Data Dictionary and Source Documentation: Nebraska Juvenile Cases

2010-2024

May 6, 2025

Contents

1 Overview of Non-sealed Juvenile Cases

The dataset are non-sealed Juvenile Delinquency Cases obtained from the NE Justice Website. The current dataset has been divided into three main tables:

1. **Case Information**: This table contains unique records pertaining to each case. It includes details such as the CaseID, County, Docket Number, Defendant Name, Judge, Classification, Filed Date, Termination Date, Year, Year of Birth, and Age. Each row represents a unique case.

2. **Involved Parties**: This table provides information on the various parties associated with each case (e.g., Juvenile, Dad, Mom, Probation Officer, Guardian Ad Litem). There exists a one-to-many relationship between Case Information and Involved Parties.

3. **Offenses**: This table contains offense-related details for each case, including the sequence count, specific charge, offense classification, offense date, and plea information. Similar to Involved Parties, a single case in Case Information may have multiple offense records.

All data can be linked through the common key, **CaseID**.

Caution: Each case will have one or more entry in the `Involved Parties` and `Offenses`, which might lead to duplicates if you run `left_join()` directly with `Case Information`!

Extraction code and data can be found here.

1.1 Data Dictionary for Case Information

Field Name	Data Type	Description & Source	Additional Details
CaseID	String	Unique identifier assigned to each case.	Common key across all tables.
County	String	County where the case was filed.	Examples: Lancaster, Douglas, etc.
DocketNumber	String	Docket or case number associated with the legal case.	May include alphanumeric characters.
DefendantName	String	Name of the juvenile defendant.	Full name as provided in the case records.
Judge	String	Name of the presiding judge.	Full name as recorded.
Classification	String	Classification of the case (e.g., Status, Misdemeanor).	Based on legal categorization.
FiledDate	Date	Date when the case was filed.	Format: MM/DD/YYYY.
TerminationDate	Date	Date when the case was terminated or closed.	Format: MM/DD/YYYY; may be blank if not terminated.
Year	Integer	Year in which the case was filed.	e.g., 2020, 2023.
YearOfBirth	Integer	Year of birth of the defendant.	e.g., 2020, 2023.
Age	Integer	Age of the juvenile at the time of filing.	e.g., 15, 16.

1.2 Data Dictionary for Involved Parties

Field Name	Data Type	Description & Source	Additional Details
CaseID	String	Unique identifier linking the party to a case.	Common key across all tables.
Role	String	Role of the party in the case.	Examples: Juvenile, Dad, Mom, Probation Officer, Guardian Ad Litem.
Status	String	Current status of the party in the case.	Example: ACTIVE.
Name	String	Name of the involved party.	Full name as provided in the records.
Address	String	Address information of the party.	May include residential or mailing address details.

1.3 Data Dictionary for Offenses

Field Name	Data Type	Description & Source	Additional Details
CaseID	String	Unique identifier linking the offense to a case.	Common key across all tables.
Count	Integer	Sequence number or count of the offense in a case.	Indicates multiple charges per case.
Charge	String	Specific charge or offense committed.	Detailed description of the legal charge.
OffenseClass	String	Classification of the offense (e.g., Class 1 Misdemeanor, Infraction).	Based on legal categorization.
OffenseDate	Date	Date when the offense was committed.	Format: MM/DD/YYYY.
Plea	String	Plea entered by the defendant regarding the offense.	Examples: "Plea Changed to Guilty", "Deny".

1.4 Links to Datasets

Unprocessed Dataset - These are the scraped case dockets (HTML files) directly from NE Justice System.

Processed Dataset:

1. Case Information

2. Involved Parties

3. Offenses

2 Validation Against Reported Data

Updated as of May 6, 2025

As a sanity check, we validate our compiled data against two external sources by comparing statistical patterns and aggregate counts by county and case classification over time.

The two primary sources are:

1. The Easy Access to State and County Juvenile Court Case Counts (EZACO), published by the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP); and

2. The annual Statistical Reports released by the Nebraska Judicial System, published by the Supreme Court of Nebraska (hereafter referred to as SCONE)

These sources are not hosted on a unified platform. Some SCONE reports are accessible via the Nebraska Library Commission, though availability is inconsistent across years.

