




# Start Here

*A brief overview  
of Michigan's  
juvenile justice  
system*







In this guide, you will find a brief overview of Michigan's juvenile justice system and its structure. By exploring this guide, you'll take the first step toward becoming a more informed youth justice advocate.

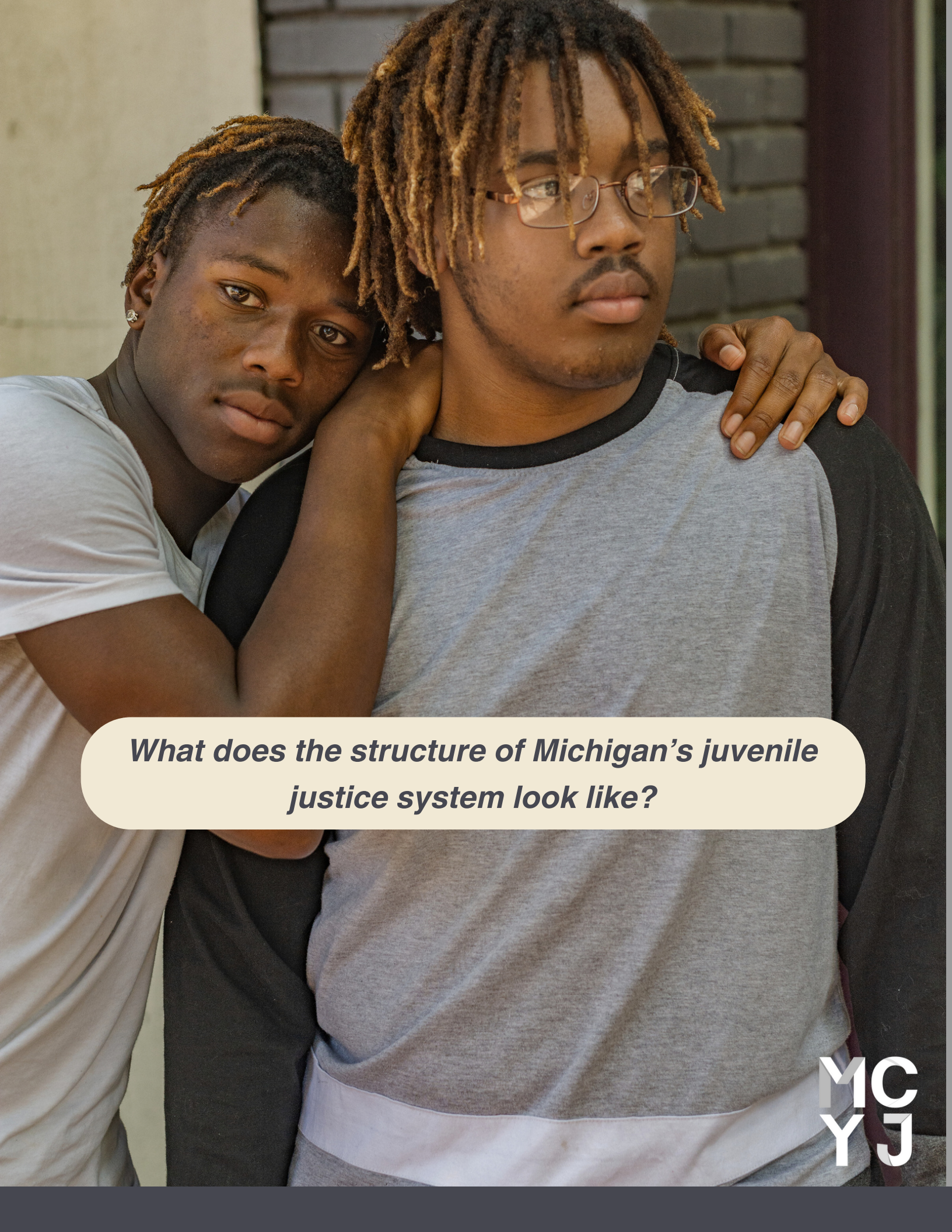
## Juvenile Justice System Philosophy

- ***Youth are developmentally different than adults*** and should be treated as such.
- Public safety is the priority when making any decisions, but it is balanced with the youth's best interest.
- Youth do not receive “time” but are provided with court-ordered rehabilitation.
- Treatment should include age-appropriate services, such as:
  - Substance abuse and mental health treatment;
  - Wraparound services;
  - Intensive case management; and
  - Residential Treatment Programs.

The Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) states:

*The Michigan Juvenile Justice system will focus on building safer Michigan communities and assisting youth to become healthy and productive citizens through proactive delinquency prevention, efficient law enforcement, effective rehabilitative treatment, statewide data collection and data sharing, and comprehensive community reintegration and support services.*





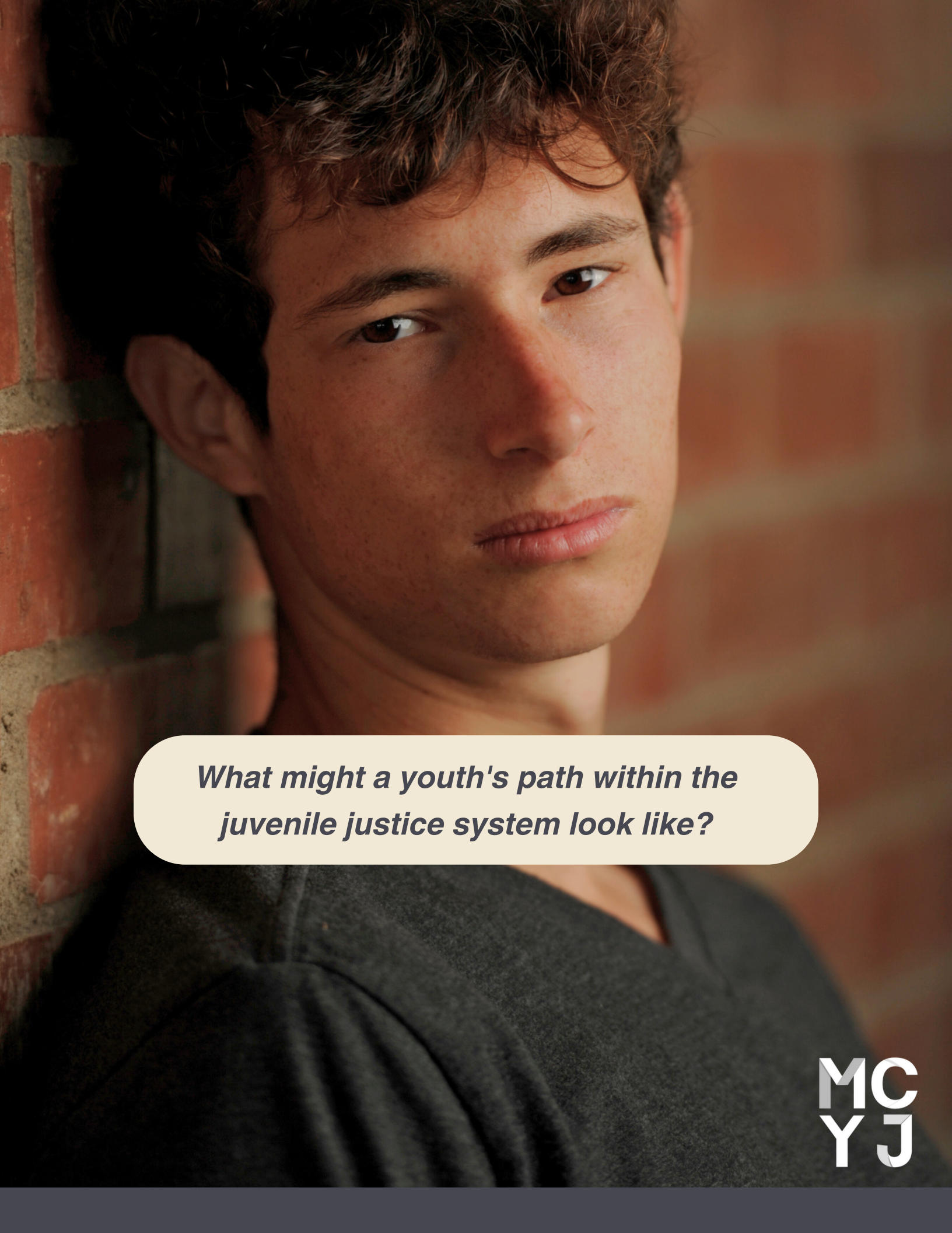
***What does the structure of Michigan's juvenile justice system look like?***





**Youth come into contact with multiple decision-makers within the juvenile justice system.**

- While the juvenile justice system is not identical to the adult criminal legal system, attorneys, court administrators, judges, and prosecutors all play an essential role in the juvenile system. The decisions made by judges and prosecutors have an influence on the outcomes of youth and their families, including their overall experience in the justice system.

A close-up portrait of a young man with curly brown hair, looking slightly to the right with a neutral expression. He is leaning against a brick wall. The lighting is soft and natural, highlighting his features. The background is a blurred brick wall.

*What might a youth's path within the  
juvenile justice system look like?*

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- **Referral and Delinquency Petition:**
  - Youth may become systems involved through various channels, such as law enforcement, schools, or social services. A delinquency petition is filed following the referral, initiating the formal legal process.
- **Possible Outcomes After Referral and Delinquency Petition:** After the referral and delinquency petition, the youth may experience one of the following outcomes:
  - **Released on a warning:** In some cases, the youth may receive a notification, and no further action is taken.
  - **Diversion:** Diversion programs are designed to steer youth away from the traditional court process. Instead of being formally charged with an offense, the child may participate in community-based programs or services to address the underlying issues that led to their behavior.
- **Judicial Processing:** If the case proceeds to judicial processing, the youth will be formally charged with the offense, and the court will handle the legal proceedings.

