



# Legal Financial Obligations in Washington's Courts

WASHINGTON STATE CENTER FOR COURT RESEARCH



PRELIMINARY REPORT TO THE LEGISLATURE  
DECEMBER 2023

Administrative Office of the Courts

Legal Financial Obligations in  
Washington's Courts:  
Preliminary Report to the  
Legislature

December 2023

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## Background and Introduction

In 2023, a proviso within the state budget bill, Engrossed Second Substitute Senate Bill 5187, provided funding for the Administrative Office of the Courts' Washington State Center for Court Research (WSCCR) to examine the system of legal financial obligations (LFOs) across Washington State courts for the preceding five years. In general, the request was for extensive, detailed information about fees, court costs, fines, and restitution ordered by Washington's trial courts. LFOs were requested to be examined with regard to the amounts assessed, collected, and waived in total (statewide), along with breakouts by age, charge, race, gender, LFO type, and specific court / jurisdiction. The proviso also requested that restitution amounts assessed be analyzed by victim type (natural person, business, state agency, or insurance company). Last, the proviso requested analysis of uncollected LFOs and outstanding LFO debt.

### The Current Study

The current study builds on previous LFO research conducted in Washington State in several ways. First, our study covers the most recent years for which we have complete data (all cases filed 2018 through 2021, allowing for case processing and repayment time). Second, for the final report we will be able, at least for some years, to include data from all of Washington's trial courts (Municipal, District, Superior, or Juvenile Courts). Finally, in the final report we will include more detailed analyses of payments and adjustments made to LFOs across the life of the case.

Given the short timeframe available to complete this work prior to the upcoming legislative session as well as restriction on data availability and quality, we were unable to answer all research questions posed by the Legislature in this preliminary report. As detailed below in the Next Steps section, we will make every effort to address all outstanding questions in the final report, due to be published before July 1, 2024. It is worth noting that record keeping for LFOs in Washington State was designed for specific accounting purposes and to be operational at the level of the individual case rather than for analysis of the type requested at either the court or the state level. Nevertheless, this report provides crucial and timely information on the role of LFOs in the legal process in courts across Washington State in recent years.

### Findings Highlights

The breadth of analysis and the recency of the data analyzed mean that noteworthy findings will likely emerge. An initial review suggests the following:

- The percentage of cases with LFOs decreased through 2015 in juvenile courts, and after 2018 in CLJ and adult superior court cases.
- Between January 2018 and December 2021, LFOs were imposed in 61% of CLJ cases, 77% of adult superior court cases, and 31% of juvenile court cases.

- Given a case filing, the chances of LFO imposition depended on multiple factors including the court of filing, the charges filed, and court-user characteristics including race and ethnicity, gender and age.
- Total monthly amounts imposed decreased by 72% in CLJs, and by 79% in both adult superior courts and juvenile courts between January 2018 and December 2021.
- Across the study period, average amounts ordered were \$875 in CLJ cases, \$1,641 in adult superior court cases, and \$550 in juvenile court cases.
- Like the probability of an LFO being assessed, amounts ordered depended on the court of filing, the charges filed, and court-user characteristics.
- Unpaid LFO debt from cases filed between January 2018 and December 2021 totaled to \$71 million in CLJ cases, \$190 million in adult superior court cases and \$8 million in juvenile court cases as of June 2023.

## Methods

### Data and Analyses

To provide at least some information on the use of LFOs in each trial court across the state of Washington, data were drawn from several sources. The vast majority of trial courts automatically share LFO data with the Administrative Office of the Courts (AOC). As researchers housed within AOC, we have access to all LFO data held by the AOC as well as case-level and person-level data for all courts statewide.

Four courts (King County Superior, King County District, Seattle Municipal, and Spokane Municipal) use their own internal data management system to track LFOs. These four courts were responsive to our requests and provided LFO data as well as court case numbers that we used to link to both case-level and person-level data. The time frames of data availability varied by data source, based on a number of factors. For the current report, all analyses conducted with cases filed 2018 through 2021 include all courts except Spokane Municipal.<sup>1</sup> In the Results section below we note when data from other courts were excluded from the analyses due to issues with availability or compatibility. The primary sample for this study consists of cases filed<sup>2</sup> in Washington’s trial courts between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. This timeframe allows for all cases to have at least 18 months of processing time to assess for the imposition of an LFO, and at least an additional 12 months to assess for payments made.

### Measures

#### Court Level/Type

All of the results presented below are disaggregated by the court level or type. There are three types of courts that handle cases involving law-violating behavior in Washington. There are

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<sup>1</sup> In the final report we plan to include Spokane Municipal Court data.

<sup>2</sup> The sample excludes cases in which the most serious offense was an infraction, and in the case of Juvenile Court, a non-offender matter.

courts of limited jurisdiction (CLJs), which are either county-level District Courts or city-level Municipal Courts; the second court type encompasses Washington’s county-level, general jurisdiction Superior Courts; the third court type is Washington’s Juvenile Courts, which handle matters that would be crimes for adults. Juvenile Courts are divisions within Superior Courts. In some instances, a case involving a youth might be heard in a CLJ or an adult Superior Court. All analyses are conducted at the court level, regardless of the age of the defendant. For example, the case of a juvenile who is tried as an adult due to the seriousness of their crime and subsequently incurs LFOs would be counted in the adult Superior Court category.

## LFO Type

As noted by Delostrinos, Bellmer, and McAllister (2022), there are four general types of LFOs imposed in Washington State: fees, costs, fines, and restitution. Fees are imposed to pay for services that are provided by the court to the defendant. Similar to fees, costs are charged to cover court costs tied to the defendant’s arrest and prosecution. Fines are assessed as punishment. Finally, restitution is charged to compensate crime victims. This preliminary report does not present the results disaggregated by LFO type, though the final report will do so.

## Primary Offense

In the data files analyzed for this report, LFOs are tied to cases, not specific charges. Thus, in instances where a single case has several attached charges, it can be difficult or impossible to determine to which charge the imposed LFO is tied. For the current study, we focus on LFOs in relation to primary offenses, defined as the most serious convicted charge for cases with a conviction and as the most serious charge filed in cases with LFOs but no conviction recorded.

## Demographic Characteristics

All of the results below are disaggregated by three demographic factors: gender, age, and race/ethnicity. All statewide data management systems used in the courts record gender as a binary indicator, male or female. Age is calculated at the time the court case was filed. Washington State court race data is broken into two categories, race and ethnicity. Racial categories consist of:

- American Indian or Alaska Native
- Asian
- Black/African-American
- Multiracial
- Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
- Other
- Refused
- Unknown/Missing
- White

Ethnicity can be:

- Latino

- Non-Latino
- Refused
- Unknown/Missing.

The extent to which this information comes from self-reports from individuals, from transcription of other justice system agencies' recording of self-identification, or from law enforcement or court staff impression of the individual's race and ethnicity is not currently known. For the current study, race and ethnicity were combined such that people with Latino ethnicity were described as Latino/Hispanic regardless of race. Additionally, Asian and Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander were combined into the single category of Asian/Pacific Islander. People whose race and ethnicity were otherwise unknown or missing were included in analyses, but not shown in charts specifically describing variation across race and ethnicity.

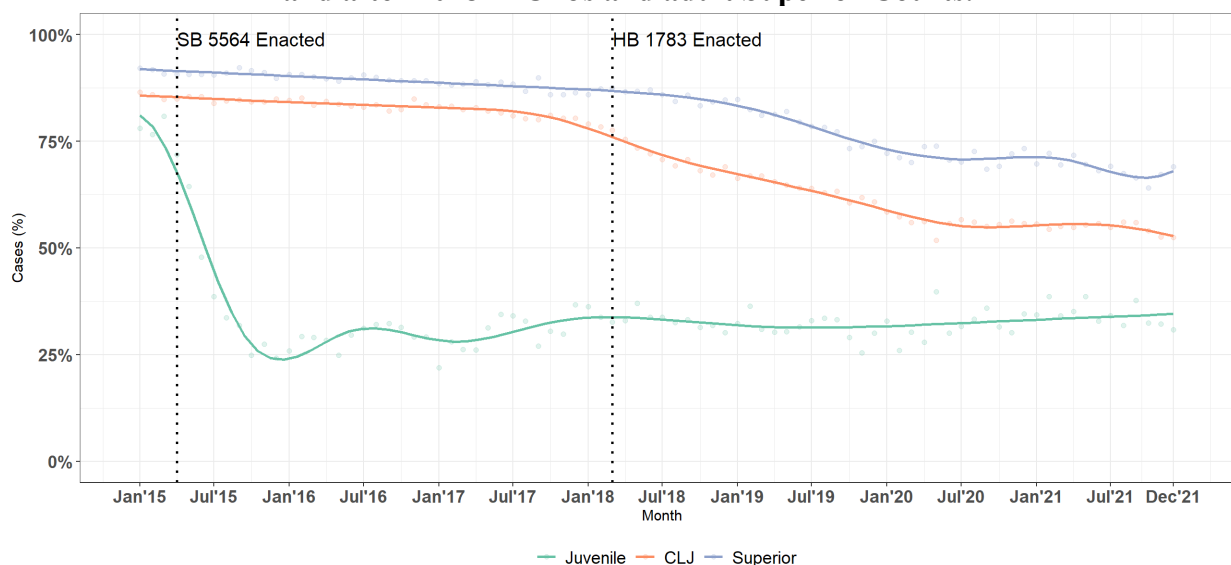


# Results

## Historical Trends in LFO Imposition

To provide historical context for this study, which analyzes cases filed from 2018 onwards, we examined the likelihood of an LFO for eligible cases<sup>3</sup> filed between January 1, 2015 and December 31, 2021. Data from King County Superior Court, King County District Court, Seattle Municipal Court, and Spokane Municipal Court are excluded from these descriptions of historical context. Of note, State Senate Bill 5564 was enacted in 2015 and State House Bill 1783 was enacted in 2018, both of which were intended to reduce the likelihood of LFO imposition and/or reduce the amount owed in consideration of individual circumstances. Figure 1 shows the results from these analyses, disaggregated by court type. Among eligible cases filed in early 2015, the vast majority resulted in the imposition of an LFO across all three court types. The likelihood of an LFO decreased steadily over time for CLJs and adult Superior Courts. There was a sharp decrease across 2015 in the likelihood of an LFO for eligible Juvenile Court cases.

**Figure 1. The percentage of cases with LFOs decreased through 2015 in Juvenile Courts, and after 2018 in CLJs and adult Superior Courts.**



## Mapping the LFO Process for Cases Filed 2018 Onward

### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

<sup>3</sup> Eligibility was determined in reference to dispositions associated with imposition of LFOs. This included all cases with a guilty finding and a subset of cases that were dismissed or only filed with increased likelihood of LFO imposition.

Figure 2 shows the process of LFO imposition in CLJs for LFO-eligible cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021.<sup>4</sup> Across the four years, about 61% of LFO-eligible cases resulted in the imposition of an LFO, while about 39% did not result in an LFO. There were many paths a case could take that lead to an LFO. The most common path, leading to approximately two of every three accounts receivable, was through a conviction and sentence, with, in some instances, charges being amended along the way. In 20% of cases, however, (approximately one-third of accounts receivable), LFOs were imposed after filing with no indication of adjudication given the data.

**Figure 2. LFOs were imposed in 61% of CLJ cases, most often following conviction.**

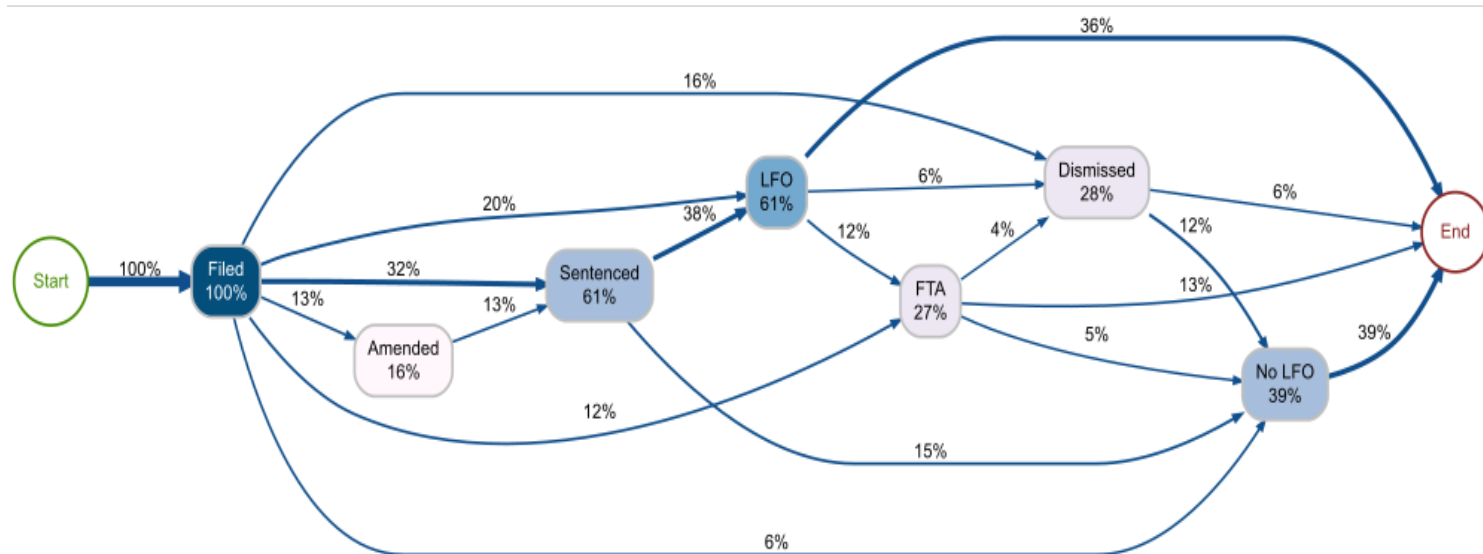
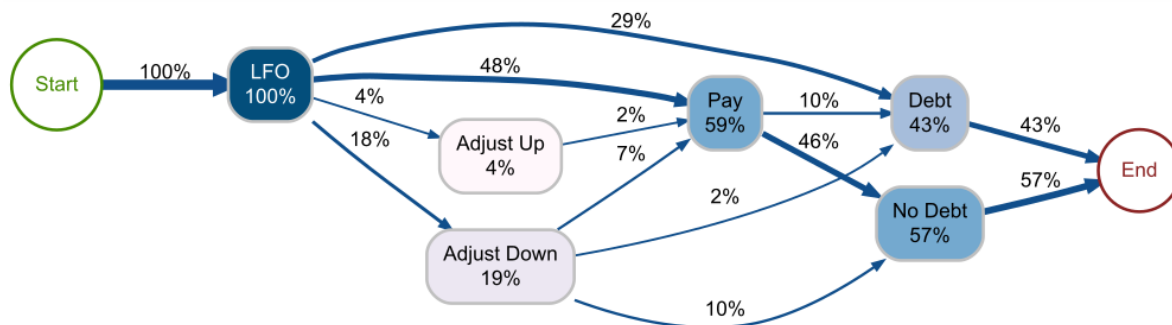


Figure 3 shows the process once an LFO was imposed for CLJ cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. After a minimum of 30 months following the filing of the case, in approximately 59% of the cases the court user had made at least one payment. Ultimately, 43% of cases carried outstanding debt at the end of the study period. About 57% of cases carried no debt, as a result of payments made by the court user and/or adjustments made by the court.

<sup>4</sup> Analyses exclude data from Spokane Municipal Court.

**Figure 3. In all CLJ cases filed 2018-2021 leading to an LFO, 43% had unpaid debt as of July 2023.**



Adult Superior Courts

Figure 4 shows the process of LFO imposition in adult Superior Courts for LFO-eligible cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. Nearly 80% of cases led to an LFO, most often following a guilty finding on amended charges. Of the 23% of cases filed with no LFOs, approximately one-third involved warrant issuance for failure to appear (FTA).

**Figure 4. LFOs were imposed in 77% of adult Superior Court cases, most often after a guilty finding on amended charges. Nearly one in three non-LFO cases followed a failure to appear.**

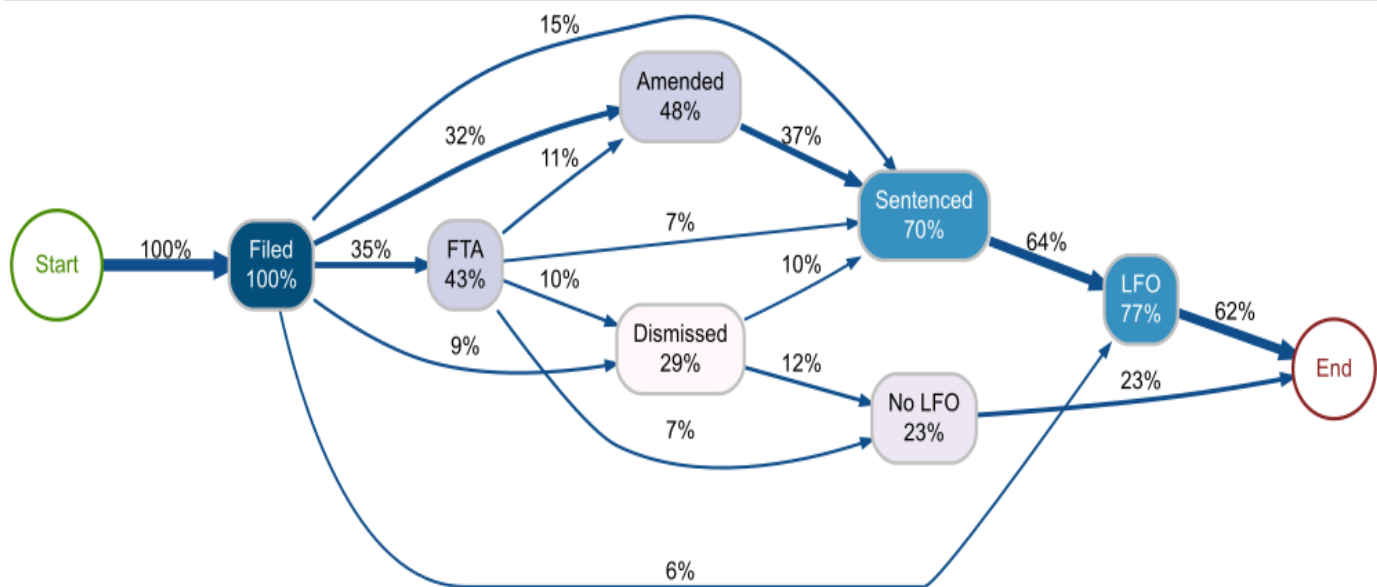
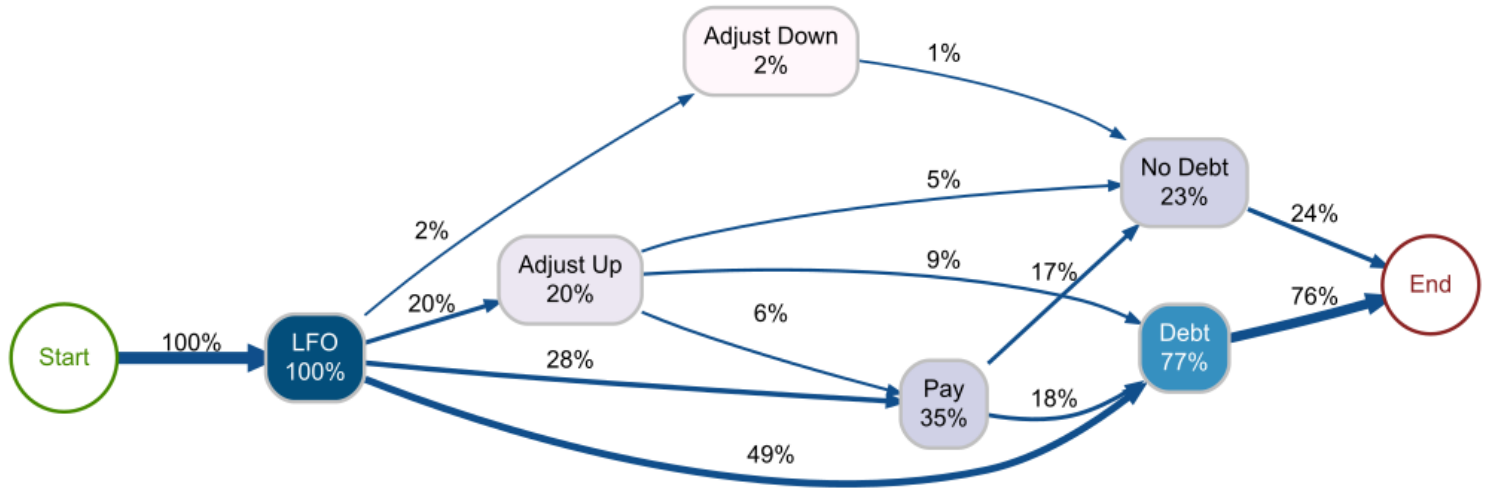


Figure 5 shows the process once an LFO was imposed for adult Superior Court cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. Given an LFO, three out of four cases filed in superior courts since 2018 had unpaid debt as of July 2023.

**Figure 5. Payments were made in 35% of superior court cases with an LFO filed since 2018; 77% had unpaid debt as of July 2023.**



### Juvenile Courts

Figure 6 shows the process of LFO imposition in Juvenile Courts for LFO-eligible cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. LFOs were imposed in nearly one in three juvenile cases (31%), most often subsequent to sentencing. Approximately one in five LFOs were imposed after filing with no additional indication of adjudication given the data.

**Figure 6. LFOs were imposed in 31% of juvenile cases, most often following conviction.**

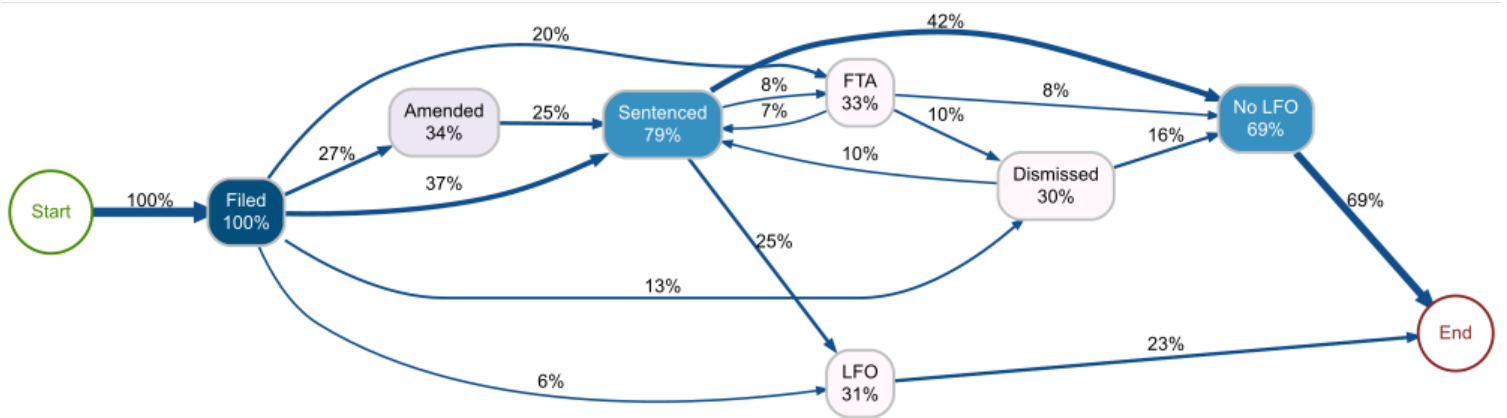
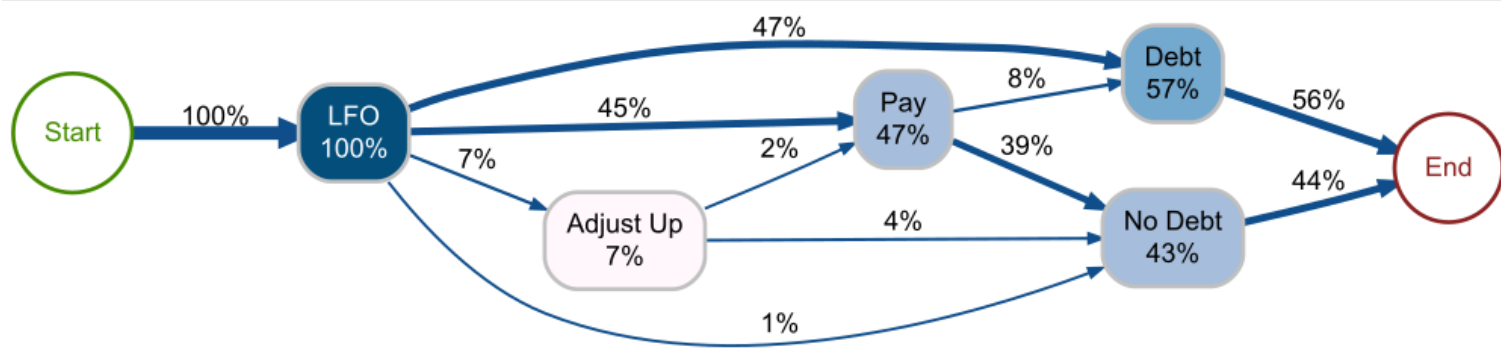


Figure 7 shows the process once an LFO was imposed for Juvenile Court cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. Payments were made in nearly half of cases with an LFO (47%); however, 57% had some amount of unpaid debt as of July 2023.

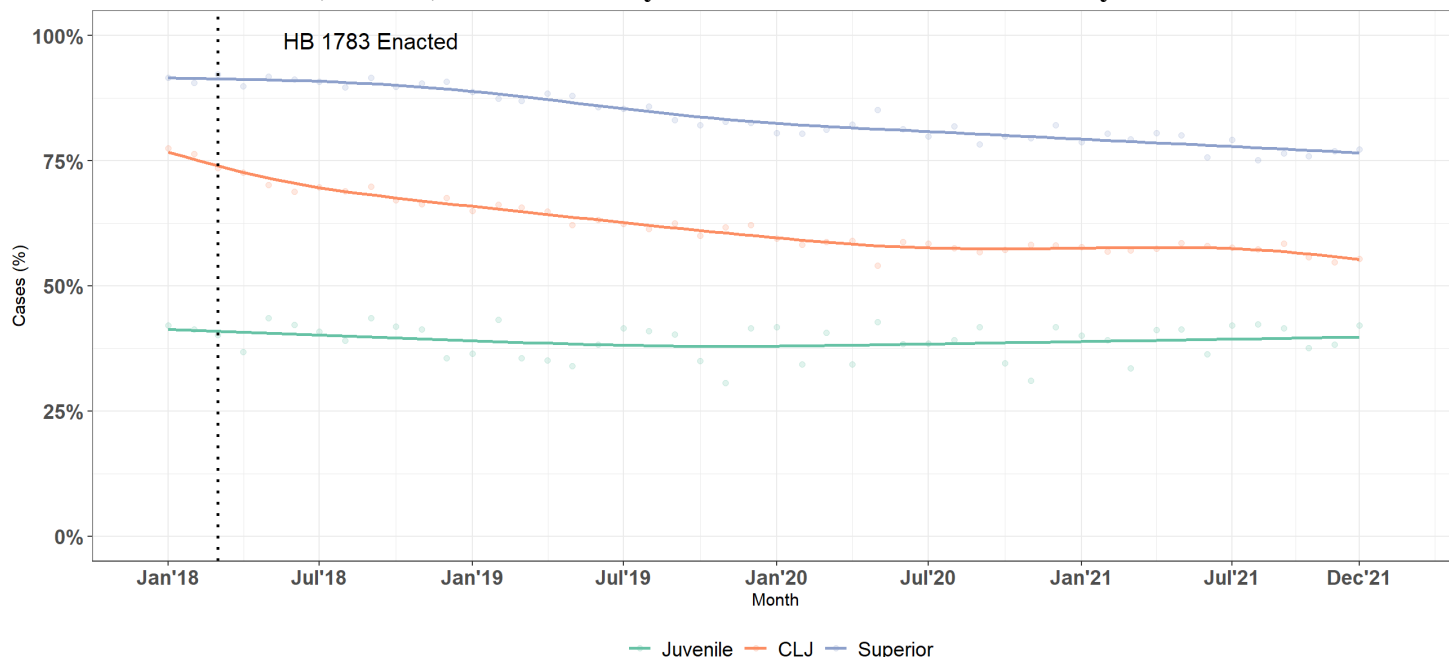
**Figure 7. Of juvenile cases with an LFO, 57% had unpaid debt as of July 2023.**



## Probability of LFO Imposition by Time

As noted above in the LFO Process section, across the study period, the overall percentage of eligible cases in which an LFO was imposed was as follows: 61% for CLJs; 77% for adult Superior Courts; and 31% for Juvenile Courts. For CLJs and adult Superior Courts, the probability of an LFO imposition decreased over the study period, while the probability remained fairly stable for Juvenile Courts, as show in Figure 8.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 8. The percentage of cases with LFOs has decreased in CLJs, and adult Superior Courts, overall, and held steady in Juvenile Courts since January 2018.**



<sup>5</sup> Note that the results in Figure 8 differ from those in Figure 1 because Figure 1 excludes data from King County Superior Court, King County District Court, and Seattle Municipal Court, whereas Figure 8 does not. Both figures exclude data from Spokane Municipal Court.

