DJJ referral to family court. At that point, the juvenile would be evaluated for community supervision or incarceration, just as would any other juvenile. The end result is that youth courts provide an additional buffer layer prior to the extreme and costly step of juvenile incarceration.

In South Carolina, under traditional family court supervision, there were four typical outcomes: immediate alternative disposition, such as juvenile pretrial intervention, arbitration, or behavioral contracts; immediate community supervision, exemplified by probation; incarceration in an intermediate temporary holding facility for evaluation, such as juvenile reviews at the Midlands Evaluation Center (MEC); and juvenile incarceration at long-term facilities, which were considered final sentencing options. Often, DJJ-supervised individuals were evaluated at MEC prior to receiving community supervision. For individuals failing supervision in family court, incarceration was the likely result. Unfortunately, there was an enormous cost difference between community-based and incarceration-based approaches, with the latter costing as much as \$40,000 per year per juvenile. Any incarceration avoidance saved the state significant resources.

Methodologically, we encountered a dilemma. On one hand, cost estimates of incarceration savings were speculative. On the other hand, failure to make such estimates would systematically underestimate youth court benefits. Unfortunately, we had no data to compare the rates at which youth court juveniles avoided incarceration compared to similarly situated direct family court referrals. Obtaining precise figures would have required a quasi-experimental design with careful case selection to match background variables across experimental and control groups.

Our solution to this dilemma was to make a general estimate of the cost savings of avoiding incarceration

risk from a family court referral, in full realization of the estimate's methodological limitations. This estimate was performed for academic reasons only and was included in the reported findings.

In 2003-2004, out of 27,328 family court referrals, 1,977 family court juveniles were incarcerated, for an incarceration rate, of 7.2%. Thus, approximately one in 14 family-court referred juveniles were incarcerated. Any avoidance of family-court referral would have, therefore, saved the state the cost associated with a 7.2% risk of incarceration. There was no concrete data available on South Carolina's median juvenile incarceration length, so assumptions would be necessary to assess costs. Typically, any incarcerated juvenile would attend a temporary evaluative facility for at least one month. This incarceration was not a final commitment, but served to give the judge information concerning the juvenile's needs.

Costs of juvenile incarceration varied by program, and no clear figures were publicly available for South Carolina as to the percentage of intermediate referrals that went on to permanent referrals. We assumed, however, a conservative baseline cost of \$20,000 per incarcerated juvenile per year, which was consistent or undercuts any obtainable estimate nationwide. We assumed (based on working experience), also, that 25% of incarcerated juveniles received an additional six months of incarceration. The cost of each incarcerated juvenile was at least $(\$20,000 / 12) \$1,666$ for the evaluative incarceration. For the 25% that received an additional period of incarceration, the additional cost was $(\$20,000 / 2) \$10,000$ per juvenile. Thus, the average cost of incarceration per incarcerated juvenile was $(\$1,666 + (\$10,000/4)) \$4,166$. Considering that 1 in 14 family court referrals would be incarcerated, the potential cost savings of avoiding family court referral was $(\$4,166 * .072)$ approximately \$299.95. Therefore, we informally estimated that, in addition to previously mentioned youth court cost savings relative to family court, any youth court referral which avoided an eventual family court referral saved South Carolina nearly \$300.00 (see Tables 3 and 4).

Table 3.
Annual Statewide Youth Court Costs

Total youth court expenditures	\$373,801
Total youth court adjudications	676
Total annual youth court expenditure/child	\$552.96
Cost-benefit ratio of youth court services	1.30
Net benefit ratio of youth court services	\$165.82