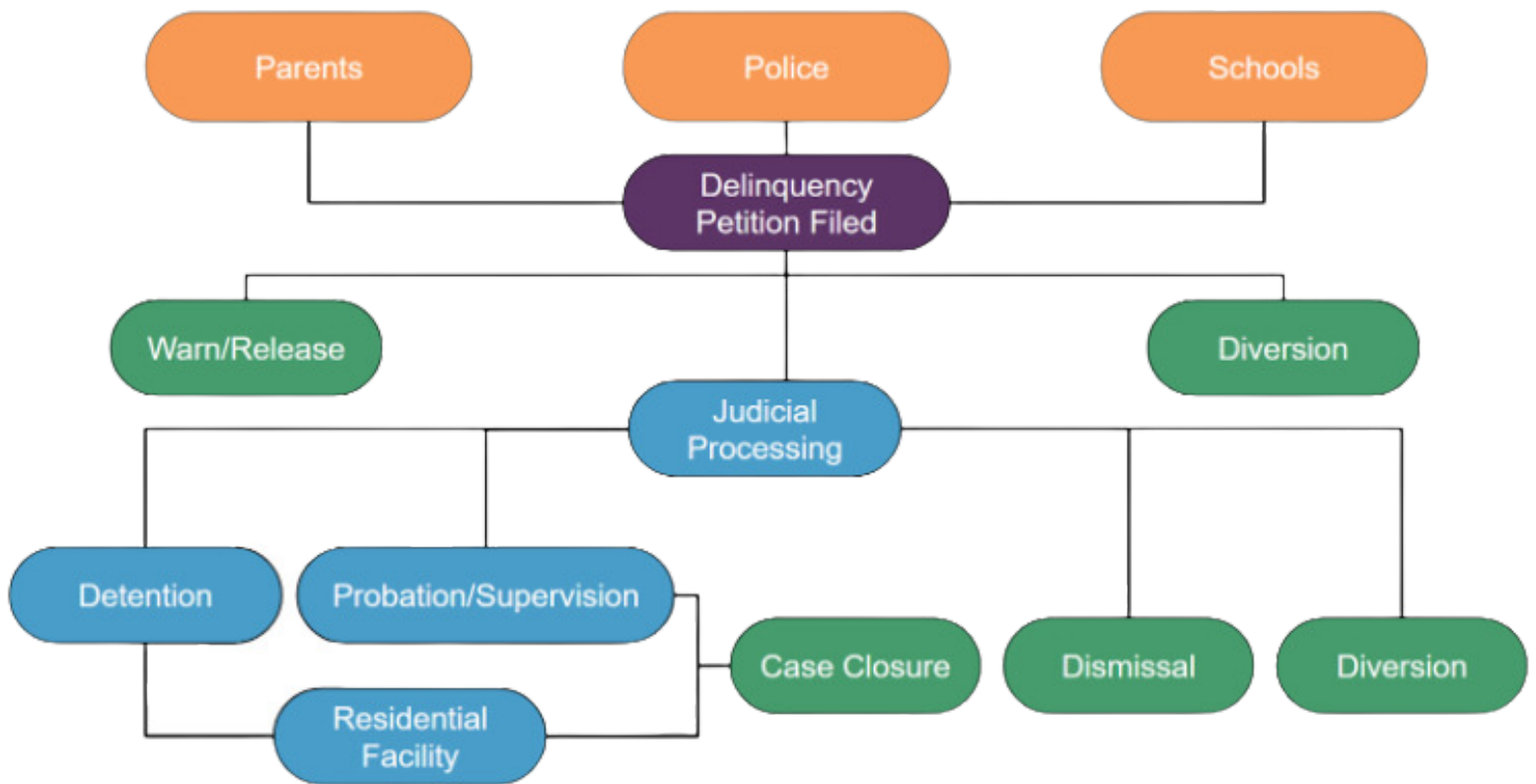
## Possible Outcomes After Judicial Processing:

Following the judicial processing, the youth may experience one of the following outcomes:

- **Dismissal**
- **Post-Arrest Diversion:** After the arrest, the youth may still be considered for diversion programs to address their behavior and avoid further involvement in the formal juvenile justice system.
- **Community-Based Probation/Supervision:** Instead of being detained, the court may place the youth on probation or under community-based supervision, where they have specific conditions to follow and may receive counseling or other support services.
- **Detention:** Sometimes, the court may decide to detain the youth. Detention may be used as a temporary out-of-home placement before formal charges are filed, or the young person may remain in detention while awaiting placement in a long-term residential facility.



The graphic below highlights the possible continuum a young person may experience. It's important to note that the youth's path in the juvenile justice system can vary widely from county to county and local authorities.



While not exhaustive, this brief overview lends insights into how youth and families come into contact with the juvenile justice system in Michigan. To learn more, we encourage you to explore the resources below:

- [Michigan Task Force on Juvenile Justice Reform](#)
- [Michigan Committee on Juvenile Justice](#)
- [State Court Administrative Office](#)

Read through MCYJ's published reports [here](#) or learn more about our legislative priorities [here](#).