## Probability of LFO Imposition by Jurisdiction

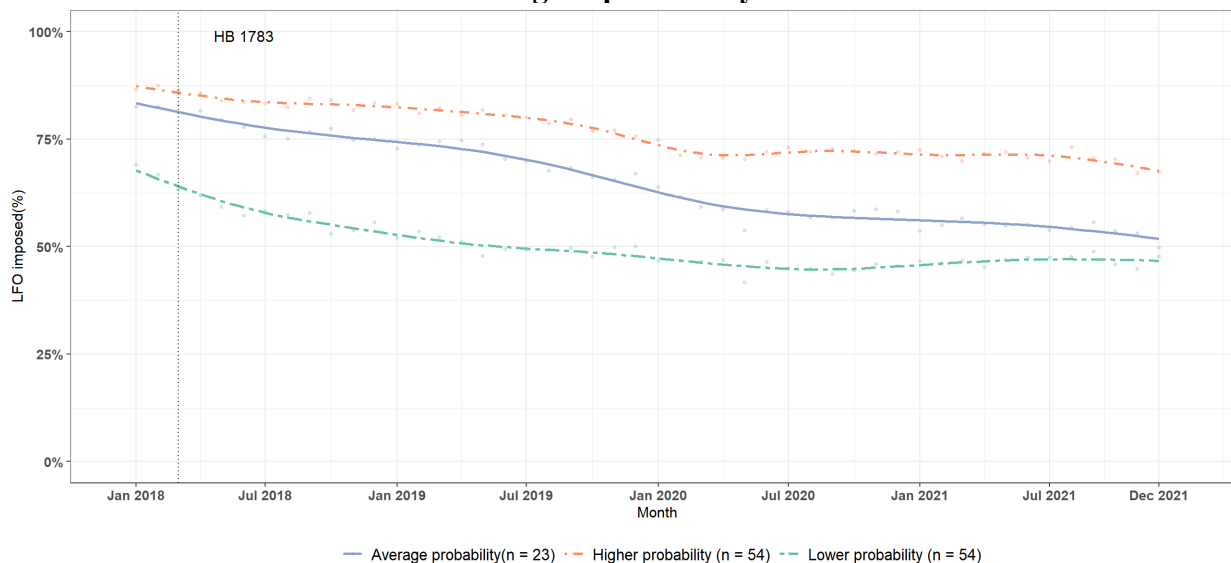
### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

While the overall percentage of eligible CLJ cases in which an LFO was imposed was 61% during the study period, there was variability across jurisdictions. Figure 9a shows that 18% of courts (n=23, represented by the blue line) had an overall probability of LFO imposition that did not differ significantly from the statewide CLJ probability. About 41% of courts (n=54, represented by the orange line) had an overall probability across the study period that was significantly higher than the statewide probability. The final 41% of courts (n=54, represented by the green line) had an overall probability across the study period that was significantly lower than the statewide probability for CLJs. For illustrative purposes, 13 courts were chosen at random from each of these three groups and their respective overall probabilities of LFO imposition are displayed in Figure 9b.

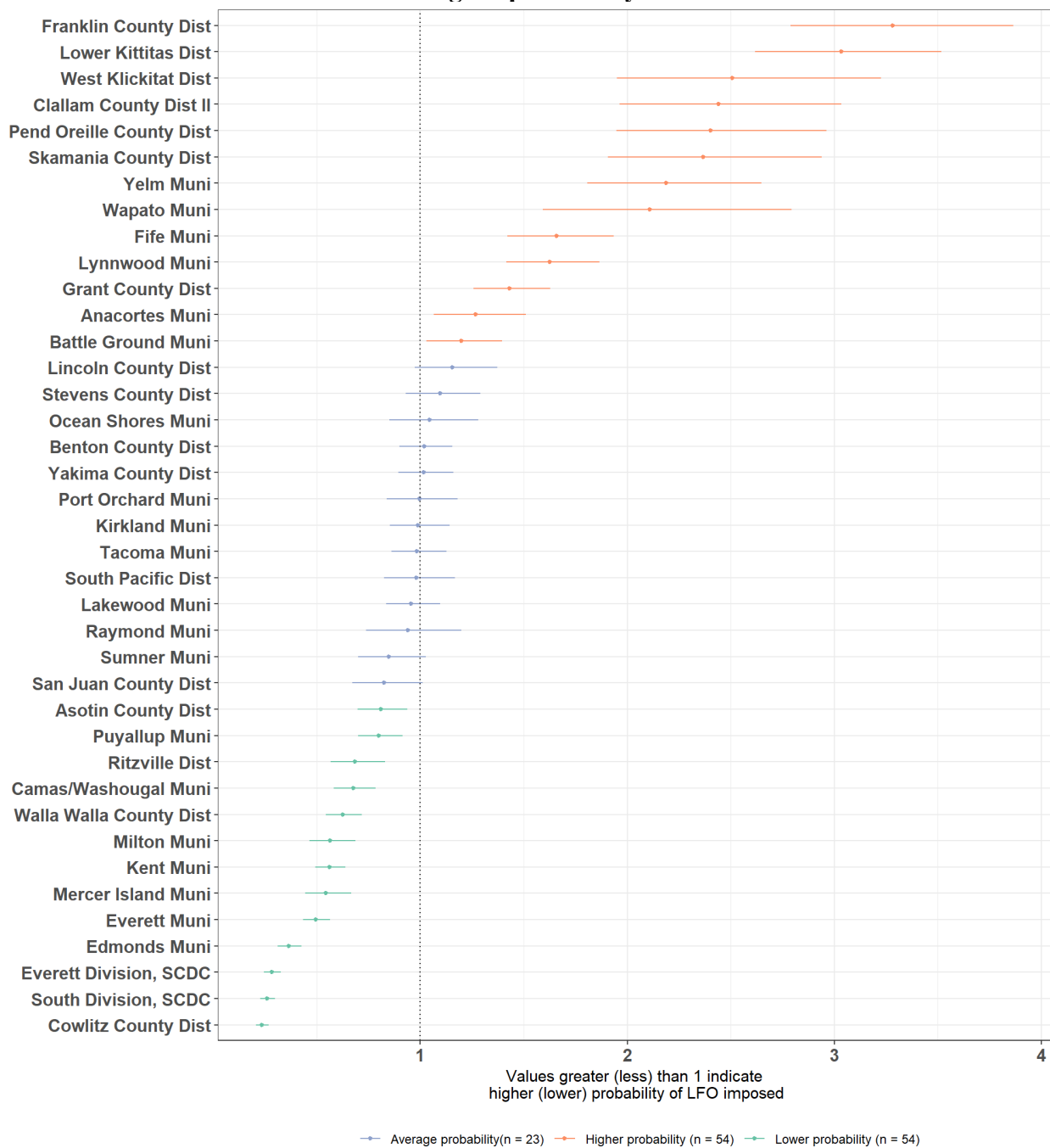
Average probability of LFOs across CLJ cases included:

- Higher probability courts (n = 54): **78%** of cases had an LFO
- Average probability courts (n = 23): **67%** of cases had an LFO
- Lower probability courts (n = 54): **51%** of cases had an LFO

**Figure 9a. Chances of an LFO vary across CLJs, from 51% in lower probability courts to 78% in higher probability courts.**



**Figure 9b. Chances of an LFO vary across CLJs, from 51% in lower probability courts to 78% in higher probability courts.**





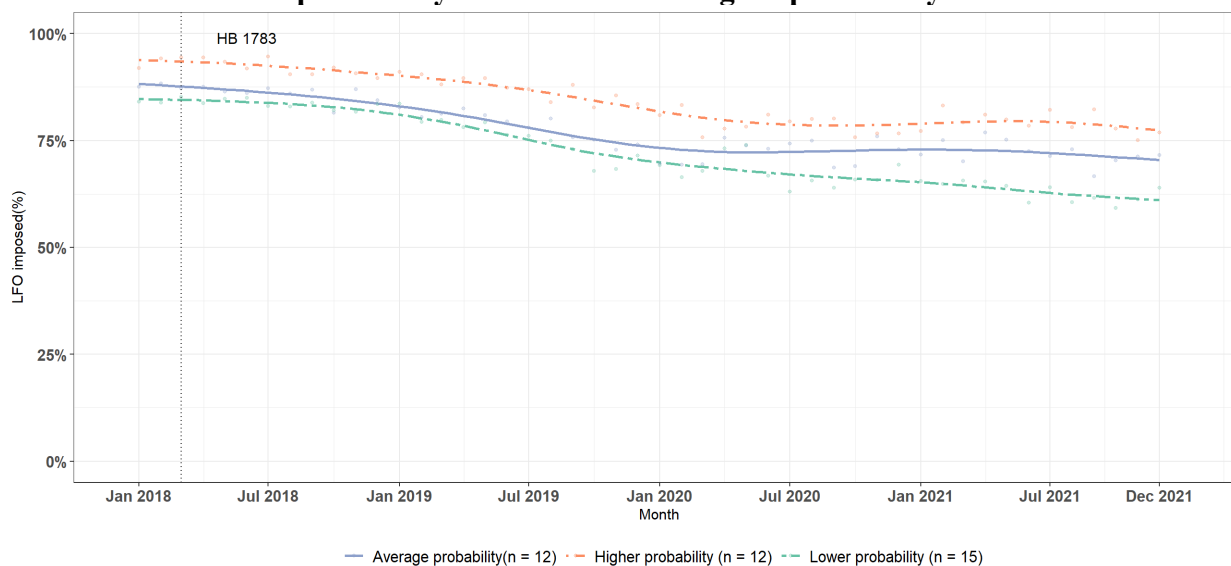
## Adult Superior Courts

While the overall percentage of eligible adult Superior Court cases in which an LFO was imposed was 77% during the study period, there was also variability across jurisdictions. Figure 10a shows that about 31% of counties (n=12) had a probability of LFO imposition that was not significantly different from the statewide adult Superior Court probability. About 31% of counties (n=12) had a probability that was significantly higher than the statewide adult Superior Court probability. The final 38% of counties (n=15) had a probability that was significantly lower than the statewide adult Superior Court probability of LFO imposition across the study period. The overall probabilities of LFO imposition for all counties are displayed in Figure 10b.

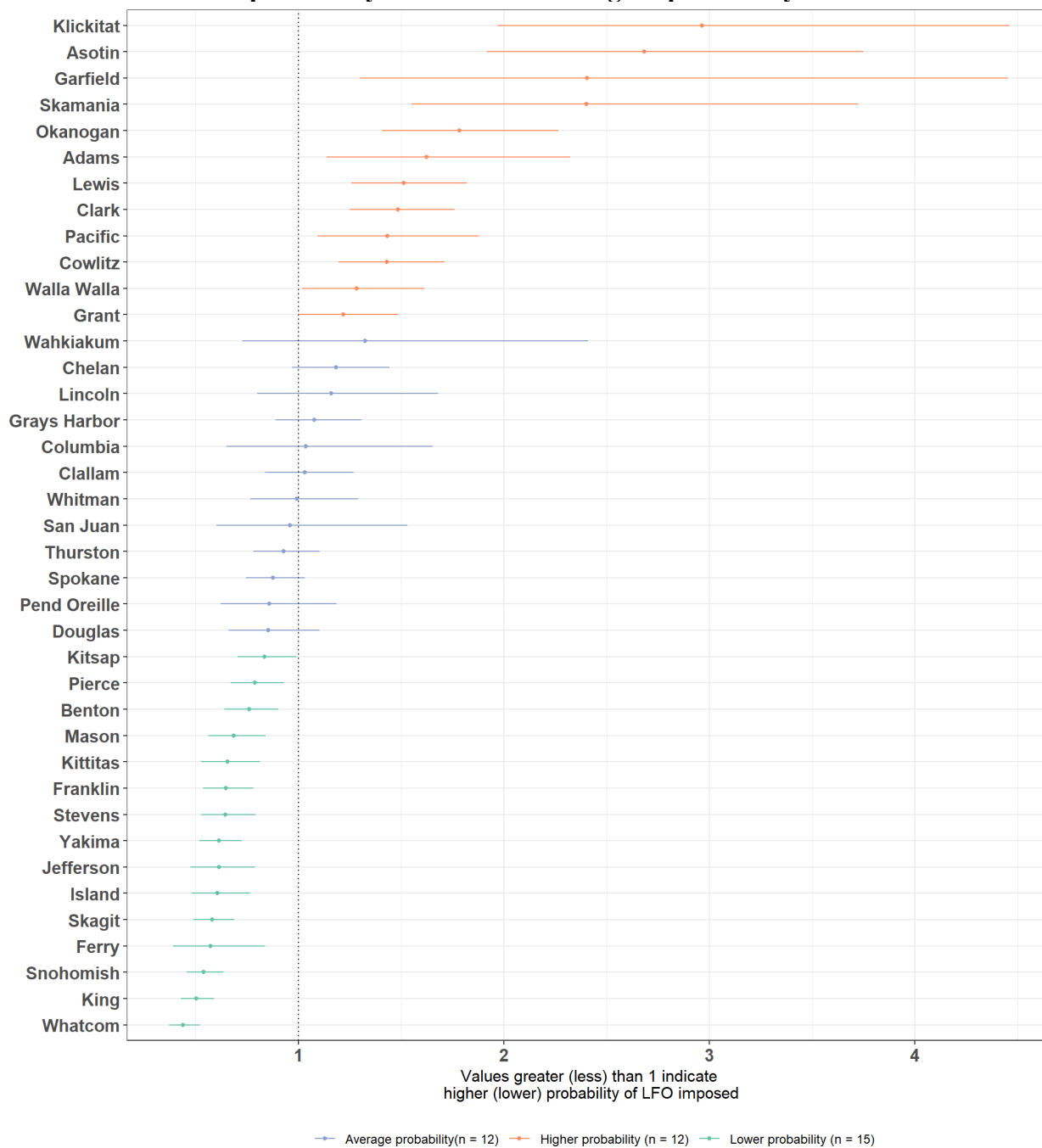
Average probability of LFOs across adult superior court cases included:

- Higher probability courts (n = 12): **85%** of cases had an LFO
- Average probability courts (n = 12): **78%** of cases had an LFO
- Lower probability courts (n = 15): **74%** of cases had an LFO

**Figure 10a. Chances of an LFO varied across adult superior court cases, from 74% in lower probability courts to 85% in higher probability courts.**



**Figure 10b. Chances of an LFO varied across adult superior court cases, from 74% in lower probability courts to 85% in higher probability courts.**



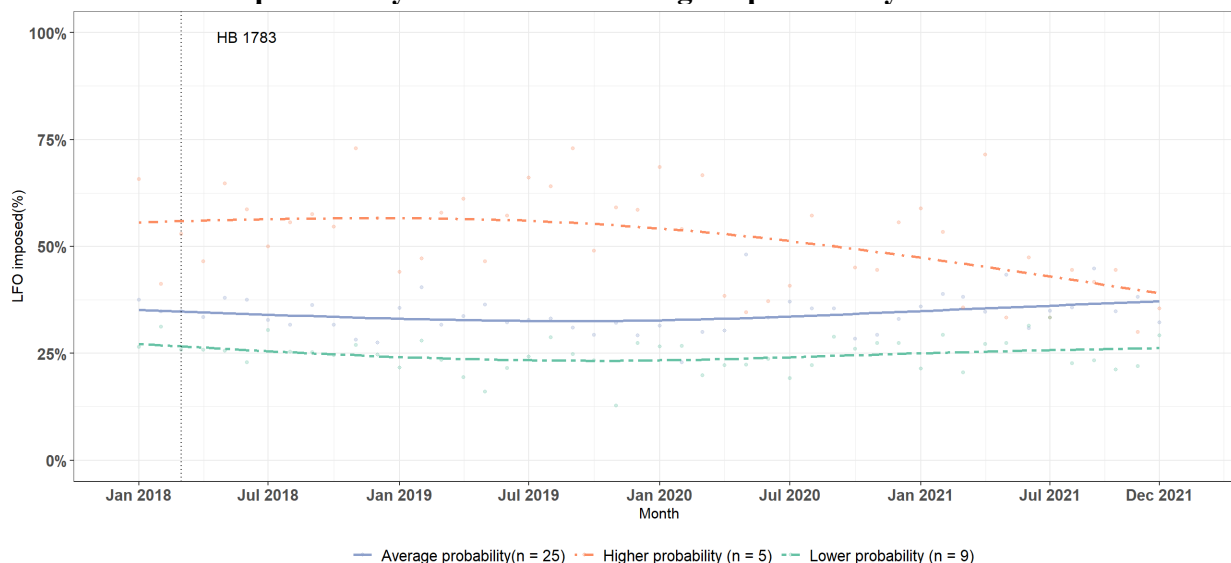
## Juvenile Courts

While the overall percentage of eligible Juvenile Court cases in which an LFO was imposed was 31% during the study period, there was also variability across jurisdictions. Figure 11a shows that about 64% of counties ( $n=25$ ) had a probability of LFO imposition that was not significantly different from the statewide Juvenile Court probability. About 13% of counties ( $n=5$ ) had a probability that was significantly higher than the statewide Juvenile Court probability. However, note that that for cases filed at the end of 2021, the probability of an LFO imposition in these counties had dropped nearly to the statewide level. The final 23% of counties ( $n=9$ ) had a probability that was significantly lower than the statewide Juvenile Court probability of LFO imposition across the study period. The overall probabilities of LFO imposition for all counties are displayed in of Figure 11b.

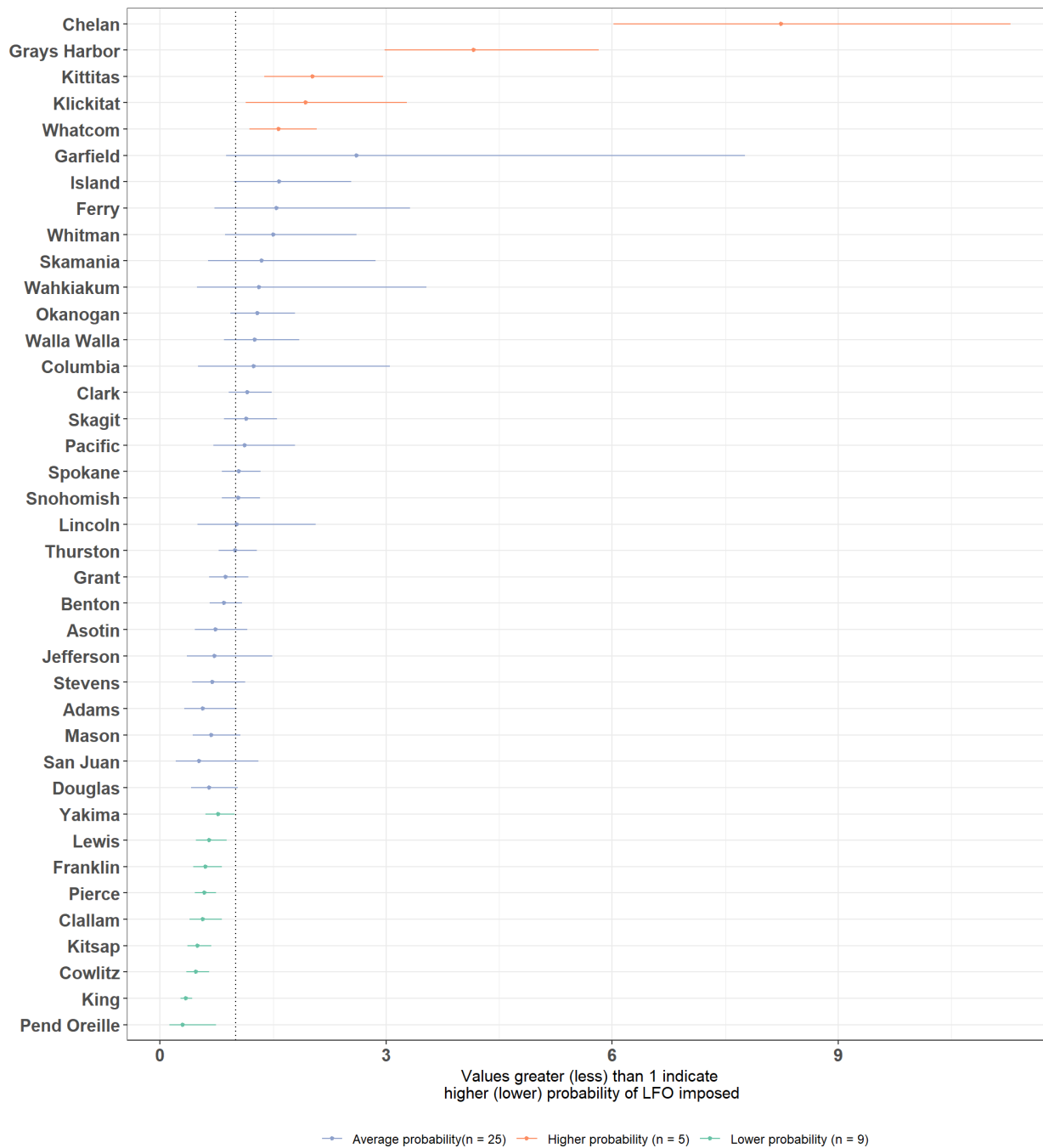
Average probability of LFOs across juvenile court cases included:

- Higher probability courts ( $n = 5$ ): **53%** of cases had an LFO
- Average probability courts ( $n = 25$ ): **34%** of cases had an LFO
- Lower probability courts ( $n = 9$ ): **25%** of cases had an LFO

**Figure 11a. Chances of an LFO varied across Juvenile Court cases, from 25% in lower probability courts to 53% in higher probability courts.**



**Figure 11b. Chances of an LFO varied across juvenile court cases, from 25% in lower probability courts to 53% in higher probability courts.**

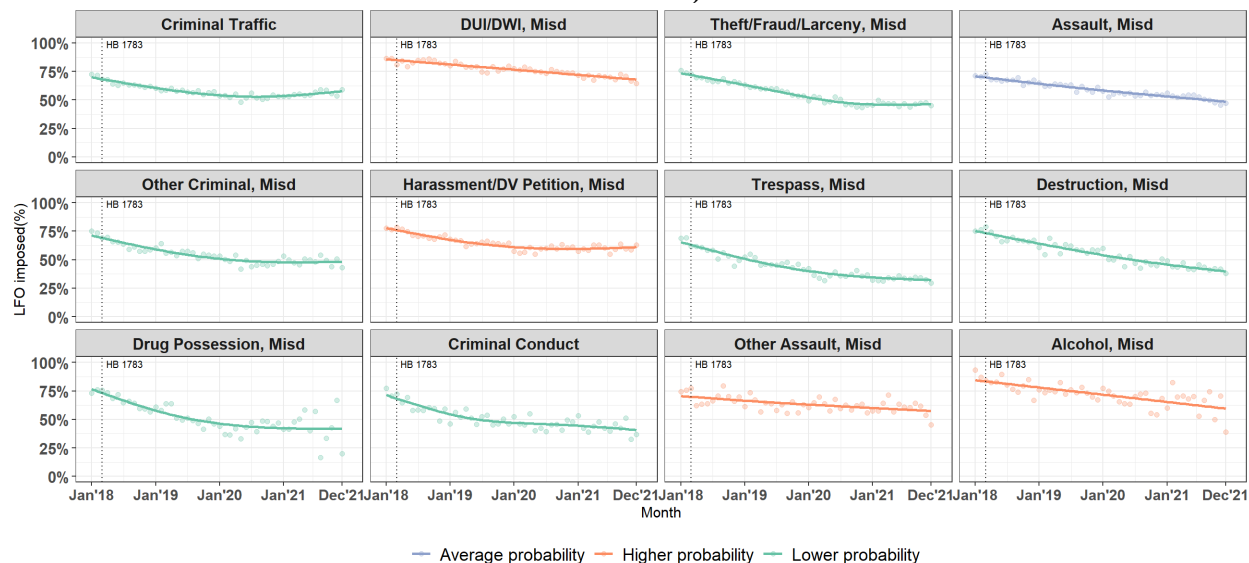


## Probability of LFO Imposition by Offense Type

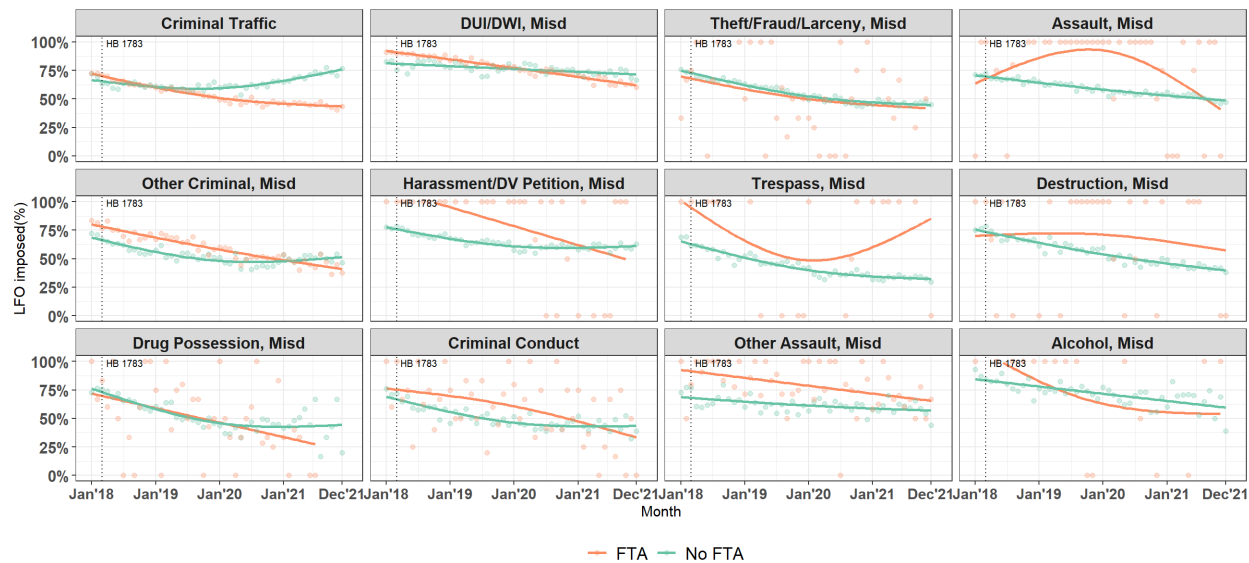
### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

The percentage of eligible CLJ cases resulting in an LFO varied by the primary offense tied to the case. Figure 12 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible CLJ cases during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). These 12 primary offense types represent 96% of LFO-eligible cases filed in CLJs during the study period. There were three offense types in which the overall percentage of cases that resulted in an LFO did not differ significantly from the statewide percentage: misdemeanor theft/fraud/larceny, misdemeanor assault, and misdemeanor destruction. Across the study period, these offense types had a probability of LFO position around 61%, though there was variability over time. Four offense types were significantly more likely to result in an LFO and five offense types were significantly less likely to result in an LFO. As noted in the CLJ LFO process map, the presence of an FTA during the case (27% of cases) is also associated with the likelihood of an LFO imposition. Figure 13 shows the difference in the probability of an LFO imposition for each offense type by FTA status.