Table 4
Youth Court Expenditures

Counties	Funding Total	Avg. Training	Total Expenses	Cases (pro-rated)	Annual Expend. per	Cost-benef it ratio	Net benefit per child
Aiken	600	3,651	4,251	23	184.83	3.89	533.95
Allendale	45,039	included	45,039	23	1,958.21	0.37	-1,239.43
Bamberg	53,853	included	53,853	22	2,447.86	0.29	-1,729.08
Berkeley	1,500	3,651	5,151	2	2,575.50	0.28	-1,856.72
Charleston	30,000	3,651	33,651	85	395.89	1.82	322.89
Charleston (Mt. Pleasant)	20,000	3,651	23,651	63	375.41	1.92	343.37
Charleston (North Chas.)	7,000	3,651	10,651	61	174.61	4.12	544.17
Clarendon	11,857	3,651	15,508	44	352.45	2.04	366.33
Colleton	18,000	3,651	21,651	12	1,804.25	0.40	-1,085.47
Dorchester	18,000	3,651	21,651	87	248.86	2.89	469.92
Fairfield	8,000	3,651	11,651	12	970.92	0.74	-252.14
Greenville	18,000	3,651	21,651	25	866.04	0.83	-147.26
Greenwood	3,600	3,651	7,521	4	1880.25	0.38	-1,161.47
Greenwood (W.S.)	18,000	3,651	21,651	28	773.25	1.08	-54.47
Marlboro	18,000	3,651	21,651	12	1804.25	2.51	-1,085.47
Richland (Alcorn MS)	13,090	3,651	16,741	24	697.54	1.03	21.24
Richland (Eau Claire HS)	175	3,651	3,826	97	39.44	18.22	679.34
Richland (W.A. Perry MS)	18,000	3,651	21,651	24	902.13	0.80	-183.35
Richland (Ridge View HS)	0	3,651	3,651	940	3.88	185.25	714.90
Sumter	8,750	3,651	12,401	18	688.94	1.04	29.84
Work (drug ct.)	111,000	included	111,000	10	11,100	0.06	-10,381.22

Discussion

Efficiency-wise, youth courts showed considerable promise, producing comparable recidivism rates at reduced cost. The relative efficiency of youth courts, however, was neither monolithic nor guaranteed. Individual youth courts displayed considerable variation, and some youth courts were not as efficient as their traditional family court counterparts.

The most obvious finding was that youth courts saved money. Each juvenile passing through a youth court rather than a family court saved South Carolina \$165.82 (see Table 3). Youth courts possessed a number of fiscal advantages over traditional court services. Youth courts employed fewer personnel by far, and, frequently, the personnel employed were only part-time. Due to their relatively informal nature, youth courts avoided the expenses of court stenography, extensive record- and docket-keeping, and prosecution and defense costs. Youth courts' avoidance of violent offend-

ers reduced associated security expenses and its community-based approach avoided prisoner transport costs. Supervision costs were likewise streamlined; in that, the youth court coordinator handled all supervisory issues, compared with DJJ's team approach. Some youth courts further saved money through use of volunteers and even donated working spaces. Such cost savings, however, may not be sustainable if youth courts were adopted on a broad-scale, permanent basis.

While the majority of youth courts exhibited net benefits, a sizeable minority did not. A consistent feature of this minority was low caseloads, which accounted for the low cost-benefit ratio. The study identified a number of possible reasons for low youth court caseloads: an inefficient referral system; an immature referral system; and a reliance on borrowed courthouse resources.

In terms of an inefficient referral system, some youth courts lacked a systematic and comprehensive referral method. For example, one youth court relied

wholly on school disciplinary referrals; the school referred only a handful of cases and then closed for the summer, resulting in a poor cost-benefit ratio. The youth court, in this case, was underutilized; in that, the school did not provide sufficient cases to justify costs. A number of youth courts complained of down time during which youth courts met, had no case to process, but instead did mock proceedings or engaged in further training, while providing refreshments, training materials, and frequently transportation. Cooperative efforts with local law enforcement, DJJ, and solicitor's offices may increase caseloads for underutilized courts. Courts which employed rigorous and rapid methods for acquiring and processing cases handled higher caseloads.

With regard to an immature referral system, many youth courts were less than one year old and the referral system was under development. These newly developed youth courts were training participants, establishing local connections, and implementing procedures. We anticipated that these new courts would improve cost-benefit ratios over time, which would be consistent with their peers' general trends.

Additionally, in regards to a reliance on borrowed courthouse resources, youth courts which met at courthouses tended to meet less frequently, likely due to scheduling and security constraints. These courts suffered backlogs similar to those encountered in traditional court systems. Youth courts which met at schools, by contrast, operated more flexibly and met more frequently.

The findings produced here suggest that youth courts, at least in some instances, are capable of providing considerable savings for the juvenile justice system. Future research should be replicated in additional jurisdictions where youth courts are utilized to address adolescent delinquency. Similarly, more precise estimations of costs and benefits may also enable greater understanding of their efficiency in processing non-serious delinquents relative to the traditional family court system. Though youth courts represent a promising approach to increasing system effectiveness and efficiency, much more rigorous empirical research is needed before vigorous endorsements of the approach can be made.

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