

Juvenile Justice Law



What is Juvenile Justice Law?

Juvenile justice law concerns laws related to the arrest, trial, and sentencing of children and adolescents. Juvenile justice law also encompasses child welfare cases in which that state appoints a legal guardian for a child. All states have separate courts that handle juvenile justice cases, but cases related to guardianship are tried in family law courts ([Juvenile Law Center](#)). When juvenile justice courts were established by states in the early twentieth century, the juvenile justice system was set up to be focused on rehabilitative justice, not punitive justice ([Finklea](#)).

Juvenile justice is primarily carried out by individual states, but there have been several important laws passed by Congress that affect juvenile justice. Firstly, the [1967 Supreme Court decision *In re Gault*](#) established that minors have the right to the same due process protections as adults, including representation. However, most states do not allow jury trials in cases with juvenile defendants. [The 1974 Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act](#) created federal regulatory bodies to coordinate and administer federal juvenile justice. The law also provided grant money to states that established juvenile justice systems focused on rehabilitation. Many of these protections were reversed in the [1997 Juvenile Accountability Block Grant](#) (JABG) which came in the wake of “tough on crime” priorities in many states. The JABG provided grant funding to states to establish graduated sanctions, build juvenile detention facilities, create juvenile drug and gun courts, and intensify punishment standards at schools ([Finklea](#)). In this period, many states also established mechanisms that transferred children from the juvenile to adult criminal courts, where harsher punishments are allowed ([Juvenile Law Center](#)).

Juvenile justice attorneys, sometimes called child advocates, represent children in juvenile justice courts that are facing delinquency charges, or in criminal court if the case is transferred. They are either hired by the child’s family or appointed by the juvenile court and act as a public defender. Juvenile justice attorneys also represent children in cases of child abuse or neglect, or in child trafficking cases. They advocate for the child during court proceedings and throughout the foster care or adoption processes ([Georgetown](#)).

Where Do Juvenile Justice Lawyers Work?

Government

Shelby County Public Defender Juvenile Division—[Internship Program](#)
[Tennessee Department of Children Services](#)

Private Sector

Firms that handle juvenile justice cases, or offer opportunities to represent minors *pro bono*

Public Sector

Justice Policy Institute—[Employment and Internships](#)
Juvenile Law Center—[Careers](#)

What Classes Should I Take?

Administrative Law
Appellate Advocacy
Criminal Procedure I, II
Family Law
Family Law Seminar
Trial Advocacy

Juvenile Justice Law Resources



Resume Boosters for Juvenile Justice Law

Earn your *pro bono* credit through the [Court Appointed Special Advocates](#), the [Juvenile Court's Foster Care Review Board](#), or the [Youth Court](#) program

Get involved with Street Law

Participate in Alternative Spring Break, Juvenile Law Track

Join the Public Action Law Society

Intern or extern with the Shelby County Public Defender's Office Juvenile Justice Division

Intern or extern with a firm that handles juvenile justice cases

Professional Associations

American Bar Association

All University of Memphis law students have free membership to the [American Bar Association](#). Their website provides routinely updated information and interest-specific career advice. Join different sections to find out what they offer. Check out the [Center on Children and the Law](#).

National Juvenile Defender Center

The [National Juvenile Defender Center](#) gives juvenile defense attorneys a permanent and enhanced capacity to address practice issues, improve advocacy skills, build partnerships, exchange information, and participate in the national debate over juvenile crime.

Juvenile Justice Law Links

["Up and Out: Regina Calcaterra's Story from Foster Care to Lawyer"](#)

This article written by Claire Chiamulera describes the life and career path of a child advocate, Regina Calcaterra.

[Research Network on Adolescent Development and Juvenile Justice](#)

[Juvenile and Emerging Adult Justice Research](#)

These research groups have conducted important neuroscience research that has implications for juvenile justice reform.