**Figure 12. Chances of an LFO varied in CLJ cases, with lower probability charges (e.g., misdemeanor theft/fraud/larceny) and higher probability charges (e.g., misdemeanor DUI/DWI)**



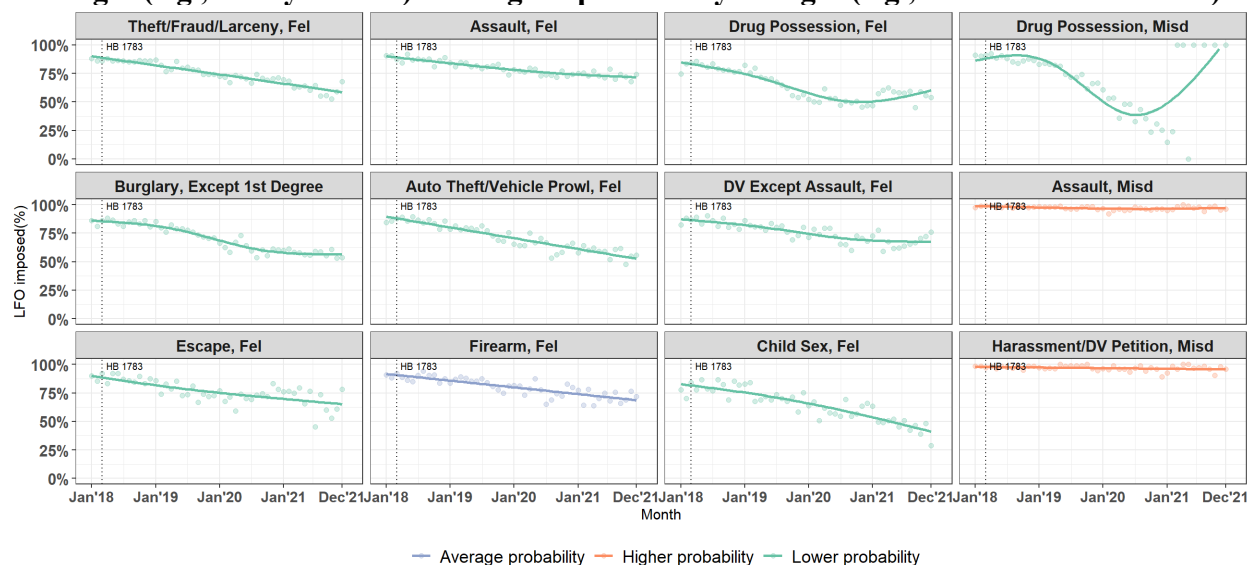
**Figure 13. Failures to appear in CLJs were frequently associated with higher probability of LFOs.**



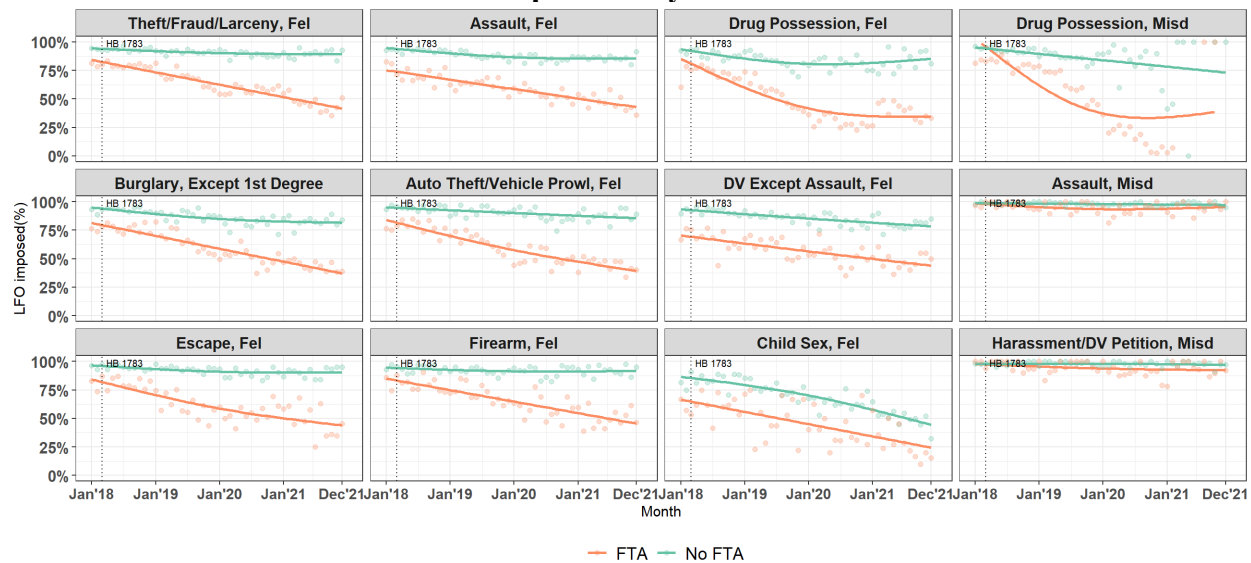
## Adult Superior Courts

The percentage of eligible adult Superior Court cases resulting in an LFO also varied by the primary offense tied to the case. Figure 14 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases in adult Superior Courts during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). These 12 primary offense types represent 80% of LFO-eligible cases filed in adult Superior Courts during the study period. There was one offense type in which the overall probability of an LFO did not differ significantly from the statewide probability: felony firearm possession. Two offense types were significantly more likely to result in an LFO and nine offense types were significantly less likely to result in an LFO relative to the overall probability. As noted in the adult Superior Court LFO process map, the presence of an FTA during the case (43% of cases) is also associated with the likelihood of an LFO imposition. Figure 15 shows the difference in the probability of an LFO imposition for each offense type by FTA status.

**Figure 14. Chances of an LFO varied in adult superior court cases, with lower probability charges (e.g., felony assault) and higher probability charges (e.g., misdemeanor assault).**



**Figure 15. Failures to appear in adult Superior Court cases were frequently associated with lower probability of LFOs.**

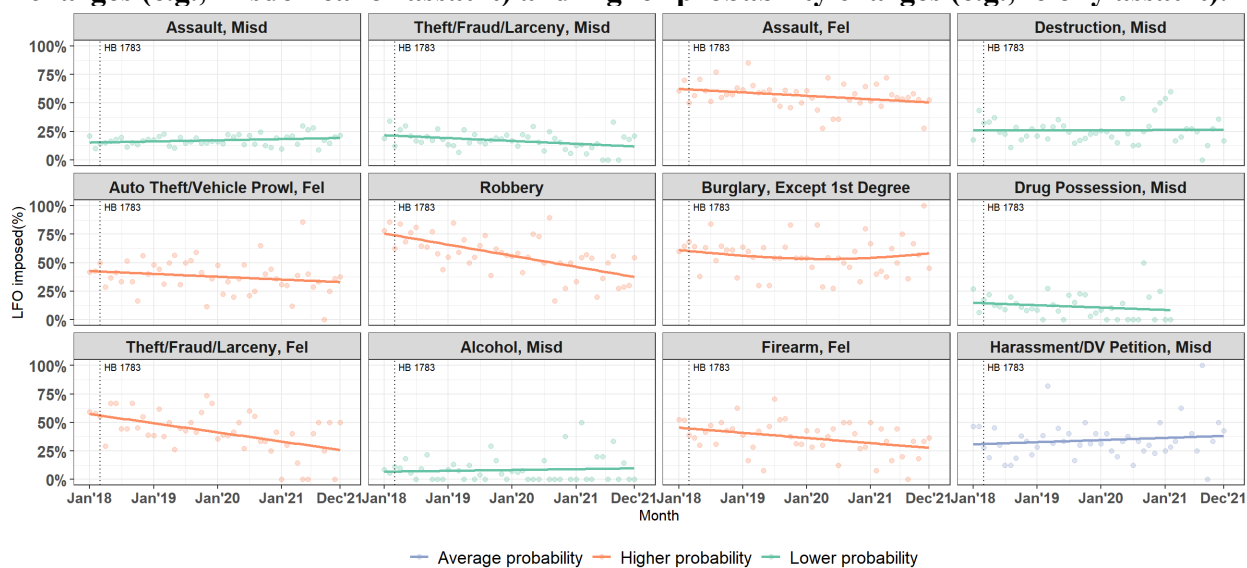




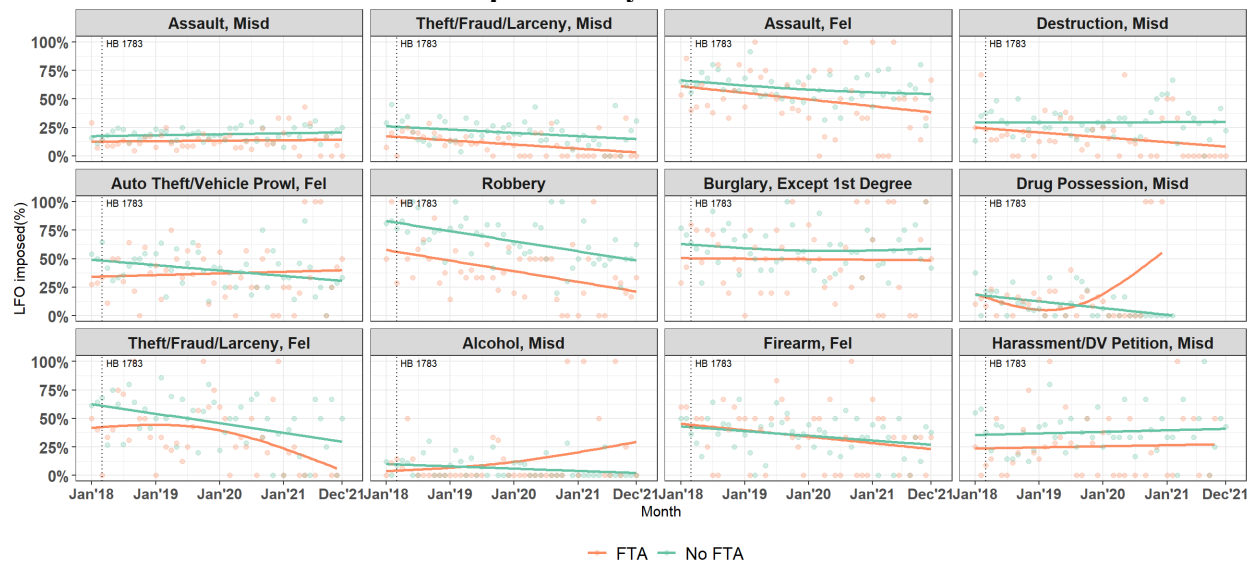
## Juvenile Courts

The percentage of eligible Juvenile Court cases resulting in an LFO also varied by the primary offense tied to the case. Figure 16 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases in Juvenile Courts during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). These 12 primary offense types represent 77% of LFO-eligible cases filed in Juvenile Courts during the study period. There was one offense type in which the overall probability of an LFO did not differ significantly from the statewide probability: misdemeanor harassment/protection order violation. Across the study period, this offense types had a probability of LFO position around 31%, with little variability over time. Six offense types were significantly more likely to result in an LFO and five offense types were significantly less likely to result in an LFO. As noted in the Juvenile Court LFO process map, the presence of an FTA during the case (33% of cases) is also associated with the likelihood of an LFO imposition. Figure 17 shows the difference in the probability of an LFO imposition for each offense type by FTA status.

**Figure 16. Chances of an LFO varied in Juvenile Court cases, with lower probability charges (e.g., misdemeanor assault) and higher probability charges (e.g., felony assault).**



**Figure 17. Failures to appear in Juvenile Court cases were frequently associated with lower probability of LFOs.**

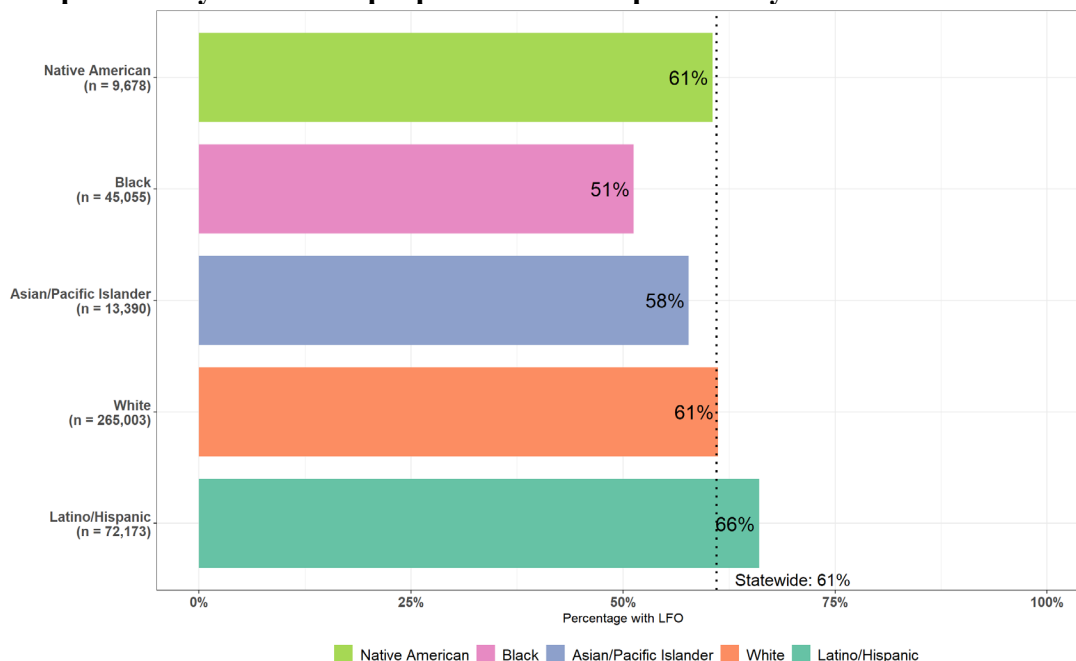


## Probability of LFO Imposition by Demographic Characteristics

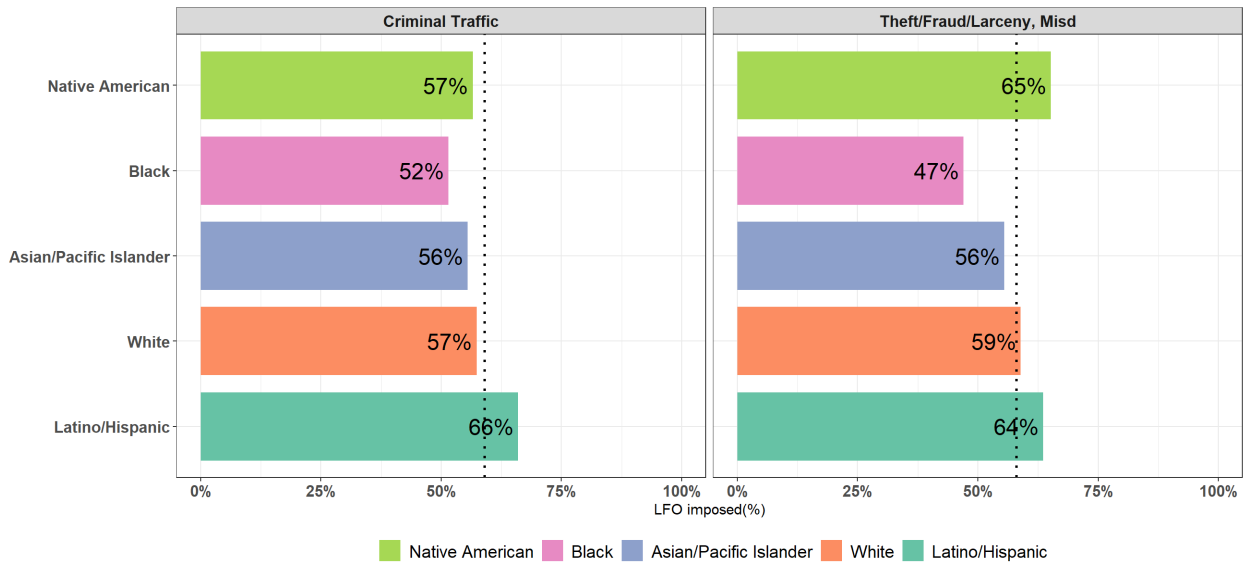
### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

Figure 18 shows the percentage of LFO-eligible CLJ cases filed during the study period that resulted in an LFO, disaggregated by the court user’s race/ethnicity. Court cases involving Latino/Hispanic individuals had the highest rate of LFO imposition, and this was the only group with a percentage higher than the statewide rate (61%). However, these patterns were not consistent across primary offense types. For illustrative purposes, Figure 19 shows two offense types. For cases where the primary offense was criminal traffic, the overall pattern holds, with cases involving Latino/Hispanic individuals showing the highest rate of LFO imposition. For cases where the primary offense was misdemeanor theft/fraud/larceny, Latino/Hispanic and Native American court users had the highest rates of LFO imposition. The probability of an LFO imposition also varied by age: those aged 25 and under had the highest probability (see Figure 20). Cases involving males and females showed about equal chances of receiving an LFO imposition in CLJs (see Figure 21).

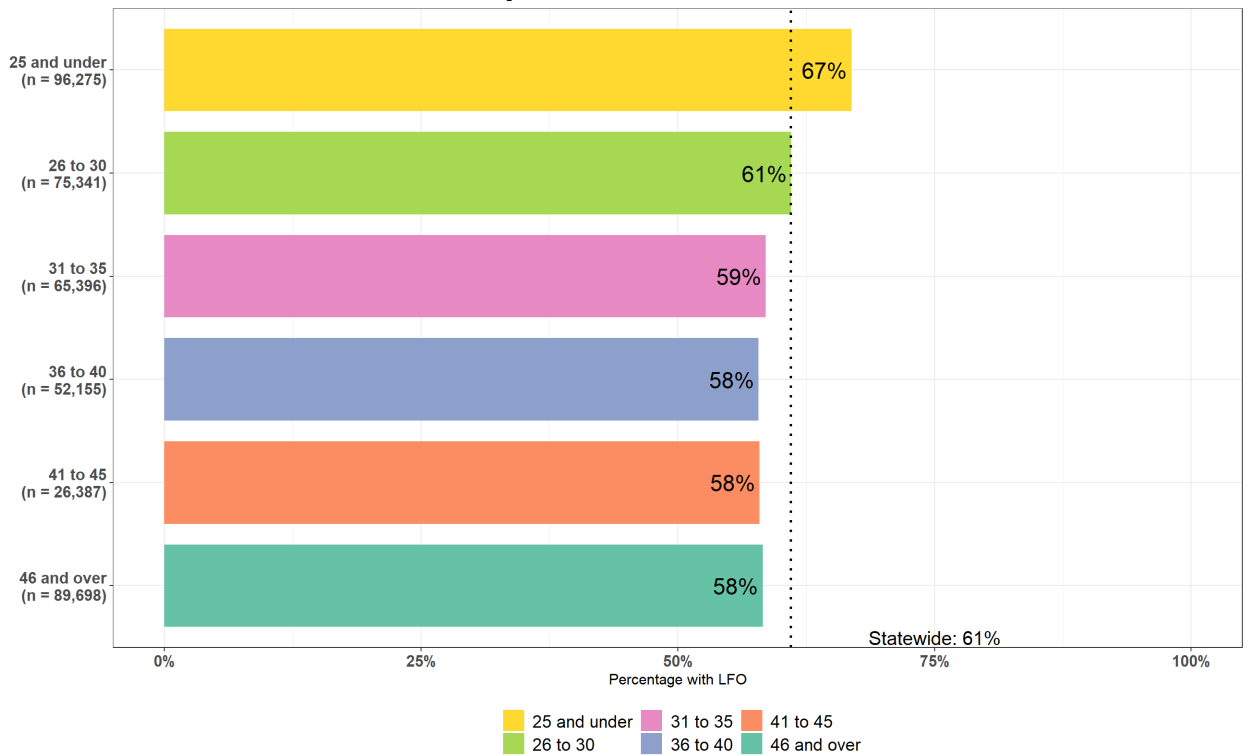
**Figure 18. Among those with CLJ cases, Latino/Hispanic people had a higher probability and Black people had a lower probability of an LFO.**



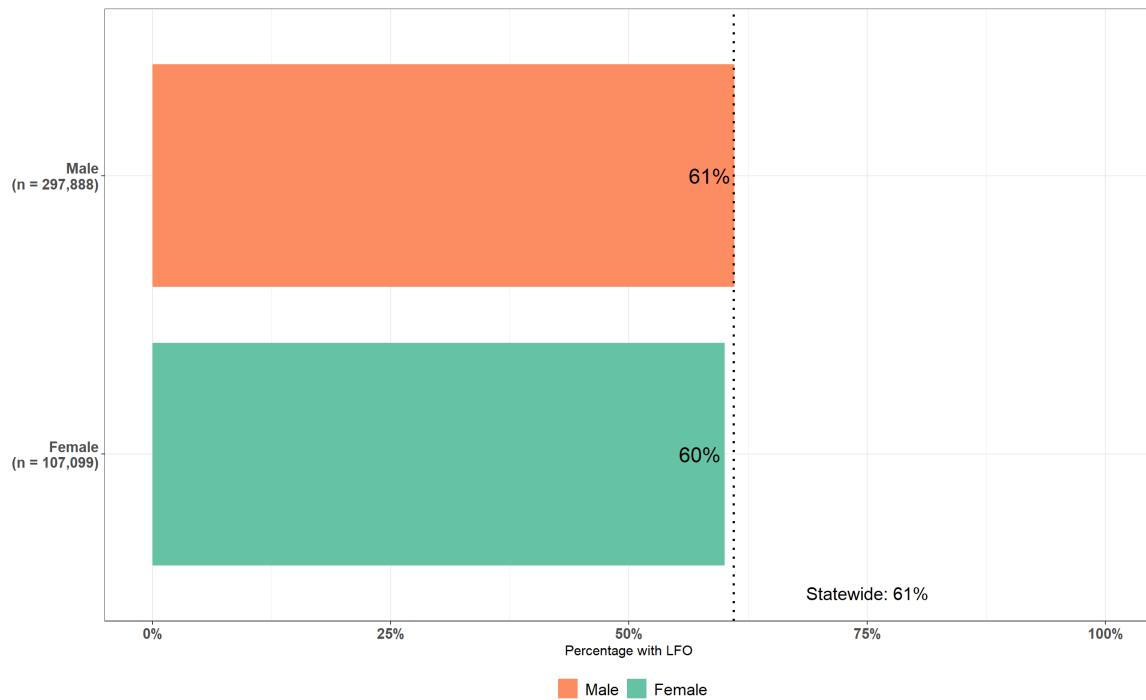
**Figure 19. Among those with misdemeanor theft, fraud or larceny CLJ case, Native American and Latino/Hispanic people had a higher probability of an LFO.**



**Figure 20. Among those with CLJ cases, 67% of people 25 and under had LFOs imposed.**



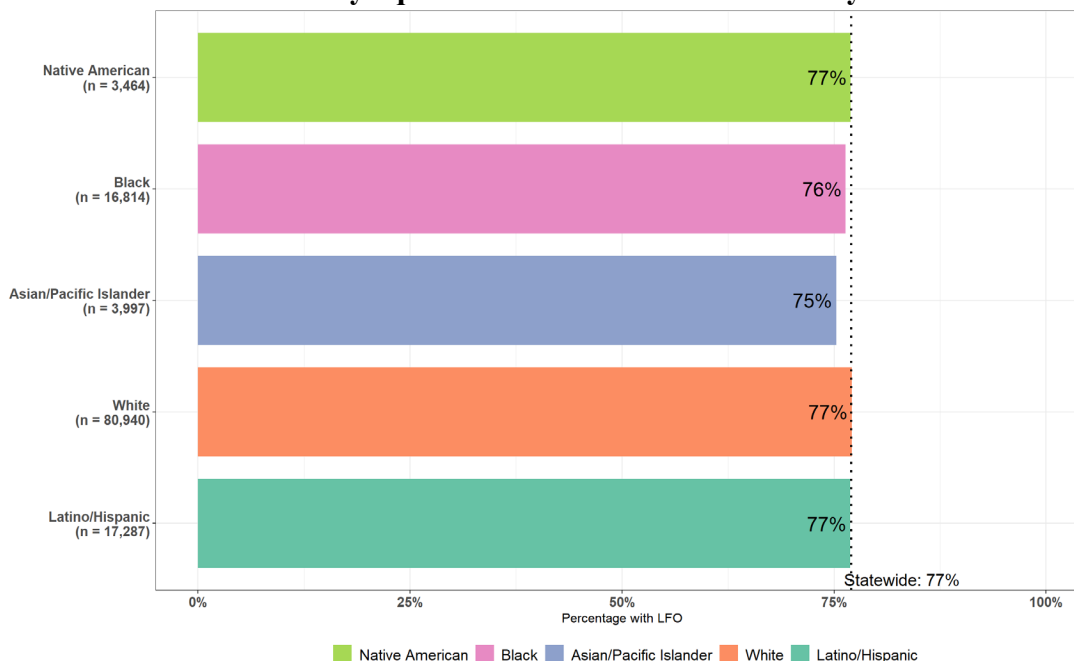
**Figure 21. Overall, women and men had effectively the same probability of an LFO in CLJ cases.**



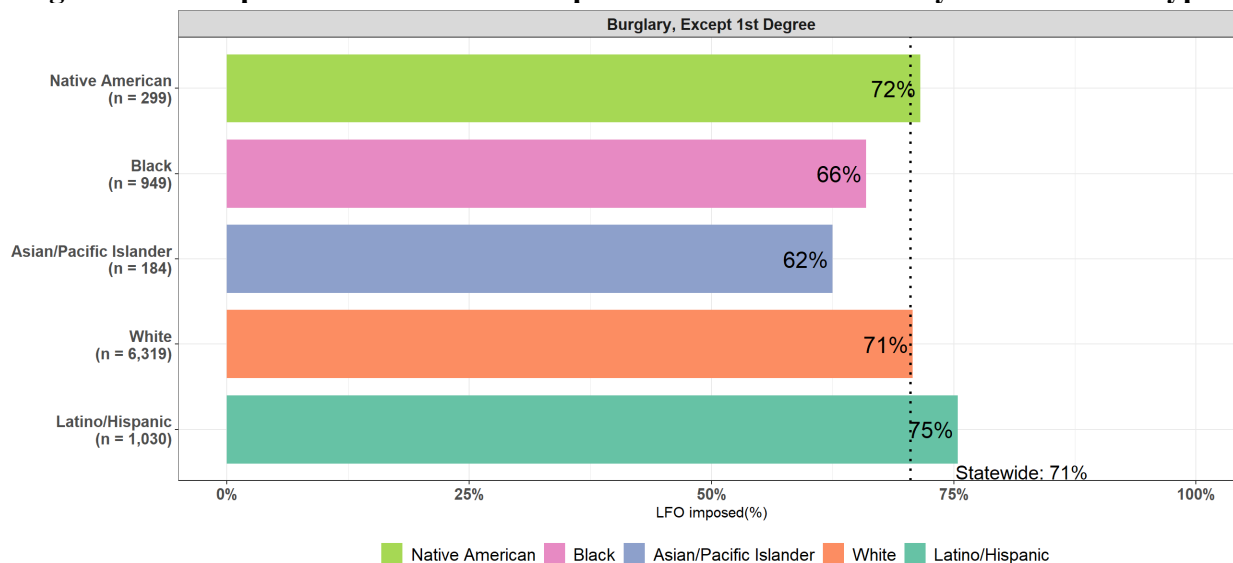
## Adult Superior Courts

Figure 22 shows the percentage of LFO-eligible Superior Court cases filed during the study period that resulted in an LFO, disaggregated by the court user's race/ethnicity. All groups had nearly identical rates of LFO imposition. However, differences did emerge when racial/ethnic differences were examined within offense types. As an example, Figure 23 shows racial differences in LFO imposition rates for cases in which non-first-degree burglary was the primary offense. Within these cases, Latino/Hispanic individuals had the highest rate of LFO imposition. The probability of an LFO imposition also varied by age: those aged 25 and under had the highest probability (see Figure 24). Cases involving males showed a higher chance of receiving an LFO imposition in adult Superior Courts (see Figure 25).