2.1 EZACO Comparison

EZACO provides juvenile case data for Nebraska from 2011 to 2021. Case types are broadly categorized as Delinquency, Dependency, and Status. For comparability, we aggregate Misdemeanor and Felony classifications from the Nebraska Justice system under the Delinquency category. Note that the counts from 2022-2024 are from SCONE (see next section).

The comparison reveals large discrepancies between EZACO and NE Justice data, particularly for earlier years (e.g., 2010–2012). However, the counts appear to converge somewhat over time. We suspect that EZACO may have overreported
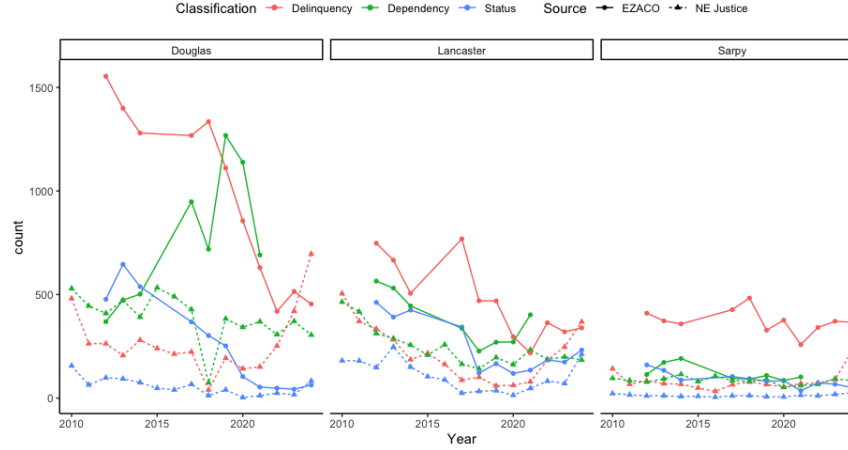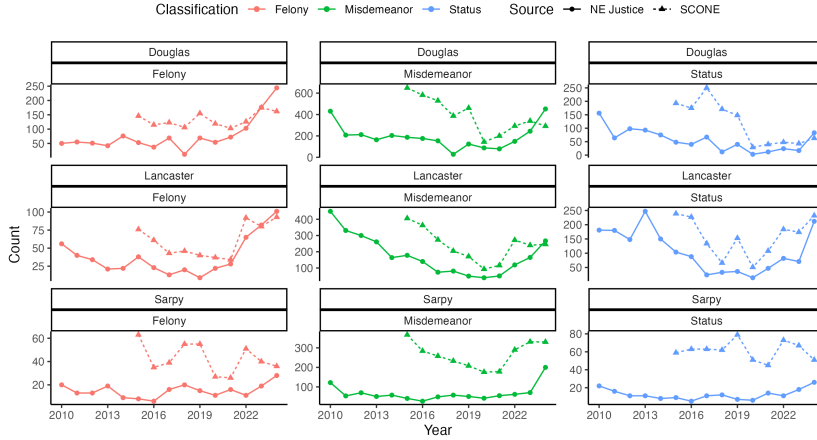
Figure 1: EZACO Counts vs. NE Justice

actual case counts. We hence check against the SCONE data as well, which appears more consistent with the NE Justice scraped data. The convergence of counts over time may be partially explained by the increasing number of sealed juvenile cases.
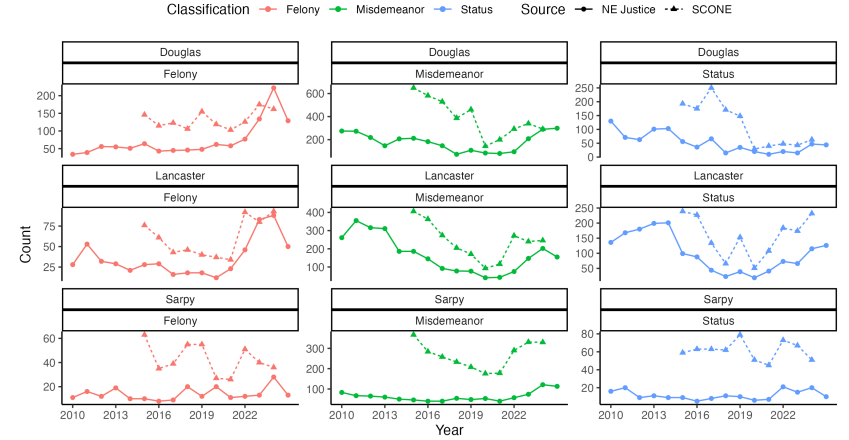
2.2 SCONE Comparison

SCONE data, available from 2015 to 2024, use the same classification system as the NE Justice system. The trends in case counts align closely, suggesting that SCONE is a more reliable benchmark. Again, the observed convergence over time likely reflects the effects of case sealing.

