

Juvenile Crimes

Attorneys

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Overview

Calm through complexity. Protecting young futures.

When a juvenile is charged with a crime, the instinct is often to minimize — to assume the system will be lenient and the matter will resolve on its own. Massachusetts Juvenile Court does prioritize rehabilitation, but a mishandled case can produce consequences that follow a young person through school admissions, employment background checks, and military eligibility for years. Cohen Cleary defends juveniles in Massachusetts and Rhode Island with a focus on diversion, record protection, and the rehabilitation-centered outcomes the juvenile system is designed to produce.

What Happens When a Teen Is Arrested or Summoned in Massachusetts?

A phone call from the police or a summons in the mail changes everything for a family. Parents assume juvenile court is informal, that a first offense will be dismissed, or that records will be sealed. None of that is reliably true. Massachusetts Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over children ages 12 through 17 at the time of the alleged offense, and while the system emphasizes rehabilitation over punishment, a case that is not handled properly from the outset can produce consequences that reach well beyond the courtroom.

Juvenile adjudications can affect college admissions, military eligibility, employment background checks, and even immigration status. The difference between a record that follows your child and one that does not often comes down to decisions made in the first days after charges are filed. Cohen Cleary provides minor criminal defense with the focus and preparation that those early decisions demand.

Juvenile Court Defense and Diversion Strategies

Massachusetts Juvenile Court operates under a distinct set of procedural rules that differ significantly from the adult criminal system. Arraignments, pretrial conferences, and dispositional hearings each carry specific requirements for both the juvenile and the parent or guardian. Judges in the juvenile sessions expect defense counsel to understand not only the legal merits of a case but also the child's educational, behavioral, and family circumstances. We prepare for those expectations from the initial consultation.

Our defense work in juvenile matters includes challenging the sufficiency of evidence, filing motions to suppress where law enforcement exceeded constitutional limits, and negotiating diversion agreements that keep cases out of adjudication entirely. For eligible clients, informal probation under Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 119, Section 58 offers a path to resolution without a delinquency finding on the record.

Where charges involve allegations serious enough to trigger youthful offender proceedings or potential transfer to adult court, the stakes escalate substantially. We address bind-over motions with detailed mitigation presentations, coordinating with educational professionals, mental health providers, and family members to demonstrate that the juvenile system remains appropriate. We also advise families on the intersection between criminal charges and school discipline, working as both a juvenile crime lawyer and a school suspension lawyer when suspension or expulsion proceedings run on a parallel track with the criminal case.

Why Families Choose Cohen Cleary

At Cohen Cleary, our practice teams combine deep subject-matter experience with disciplined execution and responsive client service. We do not take a one-size-fits-all approach. Every matter is handled with careful preparation, clear communication, and a strategy tailored to the client's goals and the realities of the forum.

Clients choose Cohen Cleary because we deliver:

Practice-Focused Legal Experience

Our attorneys work in defined practice areas, allowing us to develop practical insight into the legal, procedural, and regulatory nuances that matter most in each case. This focus allows us to anticipate issues, avoid unnecessary delays, and position matters for efficient resolution.

Clear Guidance and Proactive Communication

We prioritize clarity at every stage. Clients receive straightforward explanations of their options, timely updates on developments, and practical advice grounded in real-world outcomes.

Strategic Advocacy with Trial Readiness

Whether a matter calls for negotiation, mediation, or litigation, our attorneys prepare every case with discipline and foresight. We pursue efficient resolution when possible and are fully prepared to advocate aggressively when necessary to protect our clients' interests.

Regional Knowledge and Local Presence

With offices throughout Massachusetts and experience across New England courts and agencies, we bring local insight and regional reach to every matter.

Client-Centered Service

We treat every matter with urgency and respect. Our clients rely on us for responsive service, sound judgment, and steady counsel through complex legal challenges.

In our juvenile defense work, this approach helps families navigate a system that is unfamiliar and high-stakes with clarity, efficiency, and confidence.

Our Approach to Juvenile Court Defense and Record Sealing

Every juvenile case begins with a detailed assessment of the charges, the evidence, and the child's individual circumstances. From there, our approach adapts to the specifics:

- Investigating the facts independently, including witness interviews and school records,

before accepting the prosecution's version of events

- Identifying diversion eligibility and negotiating alternatives to formal adjudication where appropriate
- Coordinating with parents, schools, and treatment providers to present a complete picture of the juvenile to the court
- Pursuing sealing or expungement of juvenile records as soon as the case allows under M.G.L. c. 276, Section 100B

Serving Families Across Massachusetts and Rhode Island

Cohen Cleary defends juveniles facing criminal charges in Juvenile Court sessions across Massachusetts, including the Bristol County, Plymouth County, and Norfolk County divisions where our [Taunton](#) and [Plymouth](#) offices are located. Pretrial diversion practices and probation department expectations vary meaningfully by county, and familiarity with those local differences shapes case strategy from the outset. We also represent juveniles in Rhode Island Family Court juvenile proceedings, where jurisdiction, dispositional options, and wayward/delinquent classifications operate under a framework distinct from Massachusetts. Our attorneys serve families throughout southeastern Massachusetts and the broader region, with the capacity to handle juvenile matters across New England.

Talk to a Massachusetts Juvenile Defense Attorney About Your Child's Case

If your child has been charged with a crime or received a court summons, the decisions you make now will shape what follows. As part of our broader criminal defense practice, Cohen Cleary represents juveniles and their families with the preparation and seriousness these cases require. Contact us to speak with an attorney who understands the juvenile system.

Frequently Asked Questions: Juvenile Criminal Defense

What is the jurisdiction of Massachusetts Juvenile Court?

Massachusetts Juvenile Court has jurisdiction over individuals who were between the ages of 12 and 17 at the time of the alleged offense. Children under 12 cannot be charged with delinquency. Cases involving children who are 14 or older and charged with certain serious felonies may be subject to youthful offender proceedings, which can result in adult sentences. The distinction between a delinquency case and a youthful offender case is one of the most consequential decisions in the juvenile system.

Are juvenile records automatically sealed in Massachusetts?

No. This is one of the most common misconceptions families hold. While Massachusetts law provides a mechanism for sealing juvenile records, sealing is not automatic. A petition must be filed, and eligibility depends on the disposition of the case, the time elapsed, and whether the individual has subsequent involvement with the court. Expungement is available in more limited circumstances. We advise families on record protection from the earliest stages of a case, because the disposition we negotiate directly affects future sealing eligibility.

What is the difference between a CHINS case and a delinquency case?

A Child in Need of Services (CHINS) proceeding addresses behaviors like truancy, running away, or persistent disobedience that do not constitute criminal offenses. A delinquency case, by contrast, involves allegations that the juvenile committed an act that would be a crime if committed by an adult. The two categories carry very different procedural and dispositional consequences, and families sometimes confuse a school-based incident that triggers CHINS-type intervention with one that results in criminal charges.

Can my child's case be moved to adult court?

Yes, under specific circumstances. Massachusetts allows transfer to adult court for juveniles aged 14 or older who are charged with certain serious offenses, including murder and certain armed felonies. The youthful offender statute also permits adult-length sentences for qualifying cases even when the case remains in Juvenile Court. Opposing a bind-over motion or contesting youthful offender status requires a detailed presentation of the juvenile's background, mental health, educational history, and rehabilitative potential. These proceedings are among the highest-stakes matters in juvenile practice.