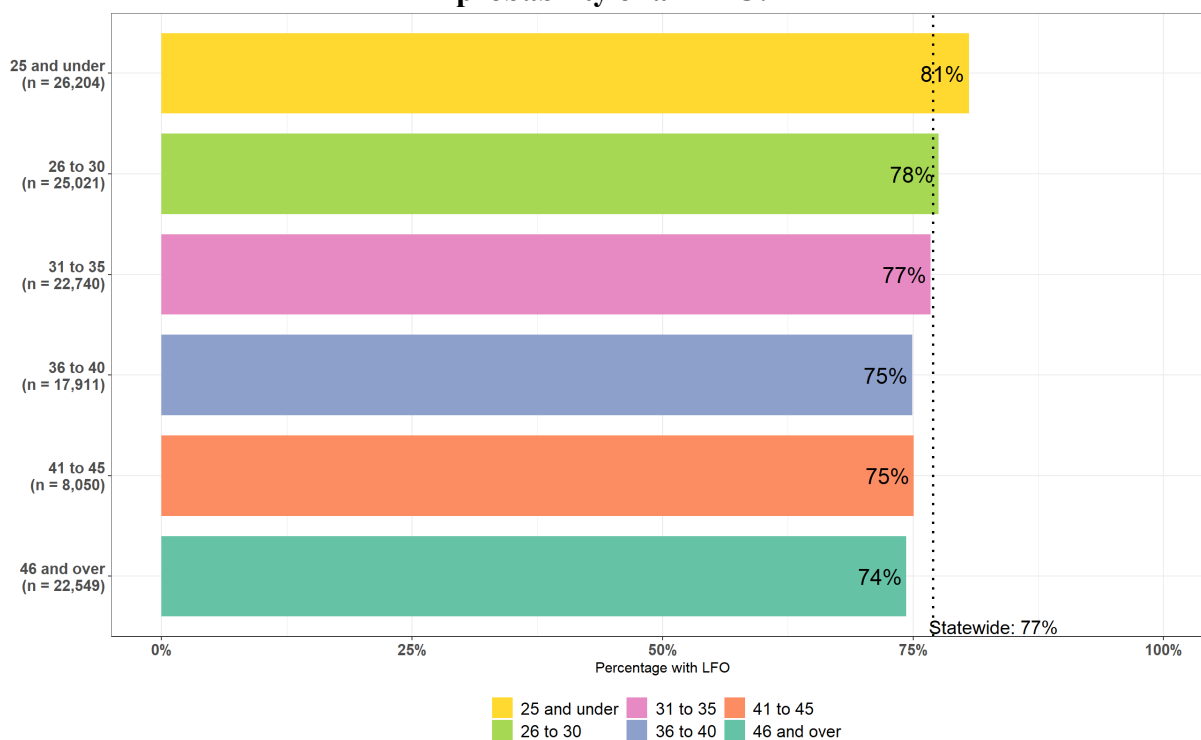
**Figure 22. Overall, probability of an LFO in adult Superior Court cases was effectively equivalent across race and ethnicity.**



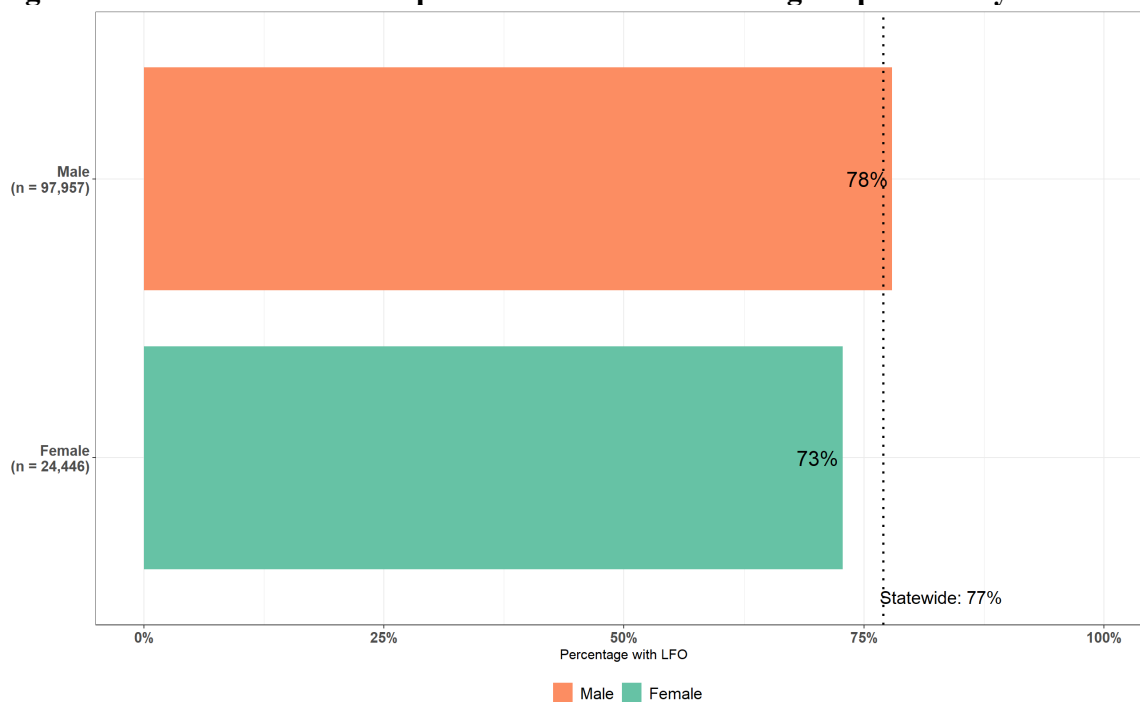
**Figure 23. Group differences in adult Superior Court cases can vary across offense types.**



**Figure 24. People 25 and under with adult Superior Court cases had the highest probability of an LFO.**



**Figure 25. Males with adult Superior Court cases had a higher probability of an LFO.**

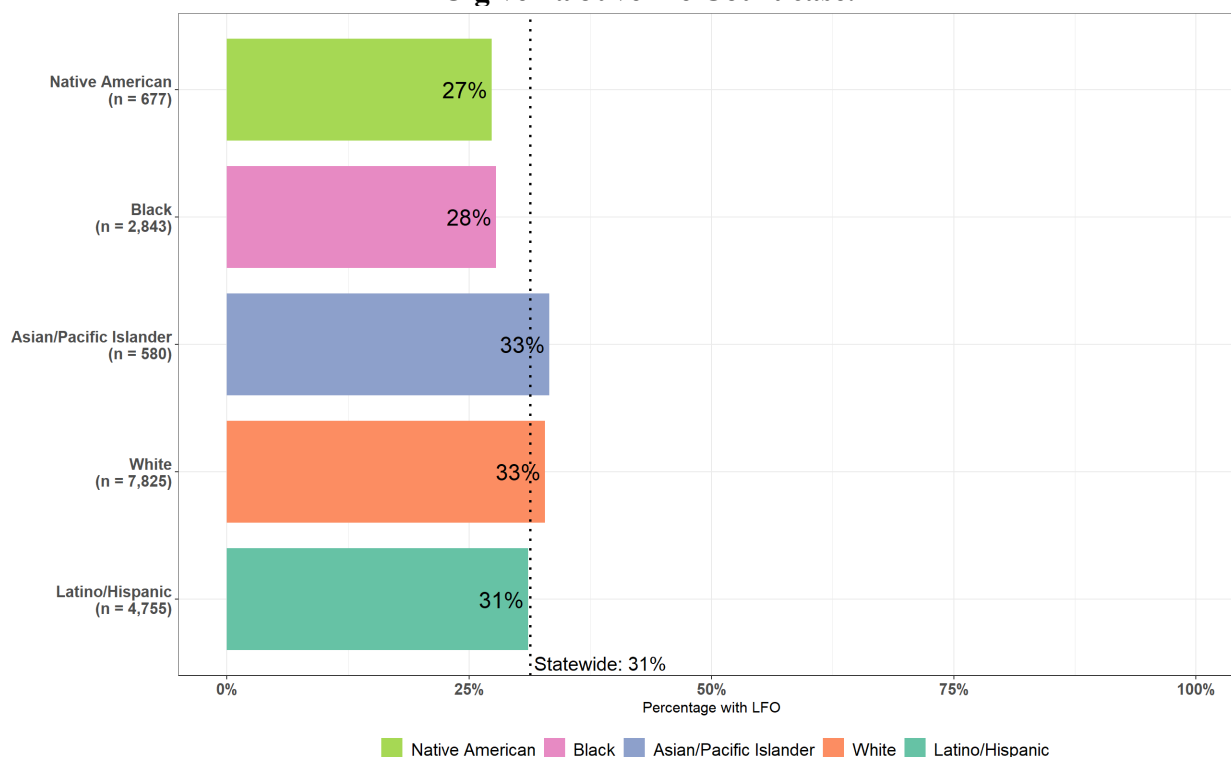




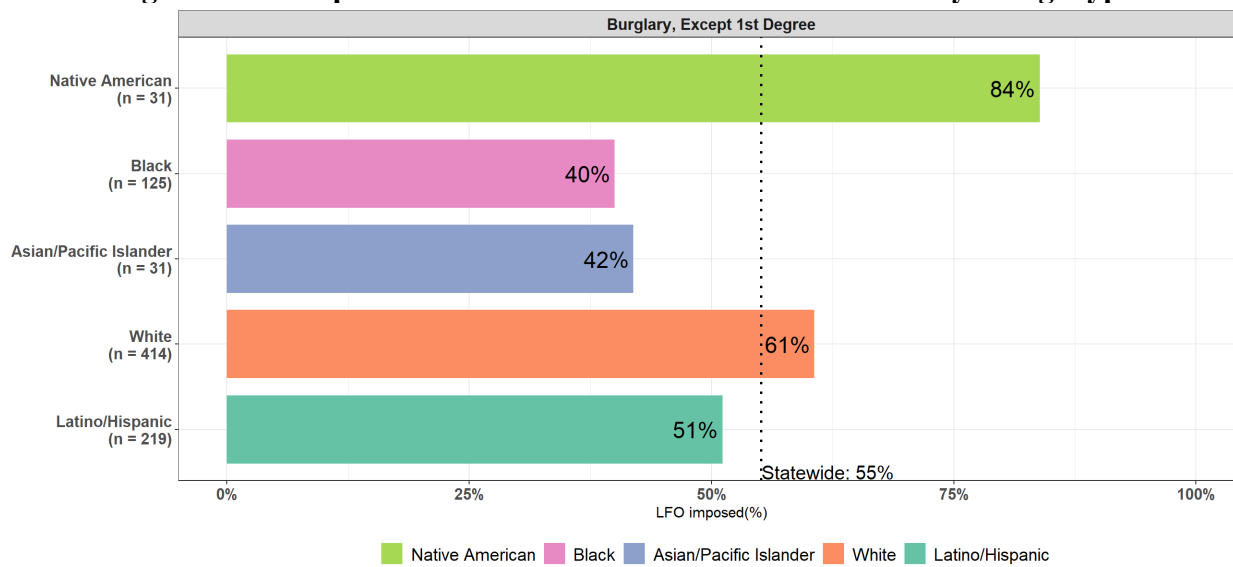
## Juvenile Courts

Figure 26 shows the percentage of LFO-eligible Juvenile Court cases filed during the study period that resulted in an LFO, disaggregated by the court user’s race/ethnicity. Cases involving White and Asian/Pacific Islander youth had somewhat higher rates of LFO imposition than other groups overall. However, the patterns differed depending on the primary offense associated with the case. As an example, Figure 27 shows the racial differences in LFO imposition rates for cases in which non-first-degree burglary was the primary offense. Within these cases, 55% resulted in an LFO imposition, but the rate was much higher for Native American youth (84%) and somewhat higher for White youth (61%). The probability of an LFO imposition also varied somewhat by age: those under 14 had the highest probability (see Figure 28). Cases involving males showed a higher chance of receiving an LFO imposition in Juvenile Courts (see Figure 29).

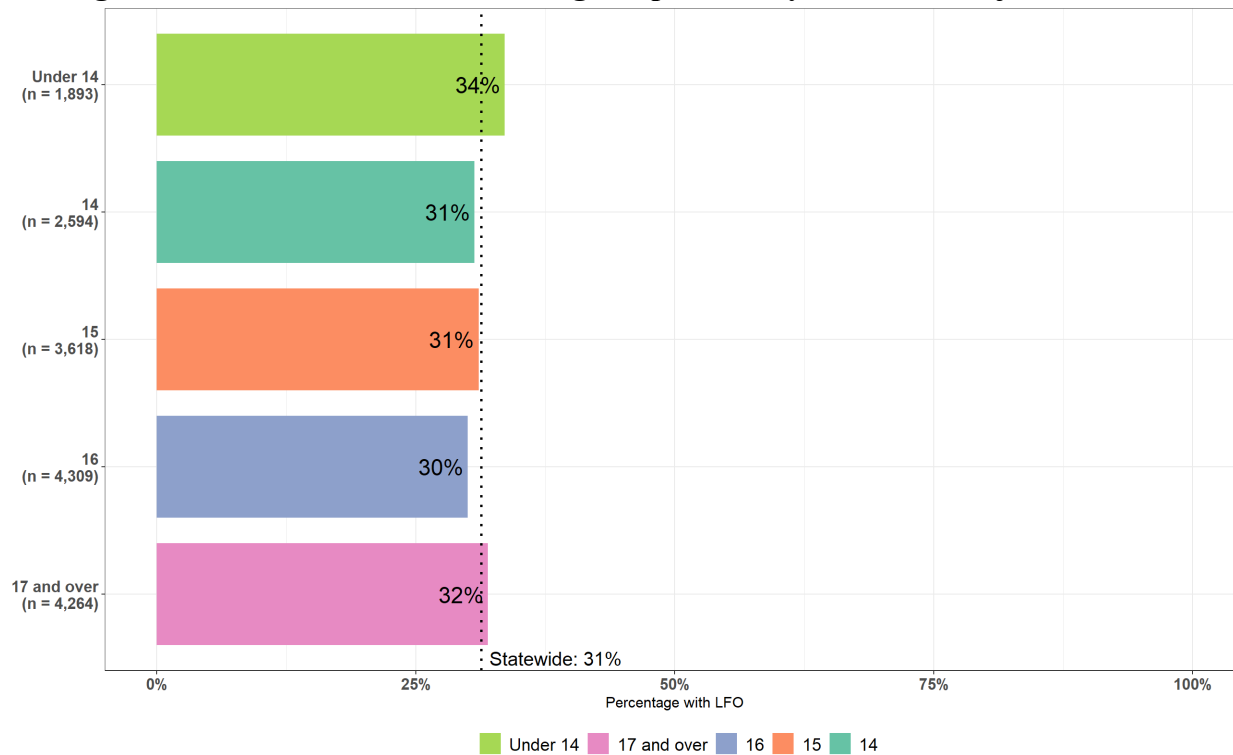
**Figure 26. Native American and Black youth, overall, had slightly lower probability of an LFO given a Juvenile Court case.**



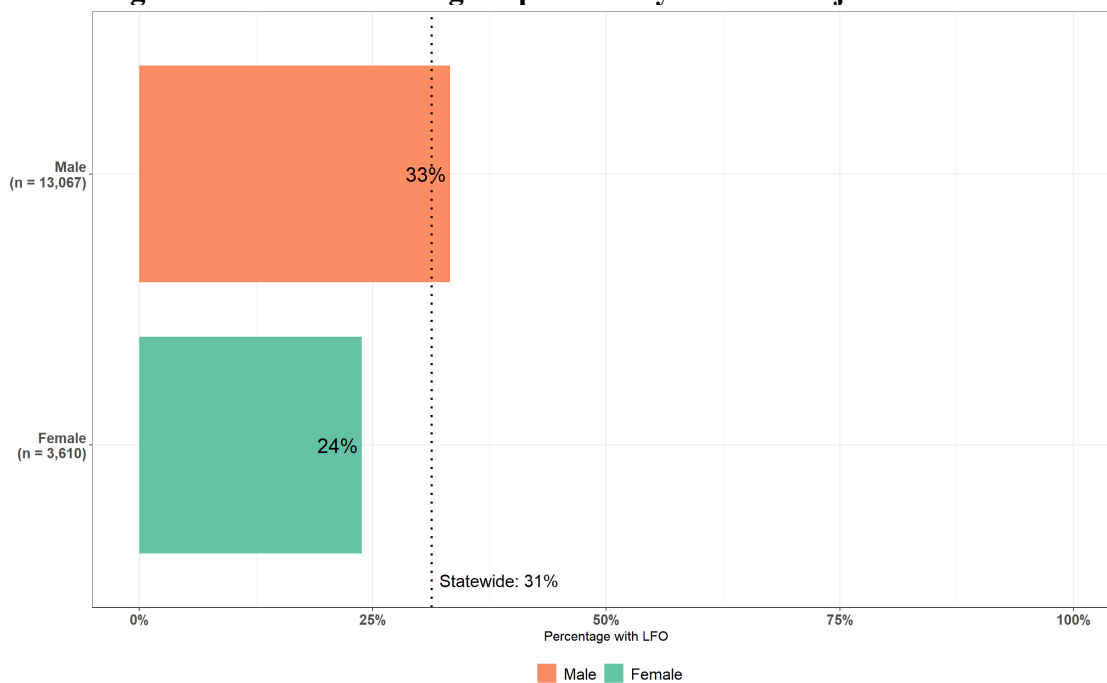
**Figure 27. Group differences in Juvenile Court cases varied by charge type.**



**Figure 28. Youth under 14 had the highest probability of an LFO in juvenile cases.**



**Figure 29. Males had a higher probability of LFOs in juvenile cases.**

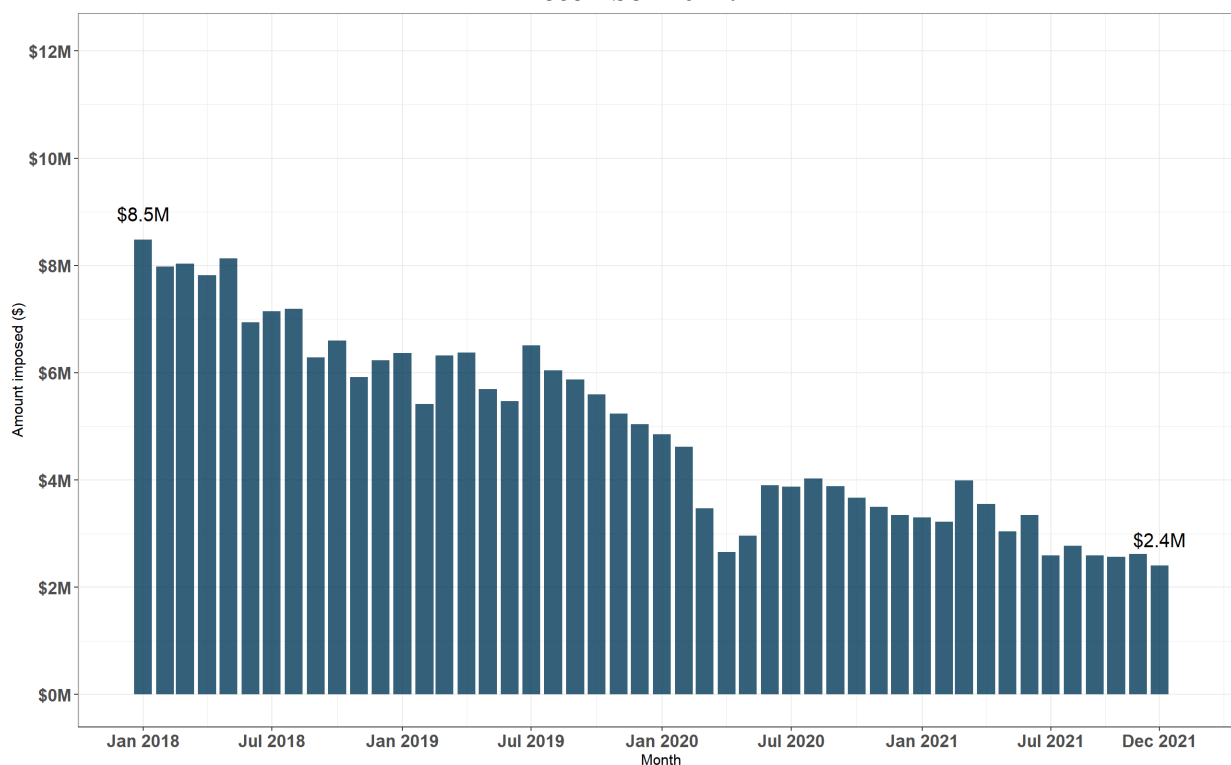


## LFO Amounts Imposed by Time

### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

Figure 30 shows the total amounts of LFOs ordered in CLJs for each month across the study period. CLJ cases filed in January of 2018 resulted in approximately \$8.5 million ordered. There was a relatively steady decrease across the study period (with a sharp dip in the early months of the Covid-19 pandemic in 2020). Cases filed in December of 2021 resulted in about \$2.4 million ordered. Among CLJ cases where an LFO was imposed, the average amount ordered was \$875.<sup>6</sup> Note that the distribution of imposed amounts is skewed by larger, outlying amounts imposed; analyses and reported averages reflect 99.5% of the overall data in order to mitigate the influence of outlying values. Given the range of amounts imposed, it is also helpful to look at the median amount ordered. Figure 31 shows that the median amount ordered hovered around \$515 during the study period, though decreasing slightly over time. Indicators of joint liability were not available for all courts; descriptions of amounts imposed in CLJs assume that LFOs are not distributed over multiple cases.

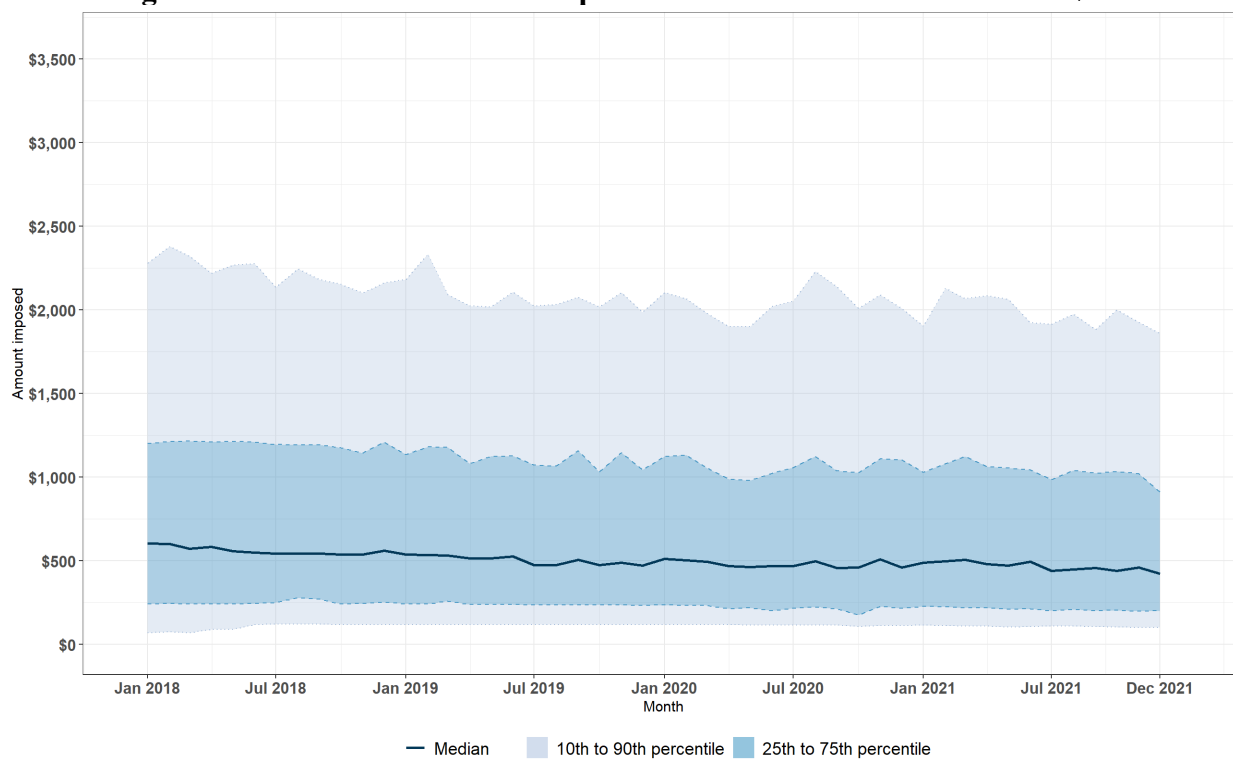
**Figure 30. Monthly amounts imposed in CLJ cases decreased 72% from January 2018 to December 2021.**



NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted.

<sup>6</sup> This amount reflects the average amount imposed per CLJ case. It is important to note that many individuals hold debt on two or more cases, so the average amount owed per *person* during the study period will be higher.

**Figure 31. The median amount imposed in CLJ cases has held at near \$500.**

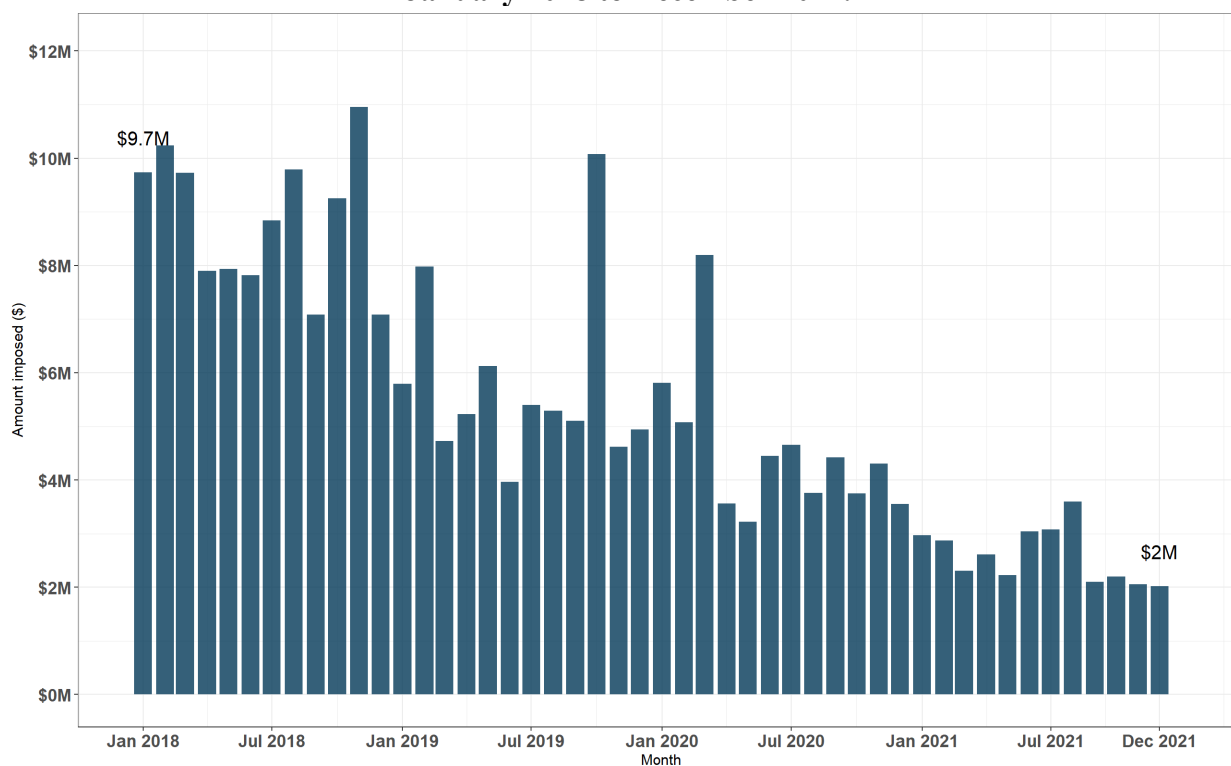


*NOTE:* Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted.