A specific caveat applies to Sarpy County: SCONE reports cases by judicial district. Sarpy County falls within District 2, which also includes Cass County. As a result, case counts reported for District 2 are higher than counts for Sarpy County alone. Lancaster County (District 3) and Douglas County (District 4) are the sole counties within their respective districts,

8

(a) SCONE Counts vs NE Justice

(b) SCONE Counts vs NE Justice (Fiscal Year Adjusted)

Figure 2: Comparison of SCONE counts against NE Justice system with and without fiscal year adjustment.

which explains their more accurate match.

We contacted the Nebraska Department of Justice Administrator and confirmed that juvenile cases are sealed automatically upon case resolution. We are currently submitting a request to obtain data on sealed cases to further improve our coverage and accuracy.

2.3   Case Classification and Counting Procedures

The Nebraska Juvenile Justice System Statistical Annual Reports provide detailed documentation on how juvenile cases are classified, recorded, and reported. This section outlines the criteria used to define case types, the temporal scope for case inclusion, and the principles applied in counting cases.

2.3.1   Case Classification

Cases are categorized into four primary types: *status offenses*, *misdemeanors*, *felonies*, and *traffic offenses*. Status offenses refer to acts that are unlawful solely due to the age of the offender (e.g., truancy), whereas delinquency offenses involve violations that are illegal irrespective of age. Felony and misdemeanor designations adhere to Nebraska's legal classification, and may be prosecuted in adult criminal court or juvenile court.

When a juvenile is charged with multiple offenses, the classification is determined by the most serious offense within the case. As such, each case is counted only once for classification purposes, based on its **highest-severity charge**.

2.3.2   Timing of Case Inclusion

For juvenile court data, cases are included based on the date of **filing** within the calendar year. However, it is noted that petitions filed in the final months of the year may not reach adjudication within the same reporting period. In contrast, adult criminal court data only include cases that have reached sentencing during the calendar year. This ensures consistency in tracking outcomes such as probation, jail, or prison sentences.

2.3.3   Counting Rules and Definitions

Case counts in the reports are case-based rather than person-based. That is, the Nebraska JUSTICE system tracks the progress and activity of individual cases without linking multiple cases to a single juvenile. As a result, when a case involves recidivism (ie. the juvenile commits another offense), there will be two cases involved for the individual. Each case is counted once in the annual statistics. For juvenile court petitions, a case is counted if at least one charge is adjudicated. For cases in adult court,

only the most severe offense is used to classify and count the case.

3   Sealing Process Overview in Nebraska

This dataset currently includes only **non-sealed** juvenile delinquency cases as reported by the Nebraska JUSTICE system. Under Nebraska law (Neb. Rev. Stat. § 43-2,108.01–.05), juvenile records may be sealed either automatically or by request, depending on the nature of the case and its outcome. Below, we summarize the sealing process.

3.1   Automatic Sealing

Juvenile records are **automatically sealed** without the need for a court petition in the following circumstances:

- No petition or complaint was filed;

- Charges were filed but later dismissed;

- The juvenile successfully completed diversion, mediation, or other pretrial rehabilitation programs;

- The juvenile was adjudicated and completed all terms of probation, supervision, or court-ordered restitution.

In such cases, the sealing is executed administratively, and all relevant records (arrest, custody, complaint, disposition, etc.) are removed from public access. The Nebraska Commission on Law Enforcement, Department of Motor Vehicles, and other state agencies are notified and must treat the records as though they never existed. These sealed records are thus **not represented in this dataset**.

3.2 Sealing by Court Motion

If a juvenile's case does not qualify for automatic sealing, a formal motion may be filed by the individual or their guardian once the individual:

- Reaches the age of majority (19 in Nebraska), or

- Waits six months following the closure of the case.

The court evaluates whether the individual has been *satisfactorily rehabilitated* by considering:

- Post-offense behavior,

- Educational and employment history,

- Completion of any court-ordered treatment or rehabilitation.

If sealing is denied, the individual must wait one year before reapplying.