



## What Happens When a State Takes Action on Truancy? A State of Washington Case Brief

### *Background*

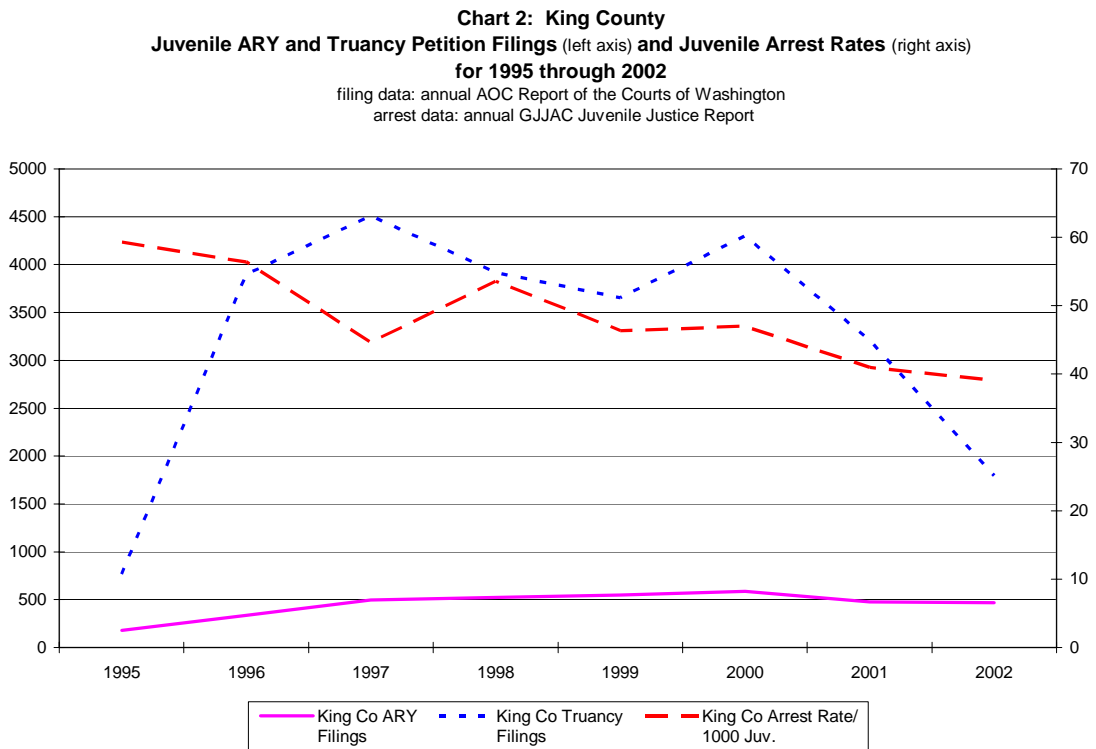
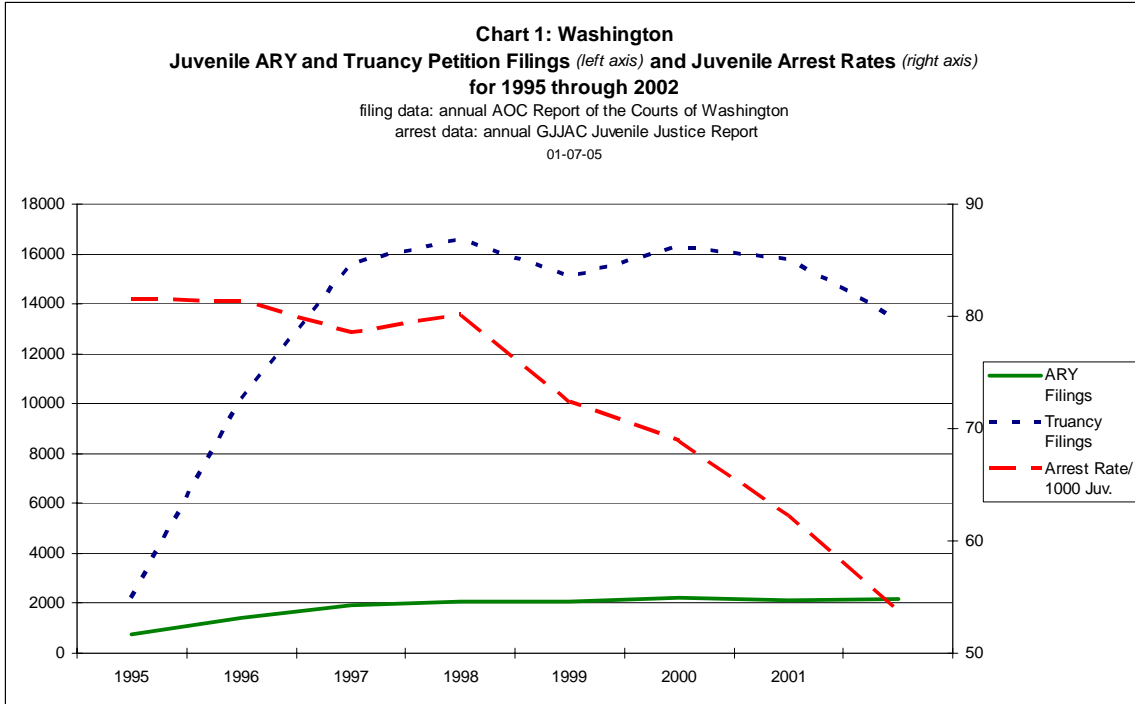
In the mid-1990s, a tragic death of a truant girl sparked enormous interest in the issue of truancy in the State of Washington. The legislature passed a comprehensive state law named for the child: the “*Becca Bill*.” Schools, courts, prosecutors, juvenile services staff and advocacy groups focused on reducing truancy in the state and they have achieved great results. In 1999, The Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) of the US Department of Justice, funded King County Juvenile Court (Seattle metro area) and 6 other sites across the nation to be model demonstration programs. The National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) won the contract for the national evaluation of these sites. Over the past five years three of these sites became the focus of an in-depth outcome research project including King County, Houston, and Jacksonville. These results will be reported in Fall 2005. However, some impressive trends have been seen from the Washington data.

### *The Trends*

The following page shows the positive trends Washington has achieved. Chart 1 presents the data for at risk youth, juvenile arrests, and truancy filings over time. “At Risk Youth” are also known in other states as “Children in Need of Supervision” or CHINS cases that come into juvenile or family courts. Chart 2 presents the same data for King County. The trends clearly show that as we focus on truancy we see that juvenile arrests decline and at risk youth stays flat and low. While the differences are not as great for King County as they are statewide, the story behind the data in King County Juvenile Court is most impressive. Over this period of time and into 2003, the county has been able to close 6 residential units (detention centers) reducing costs by \$1.5 million.. they also reduced their juvenile services staff by 39 positions saving another \$2 million per year. We cannot credit these improvements solely to truancy interventions. However, NCSE interviewed the juvenile judges, court administrators and prosecutors who attribute a significant portion of the improvement directly to truancy reduction and particularly the diversion services and interventions that follow the truancy filings.

The National Center for School Engagement hopes Washington’s example will be a catalyst for other states to take action to reduce truancy statewide. Washington needs to continue its truancy reduction efforts because it is a good public investment of resources.





The National Center for School Engagement is an initiative of the COLORADO FOUNDATION FOR FAMILIES AND CHILDREN.