## Superior Courts

Figure 32 shows the total amounts of LFOs ordered in adult Superior Courts for each month across the study period. Adult Superior Court cases filed in January of 2018 resulted in approximately \$9.7 million ordered. There was an overall decrease across the study period. Cases filed in December of 2021 resulted in about \$2.0 million ordered. Among adult Superior Court cases where an LFO was imposed, the average amount ordered was \$1,641.<sup>7</sup> Note that the distribution of imposed amounts is skewed by larger, outlying amounts imposed; analyses and reported averages reflect 99.5% of the overall data in order to mitigate the influence of outlying values. It is also helpful to look at the median amount ordered. Figure 33 shows that the median amount ordered decreased 27% from in the first half of 2018 (\$992 to \$728), and continued to decrease to roughly \$600 by December 2021. Approximately 5% of cases included an indicator of joint liability across co-defendants; total amounts imposed were distributed evenly over these cases to avoid duplication.

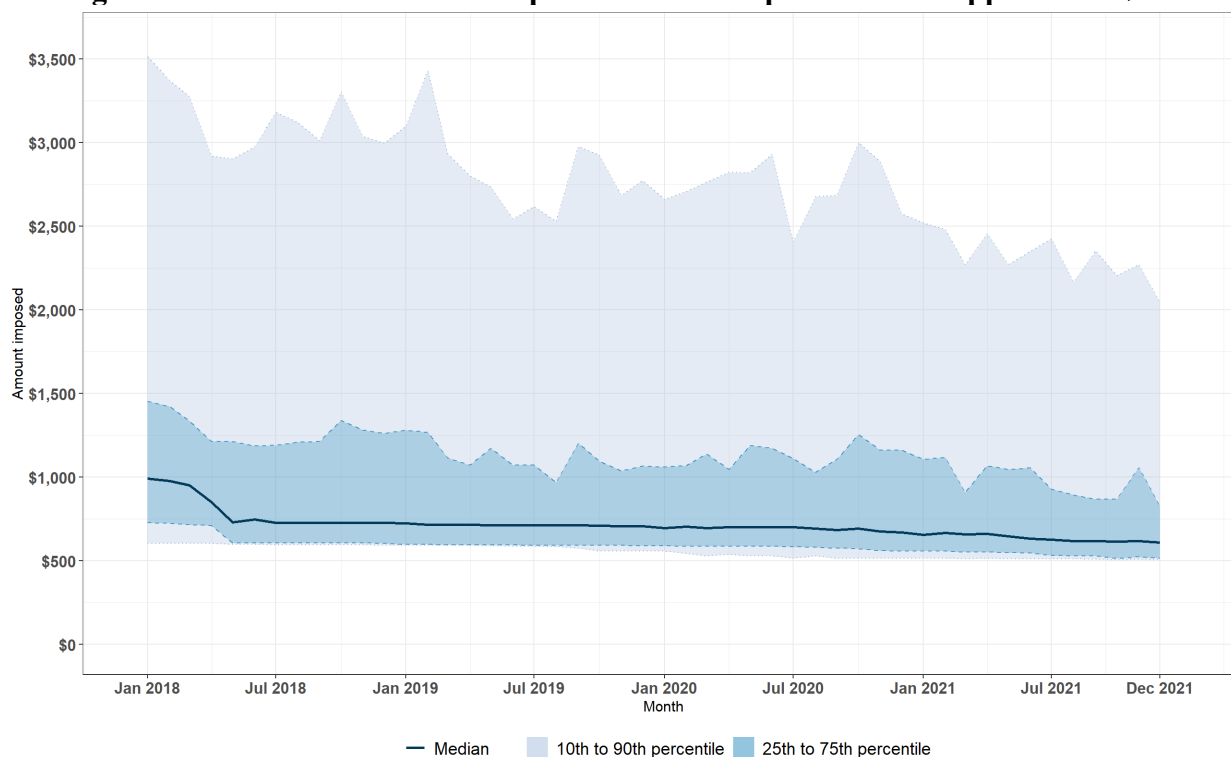
**Figure 32. Monthly amounts imposed in adult Superior court cases decreased 79% from January 2018 to December 2021.**



NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted.

<sup>7</sup> This amount reflects the average amount imposed per adult Superior Court case. It is important to note that many individuals hold debt on two or more cases, so the average amount owed per person across the study period will be higher.

**Figure 33. The median amount imposed in adult Superior courts approached \$600.**

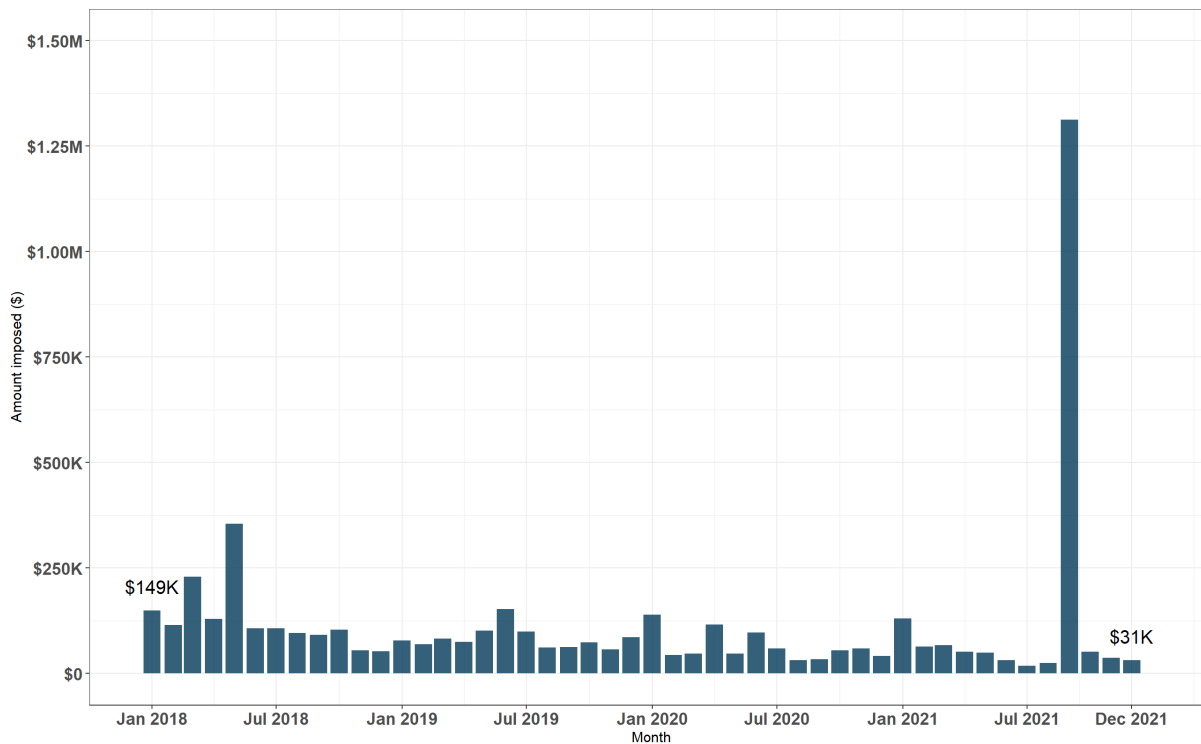


## Juvenile Courts

Figure 34 shows the total amounts of LFOs ordered in Juvenile Courts for each month across the study period. Juvenile Court cases filed in January of 2018 resulted in approximately \$149,000 ordered. There was an overall decrease across the study period, with one substantial jump in 2021 as a result of a high-profile, high-damages arson case. Cases filed in December of 2021 resulted in about \$31,000 ordered. Among Juvenile Court cases where an LFO was imposed, the average amount ordered was \$550.<sup>8</sup> Note that the distribution of imposed amounts is skewed by larger, outlying amounts imposed; analyses and reported averages reflect 99.5% of the overall data to mitigate the influence of outlying values. Given the range of amounts imposed, it is also helpful to look at the median amount ordered. Figure 35 shows that the median amount ordered stayed relatively stable over the study period at around \$120 ordered in LFOs per case. Total amounts imposed were distributed evenly over cases with joint liability to avoid duplication.

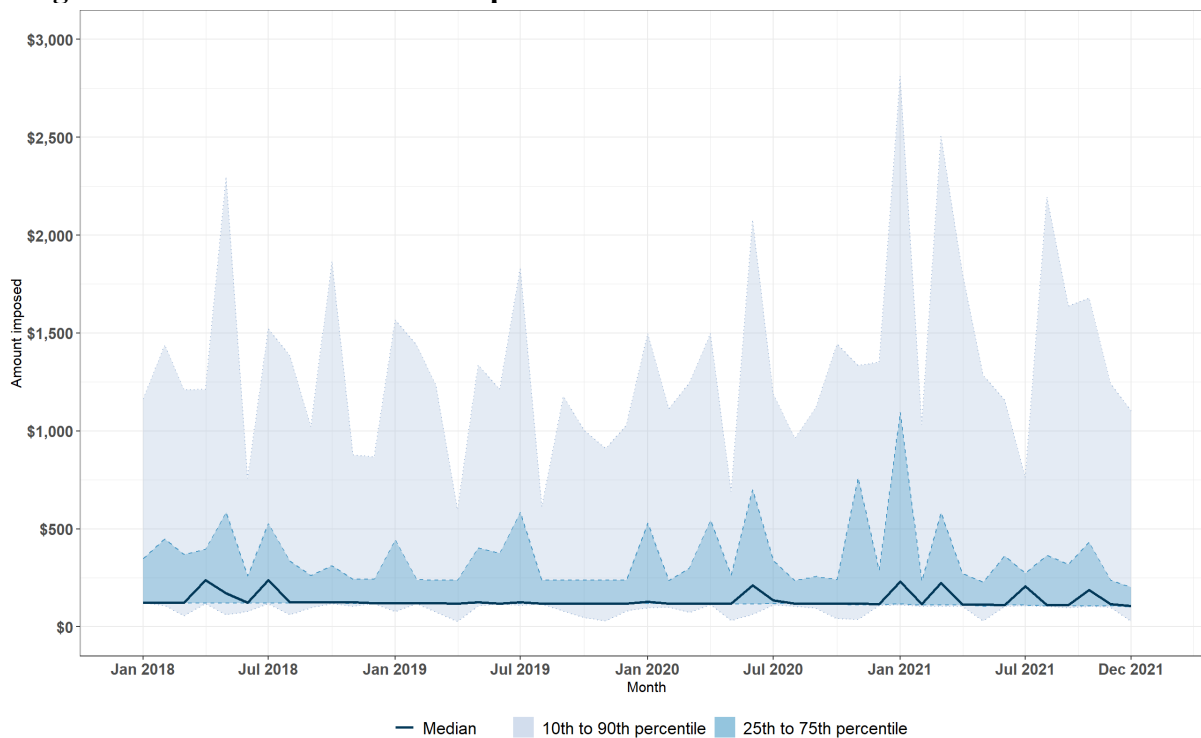
<sup>8</sup> This amount reflects the average amount imposed per Juvenile Court case. It is important to note that many individuals hold debt on two or more cases, so the average amount owed per *person* across the study period will be higher.

**Figure 34. Monthly amounts imposed in Juvenile Court cases decreased 79% from January 2018 to December 2021.**



*NOTE:* Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted. September 2021 reflects an Arson, 1<sup>st</sup> degree case.

**Figure 35. The median amount imposed in Juvenile Court cases has held around \$120.**



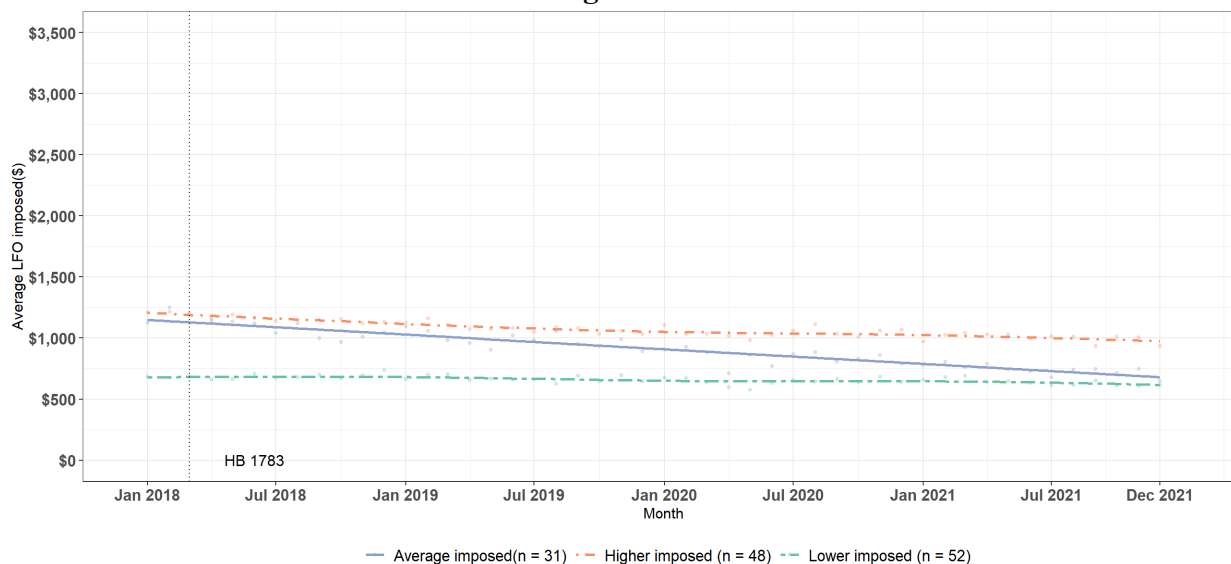


## LFO Amounts Imposed by Jurisdiction

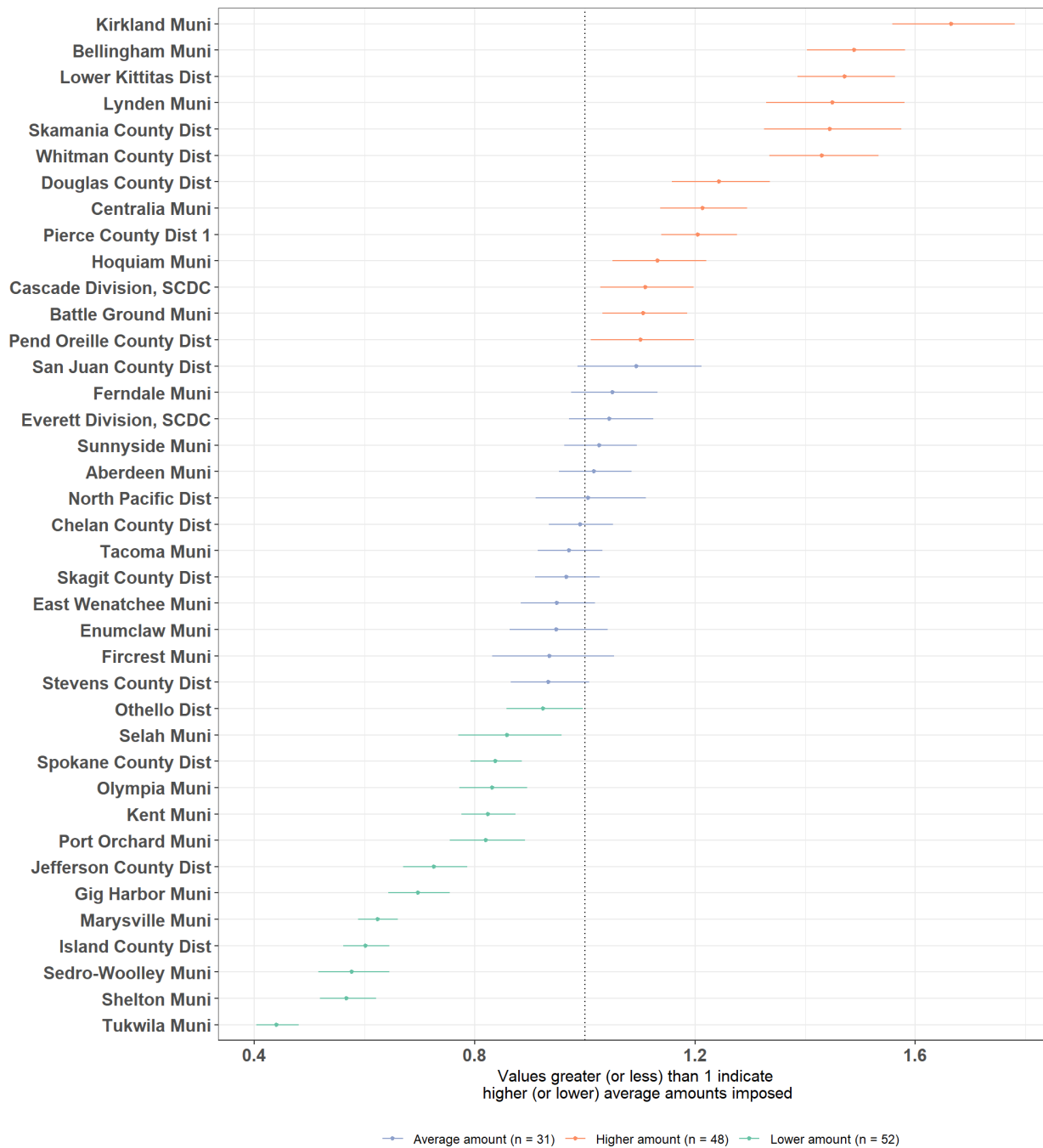
### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

As with the probability of imposition, the average LFO amount imposed in CLJs per case also varied by jurisdiction. As shown in Figure 36a, about 24% of CLJs imposed an average LFO amount that was not significantly different from the statewide average amount imposed across CLJs. About 37% of CLJs imposed an average amount that was significantly higher than the statewide average imposed. The remaining 40% imposed an average amount that was significantly lower than the statewide average. For illustrative purposes, 13 courts were chosen at random from each of the three groups and their respective average LFO amounts imposed are presented in Figure 36.

**Figure 36a. CLJs were characterized by routinely imposing average, or higher or lower than average LFO amounts.**



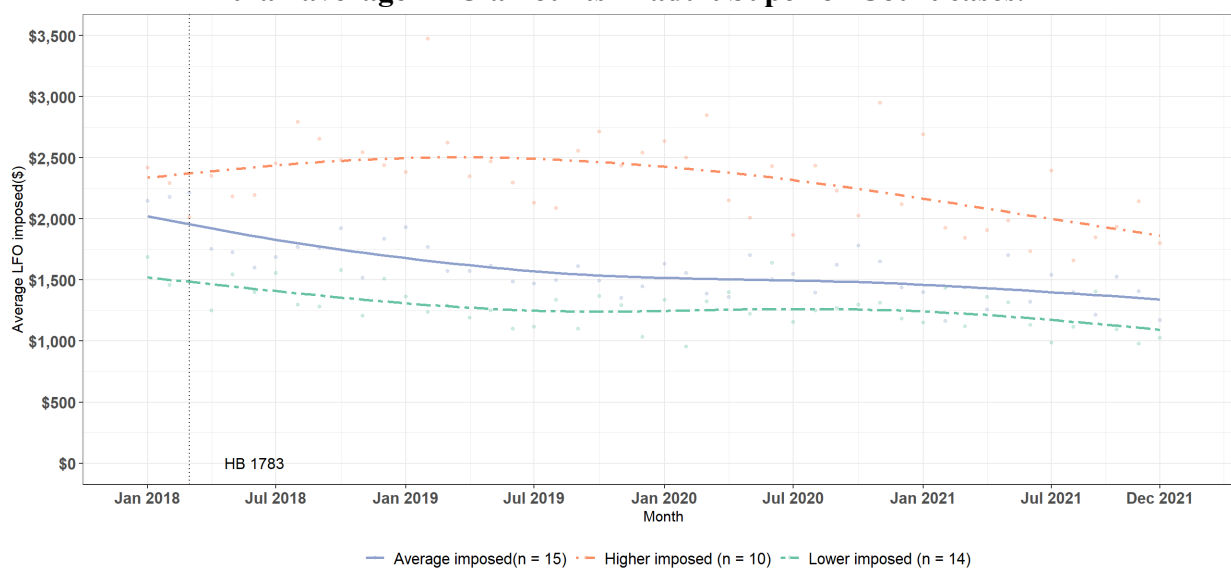
**Figure 36b. Municipal and district courts were characterized by routinely imposing average, or higher or lower than average LFO amounts.**



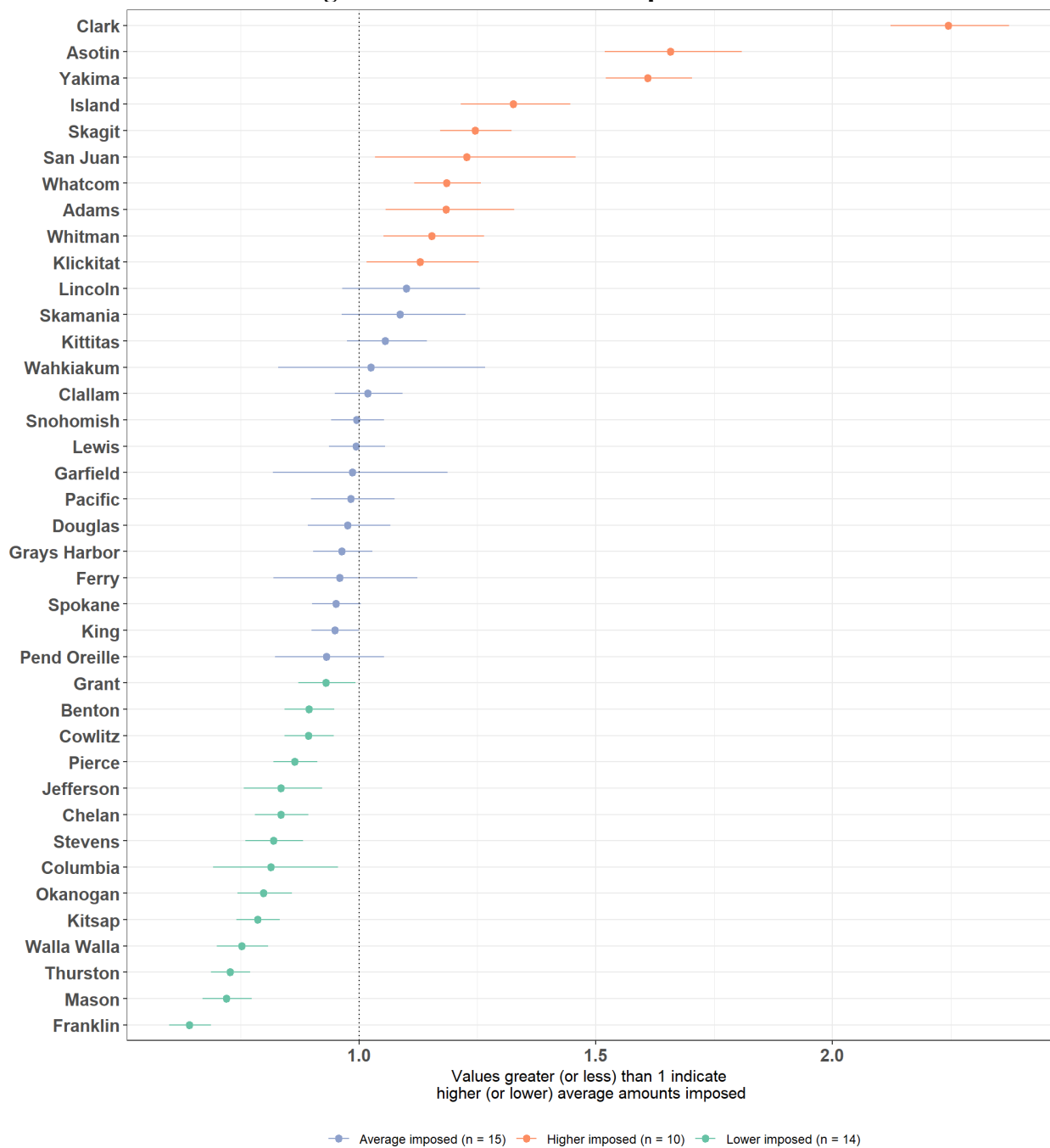
## Adult Superior Courts

The average LFO amount imposed per case also varied by jurisdiction in adult Superior Courts. As shown in Figure 37a, about 38% of counties imposed an average LFO amount that was not significantly different from the statewide average amount imposed across adult Superior Courts. About 26% of counties imposed an average amount that was significantly higher than the statewide average imposed. The remaining 36% imposed an average amount that was significantly lower than the statewide average. However, note that all groups saw an overall decrease in the average amount imposed over the study period. The respective average LFO amounts imposed for all counties are presented in Figure 37b.

**Figure 37a. Courts were characterized by routinely imposing average, or higher or lower than average LFO amounts in adult Superior Court cases.**



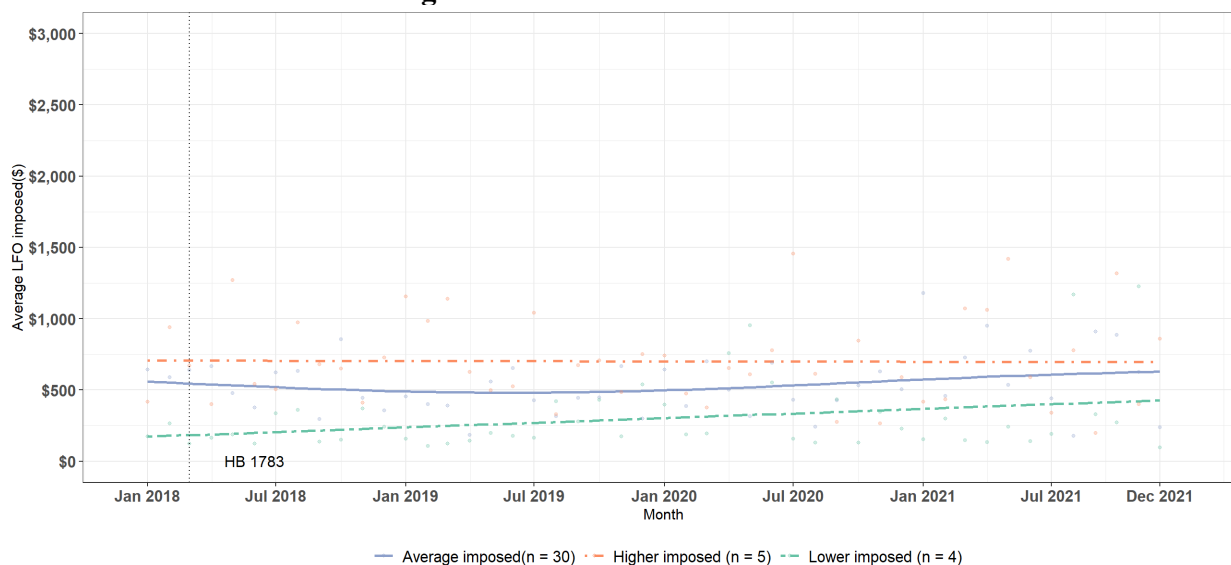
**Figure 37b. Courts were characterized by routinely imposing average, or higher or lower than average LFO amounts in adult superior court cases.**



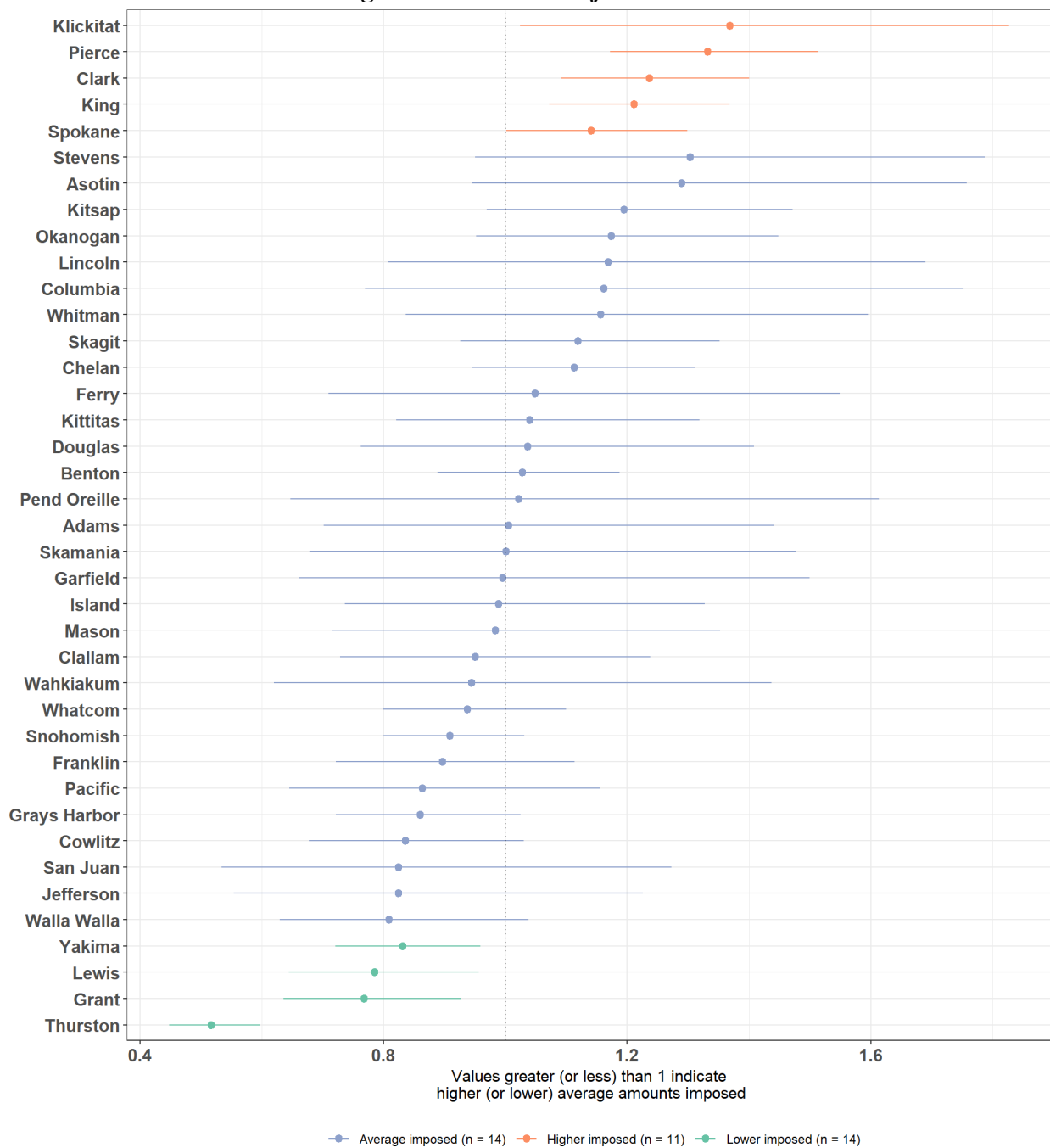
## Juvenile Courts

The average LFO amount imposed per case also varied by jurisdiction in Juvenile Courts. As shown in Figure 38a, the majority of counties (77%) imposed an average LFO amount that was not significantly different from the statewide average amount imposed across all Juvenile Courts. However, 13% of counties imposed significantly higher average amounts and 10% imposed significantly lower amounts. The respective average LFO amounts imposed for all 39 counties are presented in Figure 38b.

**Figure 38a. Courts were characterized by routinely imposing average, or higher or lower than average LFO amounts in Juvenile Court cases.**



**Figure 38b. Courts were characterized by routinely imposing average, or higher or lower than average LFO amounts in juvenile court cases.**

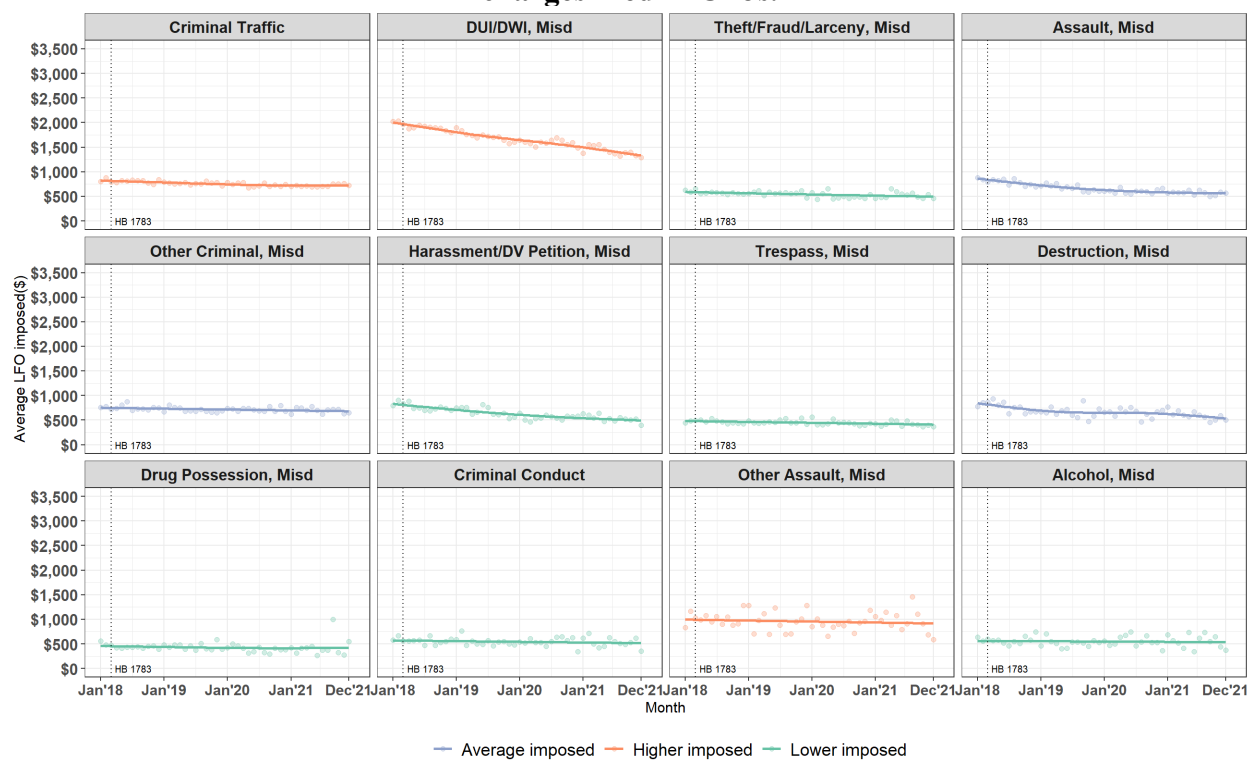


## LFO Amounts Imposed by Offense Type

### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

The average LFO amount imposed per case further varied by the primary offense type associated with the case in CLJs. Figure 39 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases filed in CLJs during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). These 12 categories represent 96% of LFO-eligible cases filed during the study period. Three offense types resulted in average LFO imposition amounts that did not differ significantly from the statewide average: misdemeanor assault, misdemeanor other criminal,<sup>9</sup> and misdemeanor destruction. Three offense types were associated with significantly higher average LFO amounts imposed; most notable is misdemeanor DUI/DWI, which resulted in substantially higher average amounts. The remaining six offense types resulted in average LFO amounts that were significantly lower.

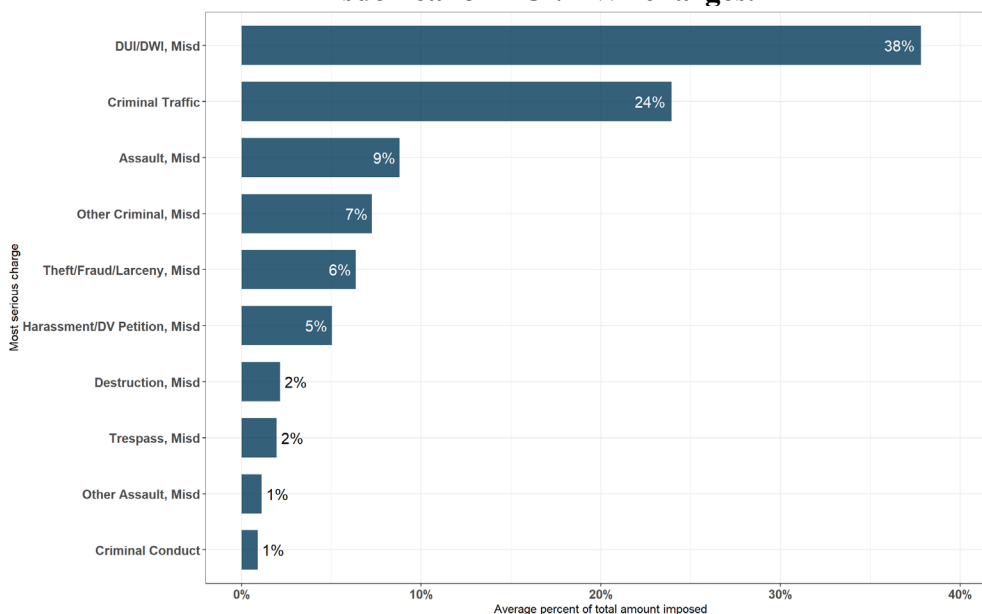
**Figure 39. Average LFO amounts imposed varied significantly across the most frequent charges filed in CLJs.**



<sup>9</sup> E.g., Disorderly conduct (RCW 9A.84.030), false statement to a public servant (RCW 9A.76.175)

Figure 40 shows the 10 primary offense types with the highest total amounts imposed in CLJs during the study period. Cases where misdemeanor DUI/DWI was the primary offense accounted for 38% of all LFO dollars imposed in CLJs across the study period. The next highest offense type was criminal traffic, which accounted for 24% of all LFO dollars imposed.

**Figure 40. Nearly 40% of all LFO dollars imposed in CLJ cases was related to misdemeanor DUI/DWI charges.**





## Superior Courts

The average LFO amount imposed per case also varied by the primary offense type associated with the case in adult Superior Courts. Figure 41 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases filed in adult Superior Courts during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). These 12 categories represent 80% of LFO-eligible cases filed in adult Superior Courts during the study period. Two offense types resulted in average LFO imposition amounts that did not differ significantly from the statewide average across adult Superior Courts: felony assault, and felony child sex offenses. Three offense types were associated with significantly higher average LFO amounts imposed. The remaining seven offense types resulted in average LFO amounts that were significantly lower.

**Figure 41. For the most frequent charges filed in adult Superior Court cases, the highest average amounts of LFOs imposed were related to felony property offenses.**

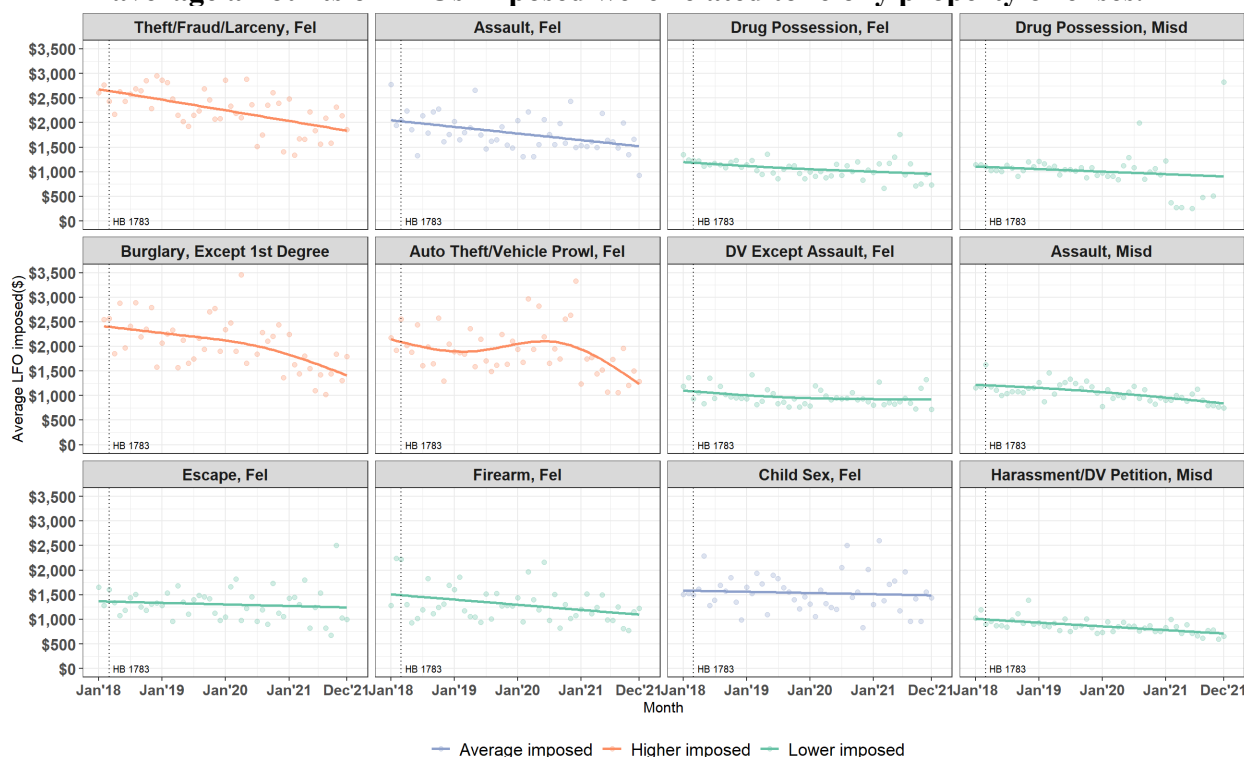
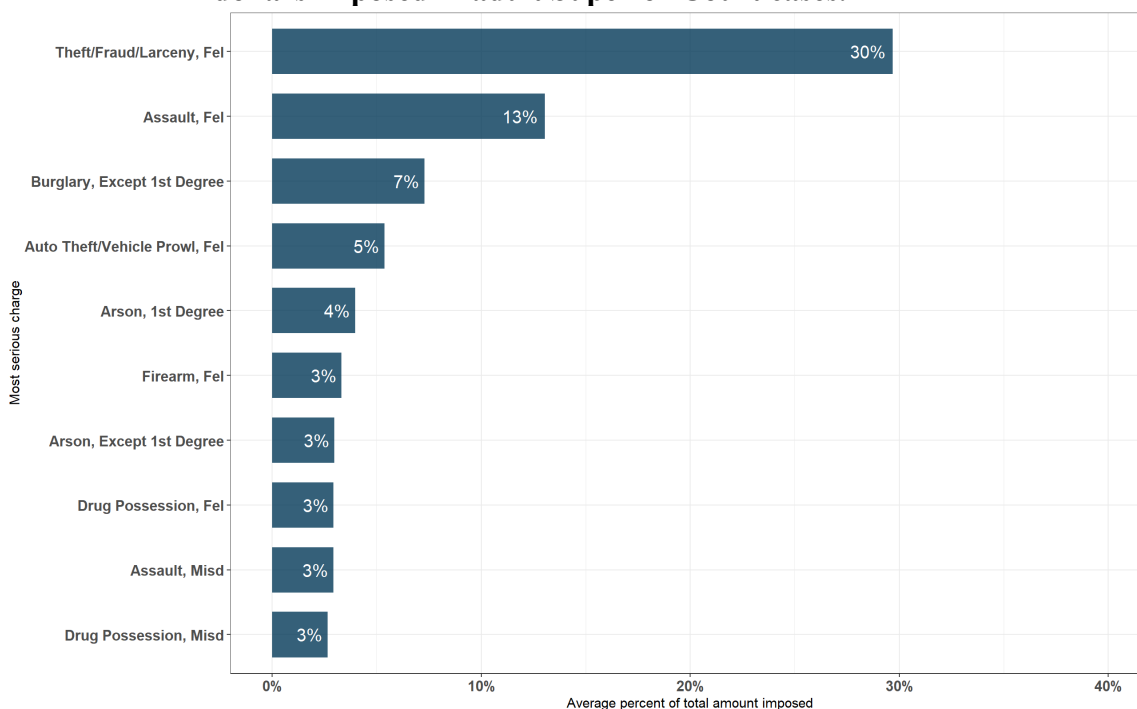


Figure 42 shows the 10 primary offense types with the highest total amounts imposed in adult Superior Courts during the study period. Cases where felony theft/fraud/larceny was the primary offense accounted for 30% of all LFO dollars imposed in adult Superior Courts across the study period. The next highest offense type was felony assault, which accounted for 13% of all LFO dollars imposed.

**Figure 42. Felony theft, fraud or larceny charges accounted for 30% of all LFO dollars imposed in adult Superior Court cases.**



## Juvenile Courts

The average LFO amount imposed per case also varied by the primary offense type associated with the case in Juvenile Courts. Figure 43 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases filed in Juvenile Courts during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). These 12 categories represent 77% of LFO-eligible cases filed during the study period. Four offense types resulted in average LFO imposition amounts that did not differ significantly from the statewide average across Juvenile Courts: felony assault, robbery, felony theft/fraud/larceny, and felony firearm possession. Three offense types were associated with significantly higher average LFO amounts imposed. The remaining five offense types resulted in average LFO amounts that were significantly lower.

**Figure 43. For the most frequent charges filed in Juvenile Court cases, the highest average amounts of LFOs imposed were related to misdemeanor and felony property offenses.**

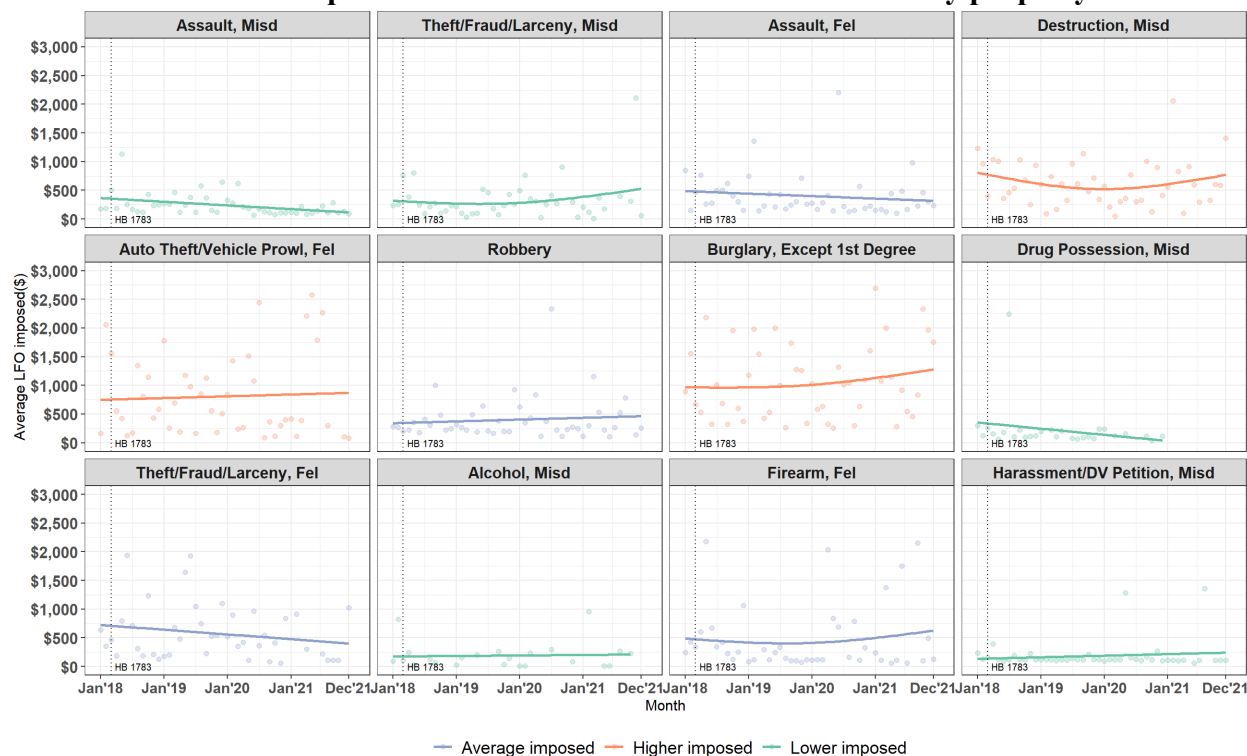
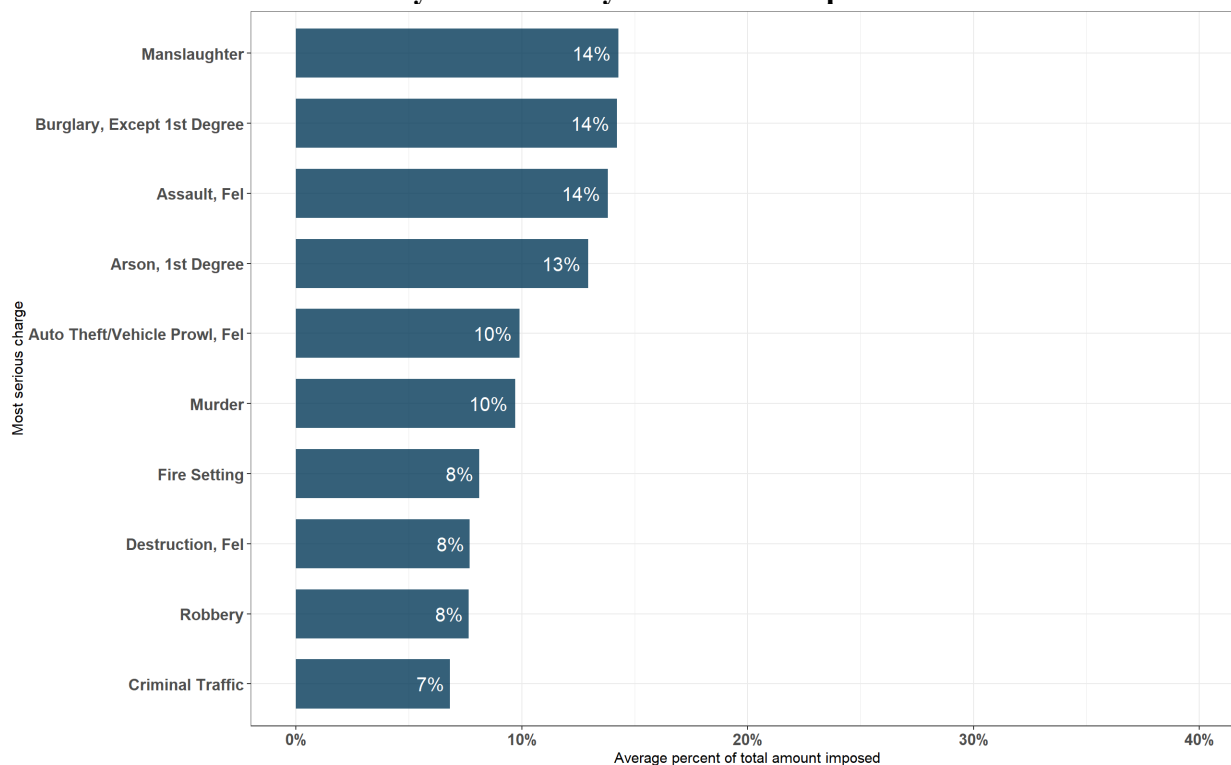


Figure 44 shows the 10 primary offense types with the highest total amounts imposed in Juvenile Courts during the study period. Cases where manslaughter, non-first-degree burglary, and felony assault were the primary offense tied to the case each accounted for 14% of all LFO dollars imposed in Juvenile Courts across the study period. The next highest offense type was first-degree arson, which accounted for 13% of all LFO dollars imposed.

**Figure 44. Three offenses – manslaughter, burglary (except 1<sup>st</sup> degree) and felony assault – accounted for nearly 42% of every LFO dollar imposed in Juvenile Court cases.**

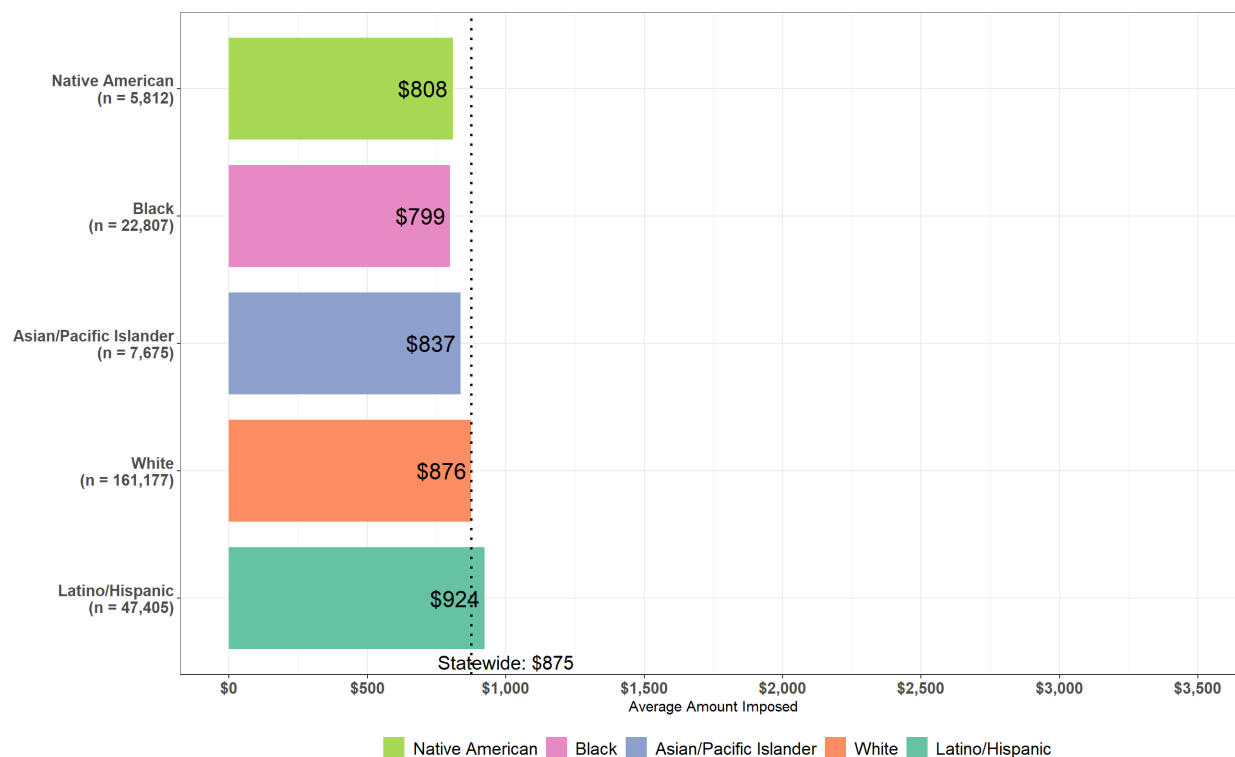


## LFO Amounts Imposed by Demographic Characteristics

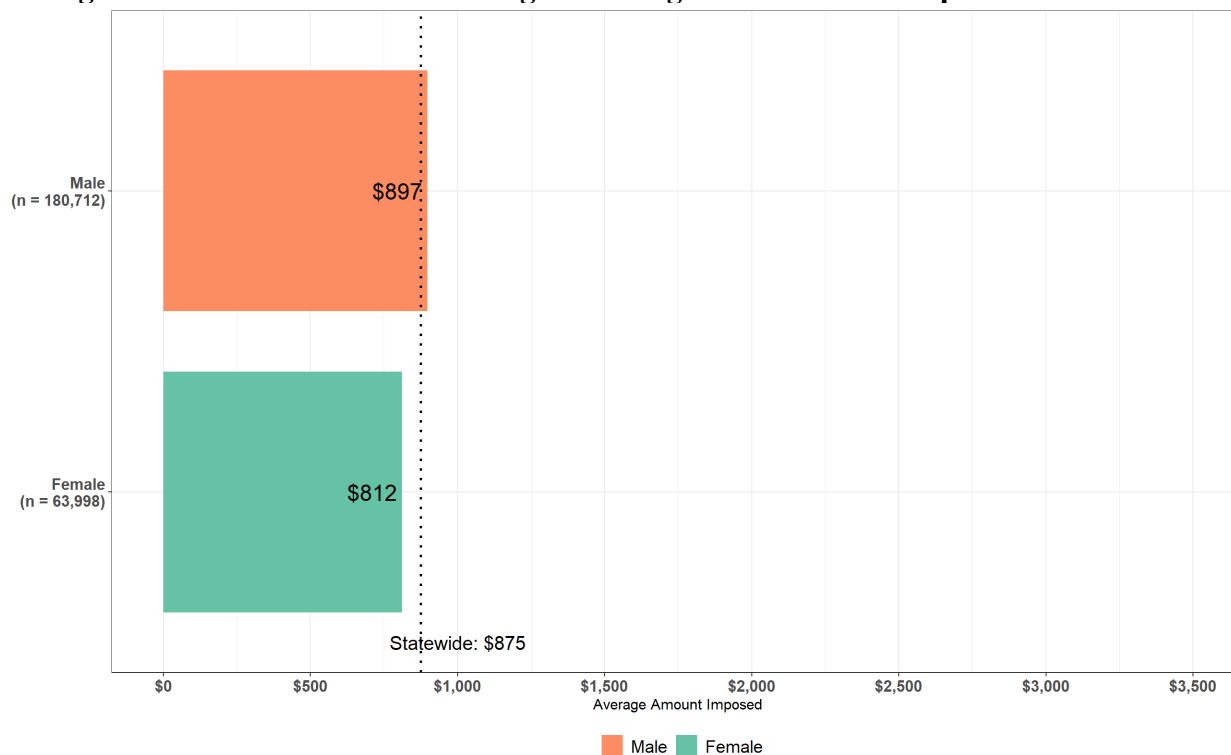
### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

The average LFO amount imposed per case in CLJs differed by demographic characteristics of the court users. Figure 45 shows the average LFO amount ordered per case disaggregated by the court user’s race/ethnicity. Latino/Hispanic individual had the highest average LFO amount ordered in CLJs per case across the study period, while Black individuals had the lowest average amount. Cases involving male court users resulted in a higher average LFO amount imposed than cases involving females (Figure 46). Finally, while the differences were not substantial, the court user’s age was also associated with differing average LFO amounts; cases involving individuals aged 46 and older had the highest average amount imposed (Figure 47).

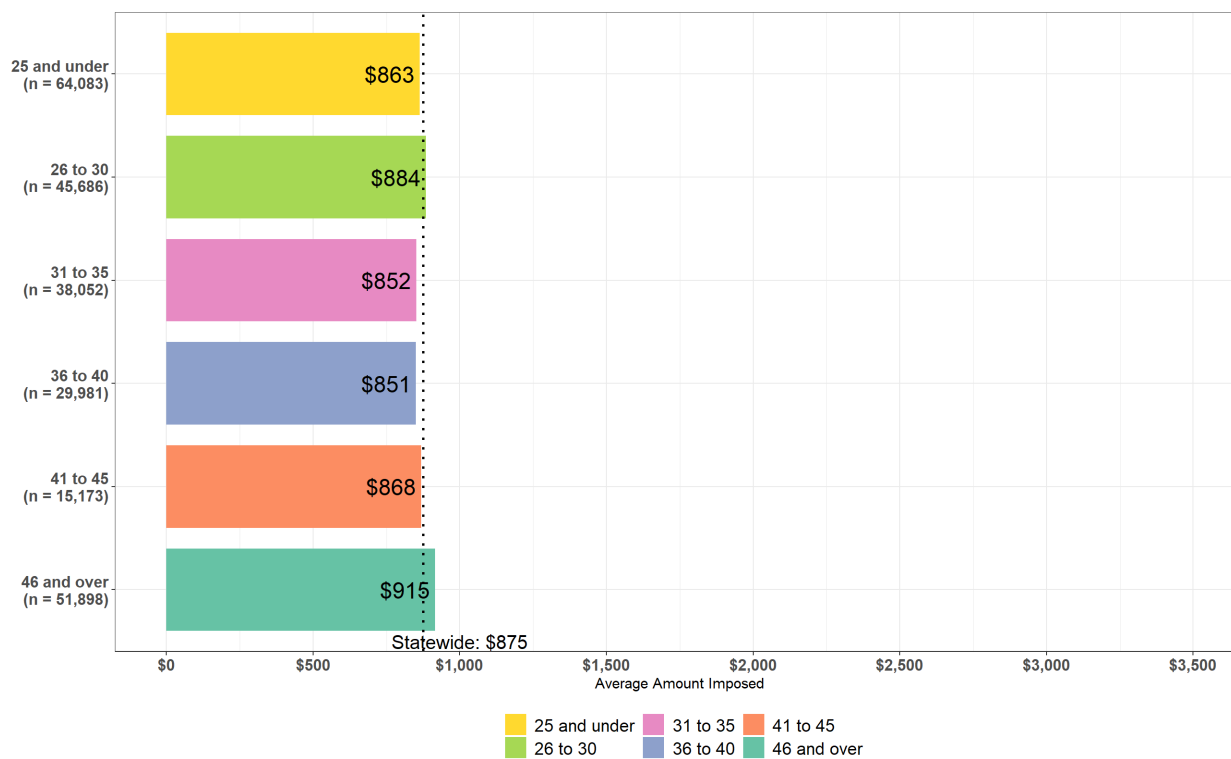
**Figure 45. Latino/Hispanic people tended to have higher average LFO amounts imposed in CLJ cases.**



**Figure 46. Males tended to have higher average LFO amounts imposed in CLJ cases.**



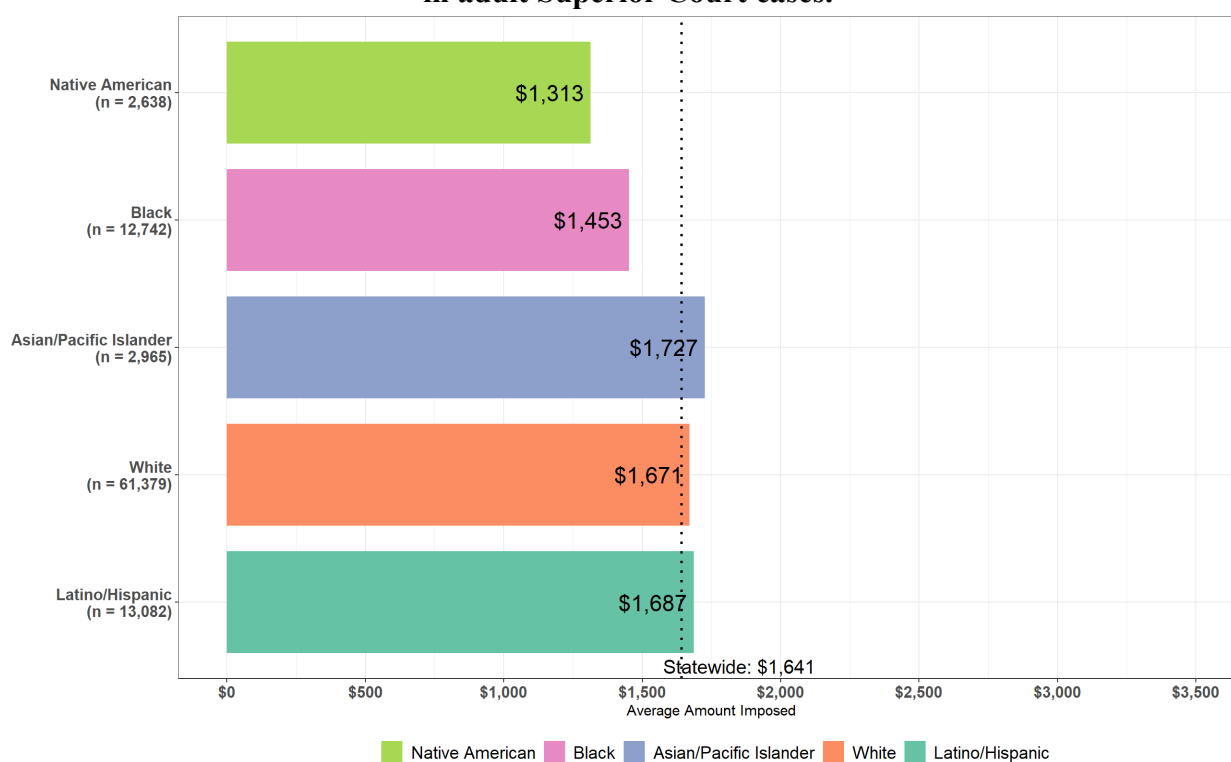
**Figure 47. People 46 and over tended to have higher average LFO amounts imposed in CLJ cases.**



## Superior Courts

The average LFO amount imposed per case in adult Superior Courts also differed by demographic characteristics of the court users. Figure 48 shows the average LFO amount ordered per case disaggregated by the court user's race/ethnicity. Asian/Pacific Islander individuals had the highest average LFO amount ordered per case across the study period, while Native American individuals had the lowest average amount. Cases involving female court users resulted in a higher average LFO amounts imposed than cases involving males (Figure 49). Finally, while the differences were not substantial, the court user's age was also associated with differing average LFO amounts; cases involving individuals aged 46 and older had the lowest average amount imposed, while individuals aged 36 to 40 had the highest (Figure 50).

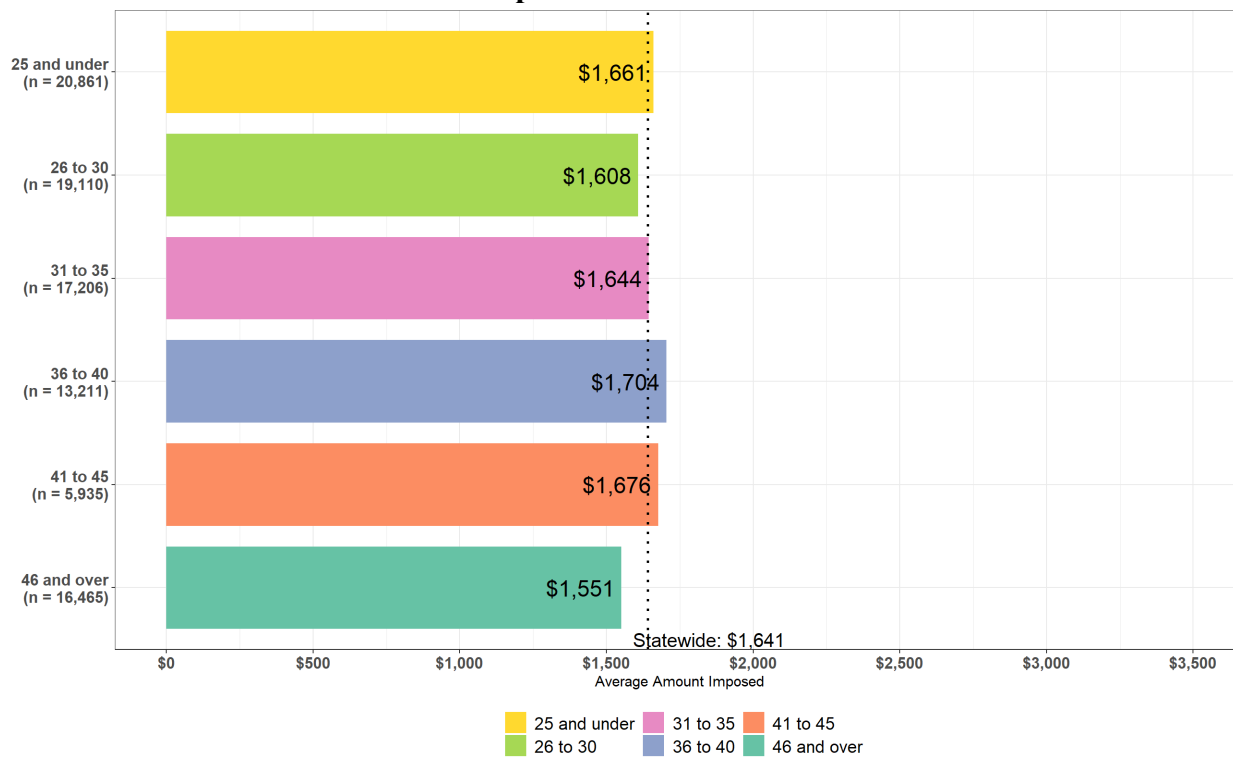
**Figure 48. Native American and Black people tended to have lower LFO amounts imposed in adult Superior Court cases.**



**Figure 49. Females tended to have higher average LFO amounts imposed in adult Superior Court cases.**



**Figure 50. People 46 and over tended to have lower LFO amounts imposed in adult Superior Court cases.**

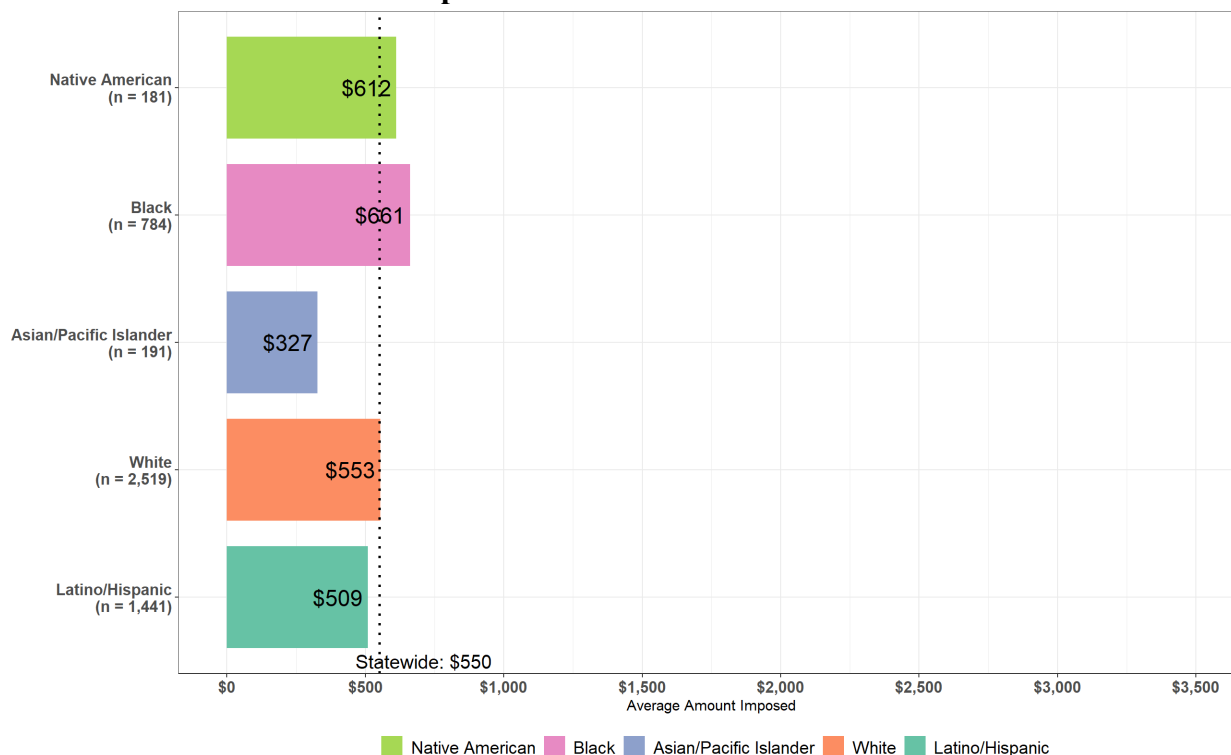




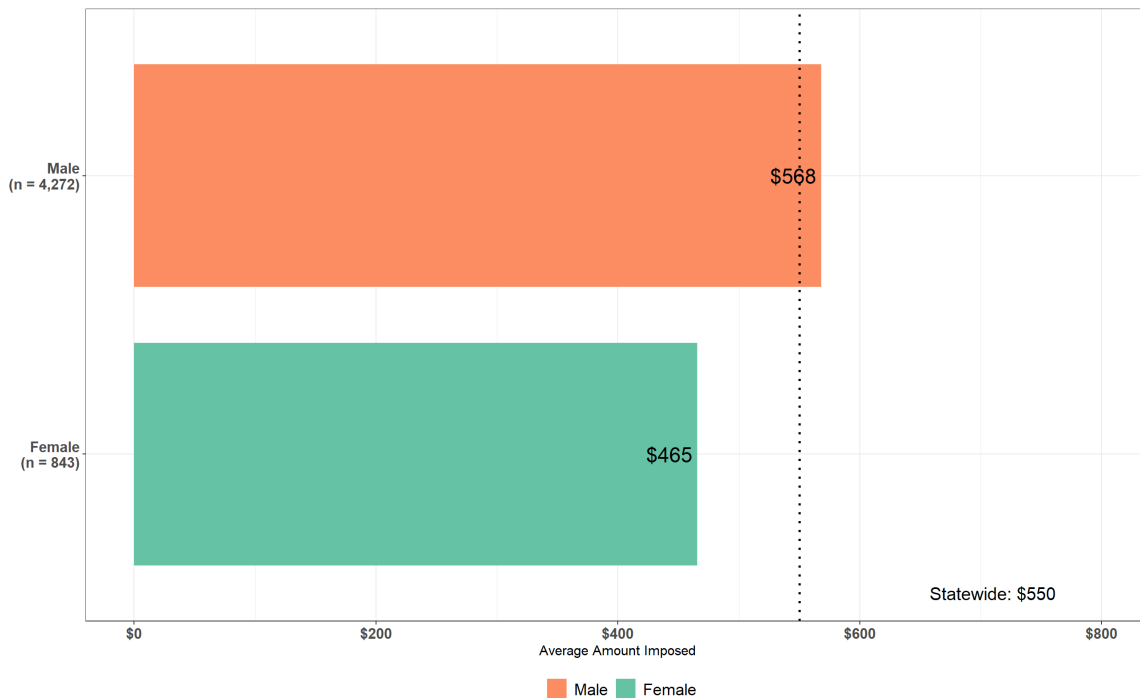
## Juvenile Courts

The average LFO amount imposed per case in Juvenile Courts also differed by demographic characteristics of the court users. Figure 51 shows the average LFO amount ordered per case disaggregated by the court user’s race/ethnicity. Black youth had the highest average LFO amount ordered per case across the study period, while Asian/Pacific Islander youth had the lowest average amount. Cases involving female youth resulted in a lower average LFO amount imposed than cases involving males (Figure 52). Finally, cases involving individuals aged 14 had the lowest average amount imposed, while individuals aged 17 and older had the highest (Figure 53).

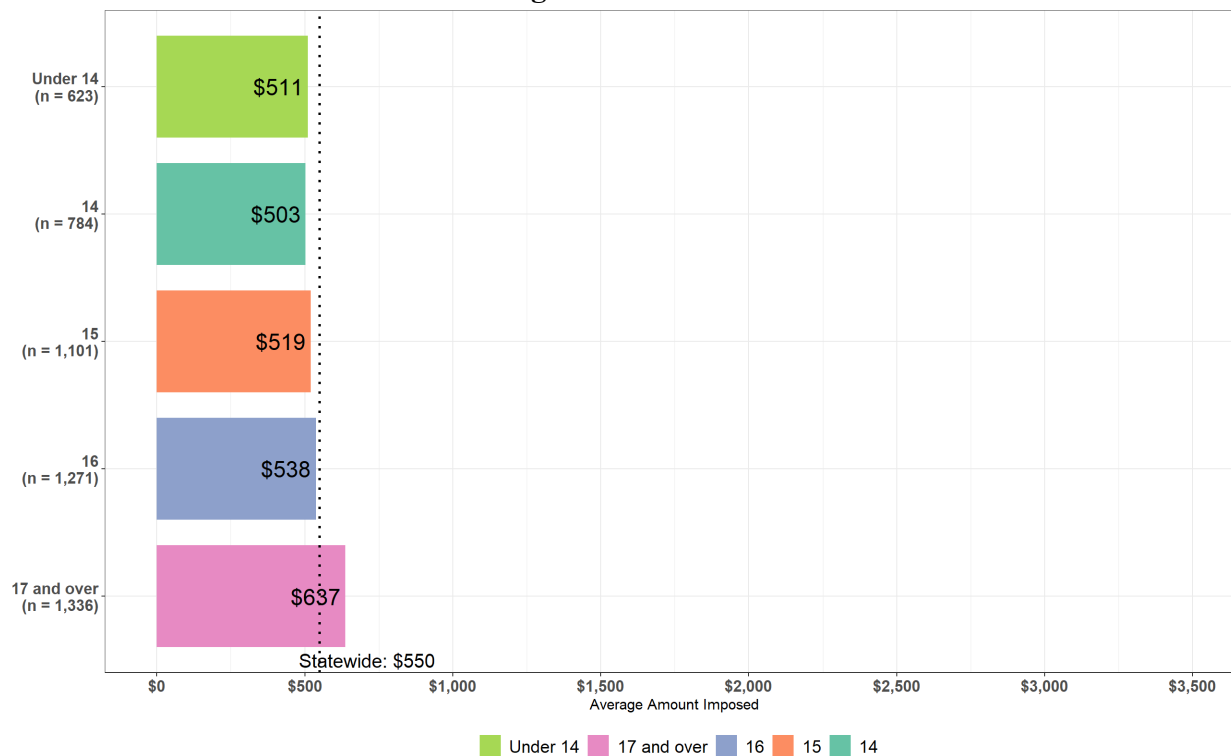
**Figure 51. Native American and Black youths tended to have higher LFO amounts imposed in Juvenile Court cases.**



**Figure 52. Female youth tended to have lower LFO amounts imposed in Juvenile Court cases.**



**Figure 53. Average LFO amounts imposed in Juvenile Court cases tended to be higher among those 17 and over.**

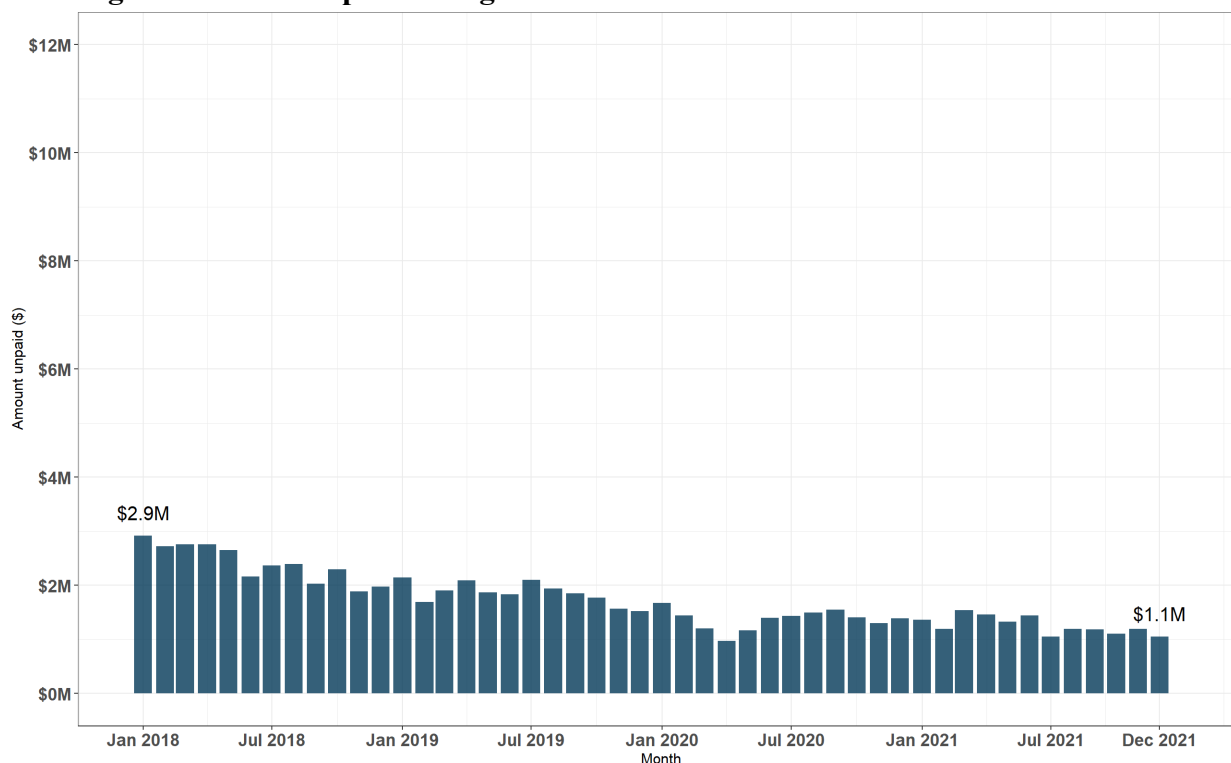


## LFO Outstanding Debt by Time

### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

Figure 54 shows the amount of outstanding debt, as of fall 2023, for CLJ cases filed in each month between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. For example, for cases filed in January of 2018, there remained \$2.9 million in outstanding debt tied to these cases in the fall of 2023. The amounts of outstanding debt decreased over the study period, so that for cases filed in December of 2021, there remained \$1.1 million in outstanding debt tied to these cases. Among CLJ cases that had outstanding debt in fall 2023, the average amount owed was \$712.<sup>10</sup> Sum totals and ranges of unpaid debt reflect all data; however, averages are calculated with 99.5% of data to mitigate the influence of outlying amounts. and thus, it is also helpful to look at the median amount owed. As shown in Figure 55, the median remaining amount owed per case dropped from around \$500 for cases filed in January 2018 to about \$380 for cases filed in December 2021. As of fall 2023, cases filed in CLJs between January 2018 and December 2021 generated over \$71 million in unpaid debt.

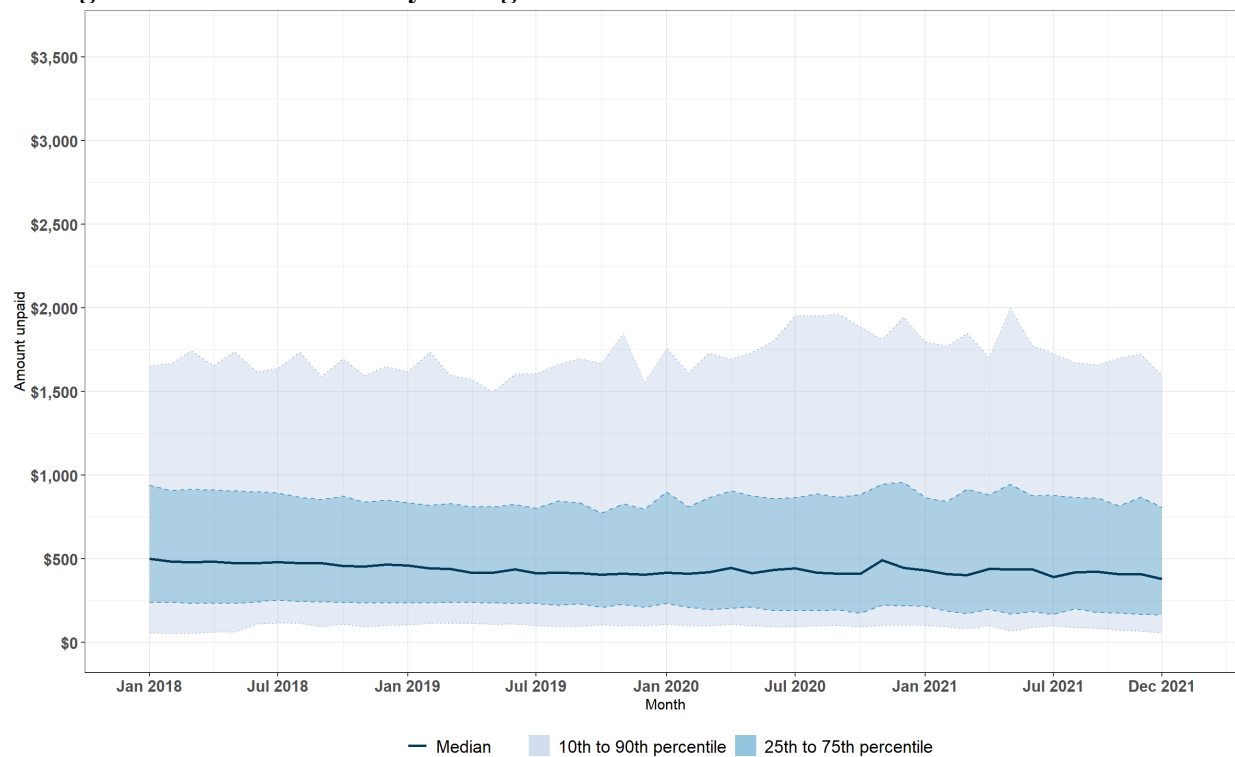
**Figure 54. Total unpaid debt generated each month in CLJ cases decreased 62%**



NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted for comparison between months.

<sup>10</sup> This amount reflects the average amount owed per CLJ case. It is important to note that many individuals hold debt on two or more cases, so the average amount owed *per person* over the study period will be higher.

**Figure 55. Median monthly debt generated in CLJ cases was \$380 in December 2021.**

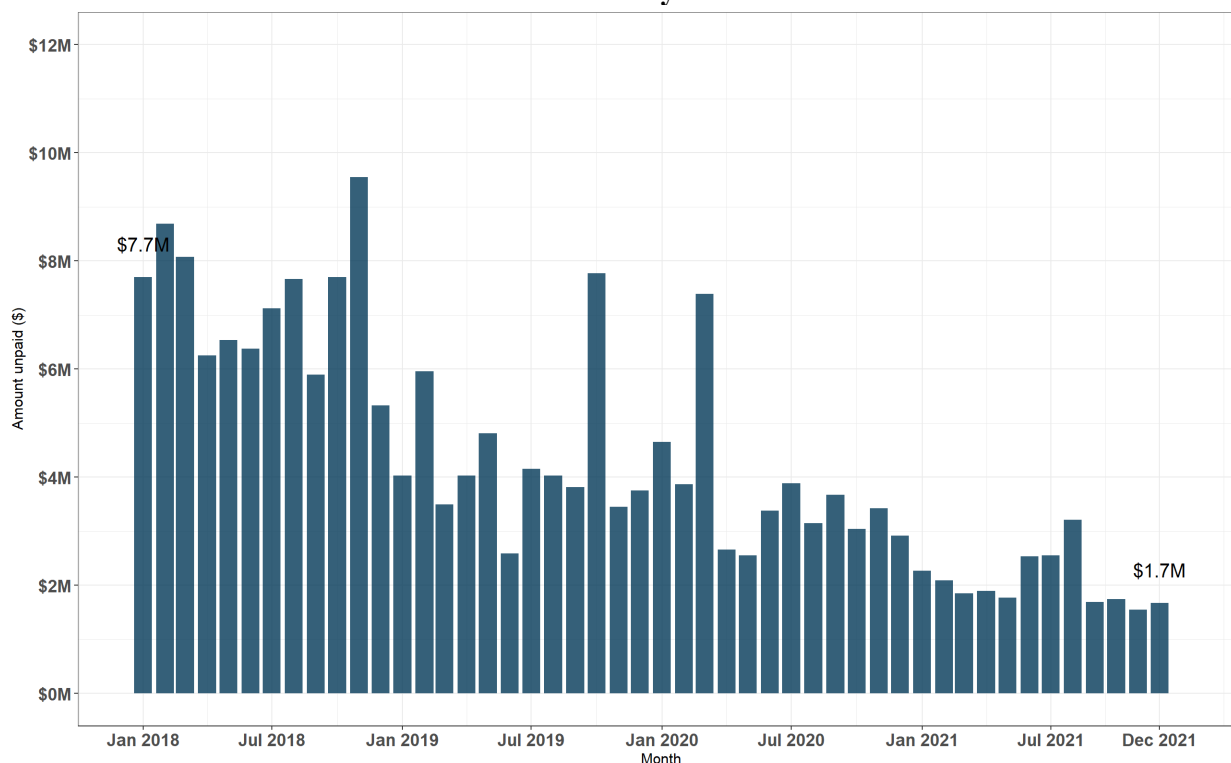


NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted for comparison between months.

## Adult Superior Courts

Figure 56 shows the amount of outstanding debt, as of fall 2023, for adult Superior Court cases filed in each month between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. For example, for cases filed in January of 2018, there remained \$7.7 million in outstanding debt tied to these cases in the fall of 2023. The amounts of outstanding debt decreased over the study period, so that for cases filed in December of 2021, there remained \$1.7 million in outstanding debt tied to these cases. Among adult Superior Court cases that had outstanding debt in fall 2023, the average amount owed was \$1,571.<sup>11</sup> Total amounts and ranges of unpaid debt are based on all data; averages reflect 99.5% of data to minimize the impact of outlying values. It is also helpful to look at the median amount owed. As shown in Figure 57, the median remaining amount owed per case dropped from around \$940 for cases filed in January 2018 to about \$530 for cases filed in December 2021. As of fall 2023, LFOs imposed in adult superior court cases between January 2018 and December 2021 generated nearly \$190 million in unpaid debt.

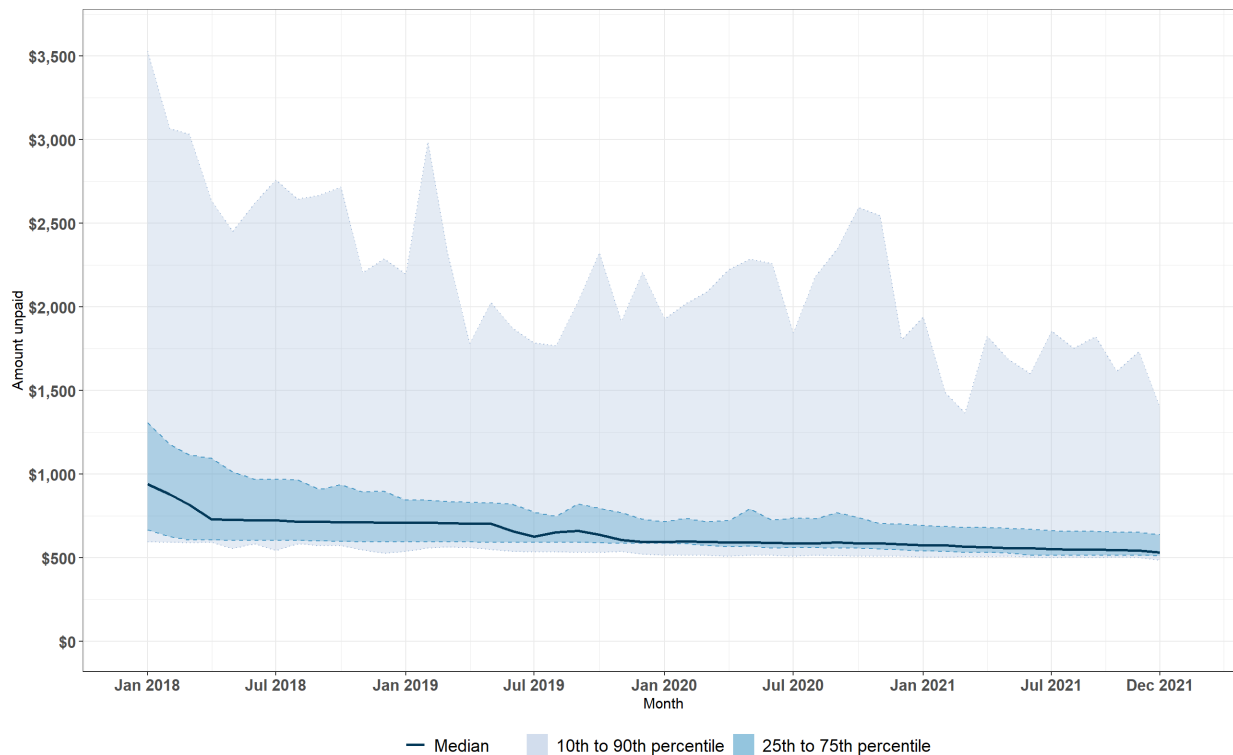
**Figure 56. Total unpaid debt generated each month in adult Superior Court cases decreased by 78%.**



NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted for comparison between months.

<sup>11</sup> This amount reflects the average amount owed per adult Superior Court case. It is important to note that many individuals hold debt on two or more cases, so the average amount owed *per person* over the study period will be higher.

**Figure 57. Median monthly debt generated in adult Superior Court cases was \$530 in December 2021.**

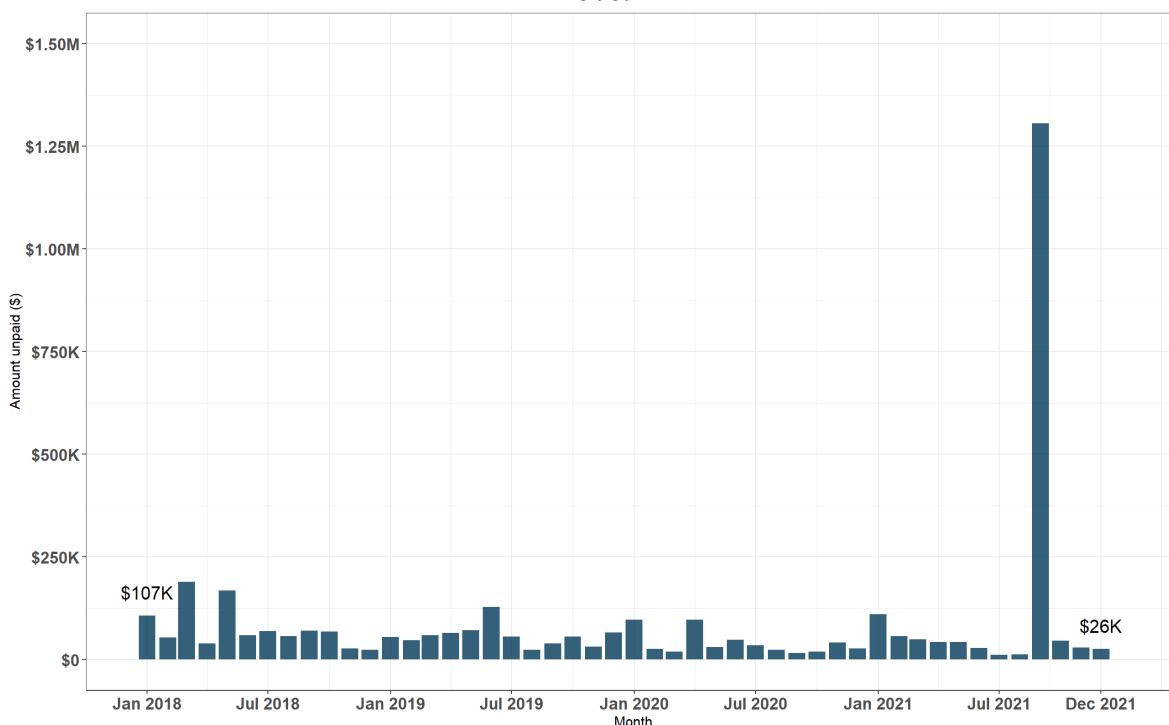


NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted for comparison between months.

## Juvenile Courts

Figure 58 shows the overall amount of outstanding debt, as of fall 2023, for Juvenile Court cases filed in each month between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021. For example, for Juvenile Court cases filed in January of 2018, there remained \$107,000 in outstanding debt tied to these cases in the fall of 2023. The amounts of outstanding debt decreased over the study period (with one exceptionally high case in 2021), so that for cases filed in December of 2021, there remained \$26,000 in outstanding debt tied to these cases. Among Juvenile Court cases that had outstanding debt in fall 2023, the average amount owed was \$664.<sup>12</sup> Note that total amounts and ranges of unpaid debt are based on all data; averages reflect 99.5% of data to minimize the impact of outlying values. It is also helpful to look at the median amount owed. As shown in Figure 59, the median remaining amount owed per case dropped from around \$120 for cases filed in January 2018 to about \$100 for cases filed in December 2021. As of fall 2023, LFOs imposed in Juvenile Court cases between January 2018 and December 2021 generated nearly \$8 million in unpaid debt.

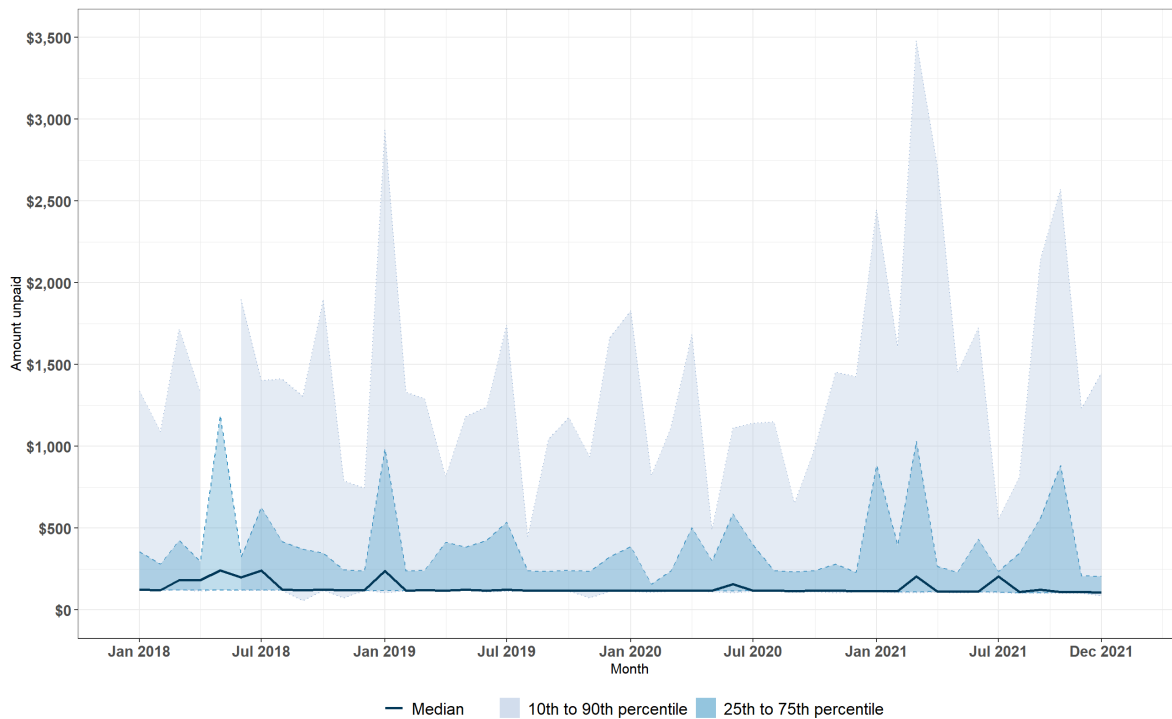
**Figure 58. Total unpaid debt generated each month in Juvenile Court cases decreased by 76%.**



NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted for comparison between months.

<sup>12</sup> This amount reflects the average amount owed per Juvenile Court case. It is important to note that many individuals hold debt on two or more cases, so the average amount owed *per person* over the study period will be higher.

**Figure 59. Median monthly debt generated in Juvenile Court cases was \$100 in December 2021.**



NOTE: Dollar amounts are inflation-adjusted for comparison between months.

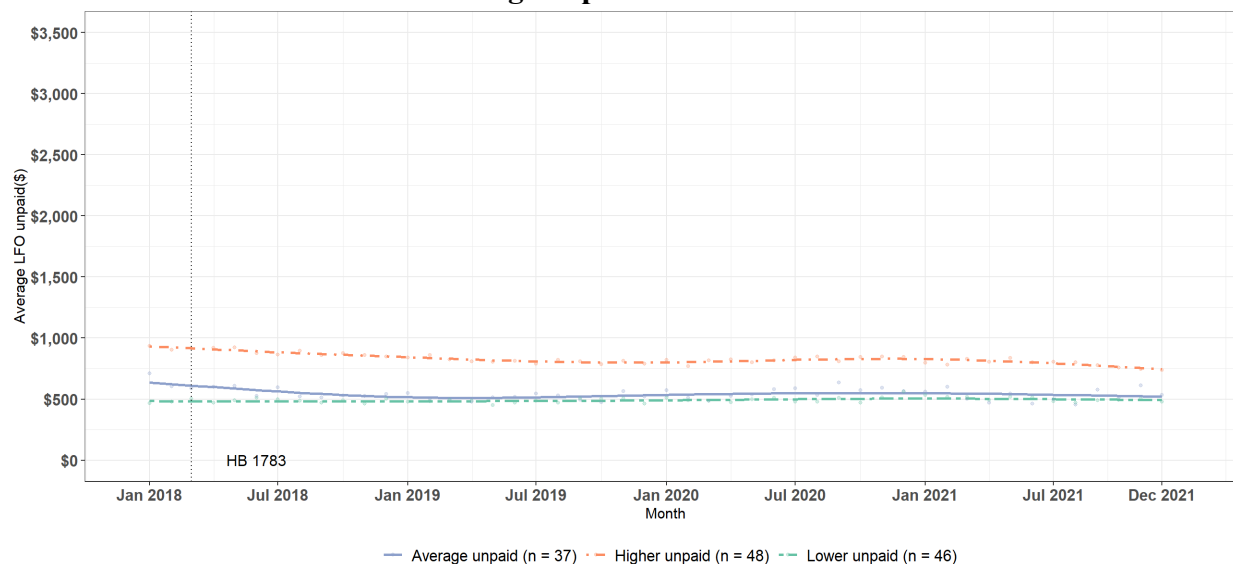


## LFO Outstanding Debt by Jurisdiction

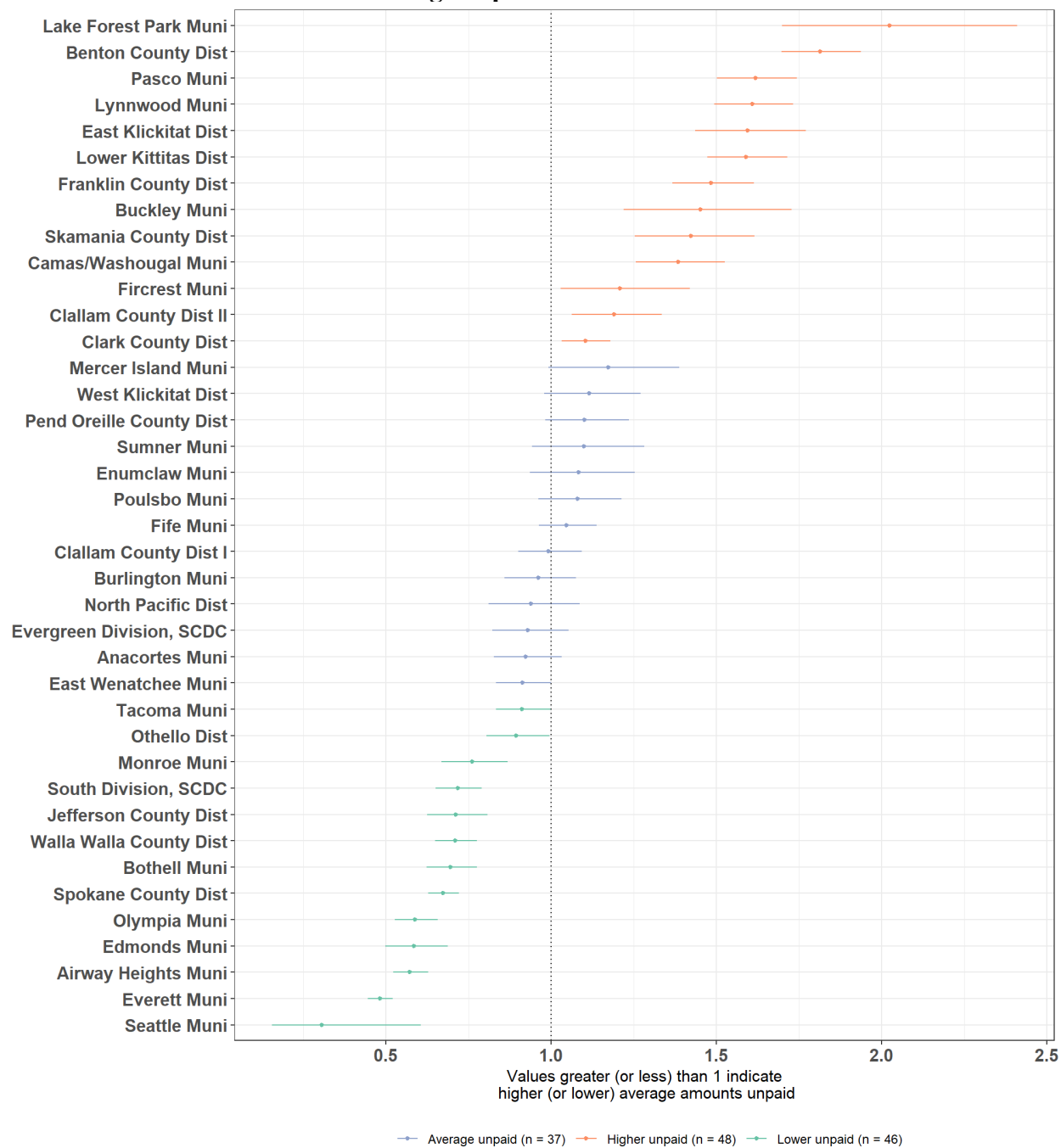
### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

The average amount of unpaid LFOs per CLJ case varied by jurisdiction. As shown in Figure 60a, 28% of CLJs had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that did not significantly differ from the statewide average across CLJs. About 37% of CLJs had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that was significantly higher than the statewide average. The remaining 35% of CLJs had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that was significantly lower than the statewide average, though note that the difference was not substantial. For illustrative purposes, 13 courts were chosen at random from each of the three groups, and their respective overall per-case averages of unpaid LFOs are presented in Figure 60b.

**Figure 60a. Courts were characterized by routinely generating average, or higher or lower than average unpaid debt in CLJ cases.**



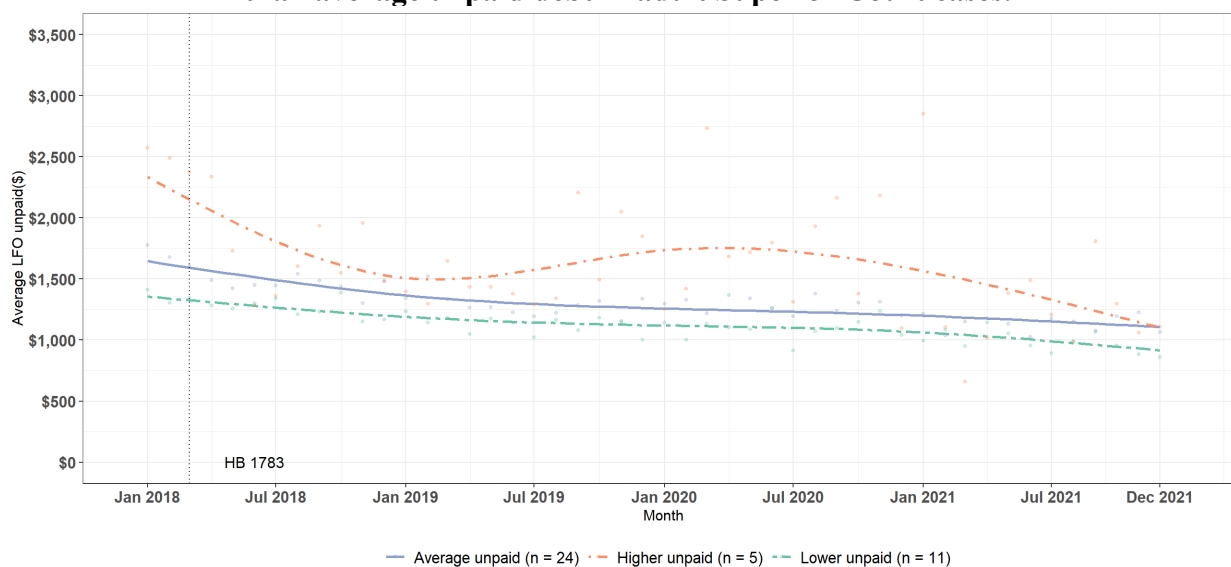
**Figure 60b. Courts were characterized by routinely generating average, or higher or lower than average unpaid debt in CLJ cases.**



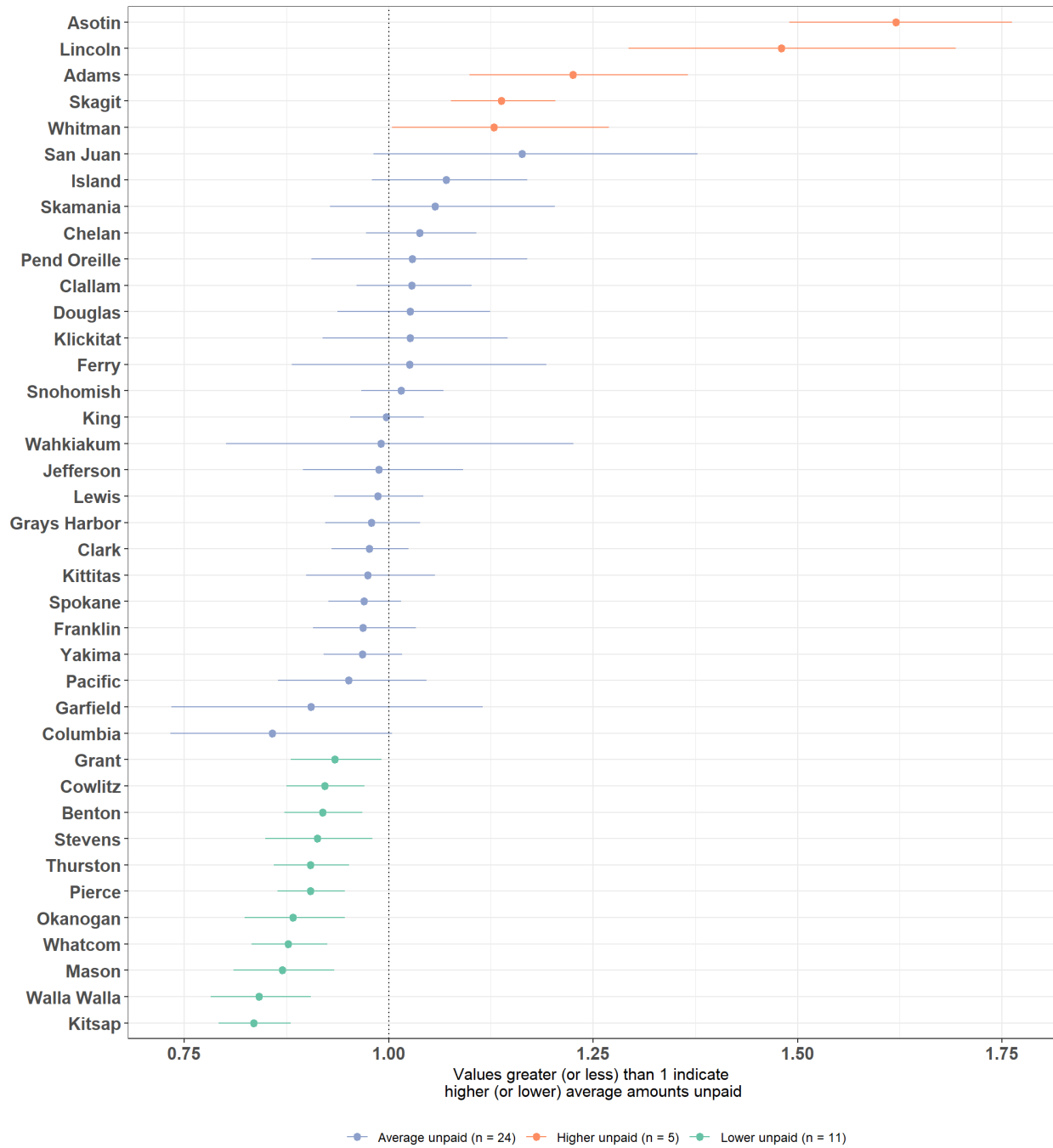
## Adult Superior Courts

The average amount of unpaid LFOs per adult Superior Court case also varied by jurisdiction. As shown in Figure 61a, 62% of counties had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that did not significantly differ from the statewide average across adult Superior Courts. About 13% of counties had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that was significantly higher than the statewide average. The remaining 26% of counties had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that was significantly lower than the statewide average, though note that the difference was not substantial. The overall per-case averages of unpaid LFOs for all 39 counties are presented in Figure 61b.

**Figure 61a. Courts were characterized by routinely generating average, or higher or lower than average unpaid debt in adult Superior Court cases.**



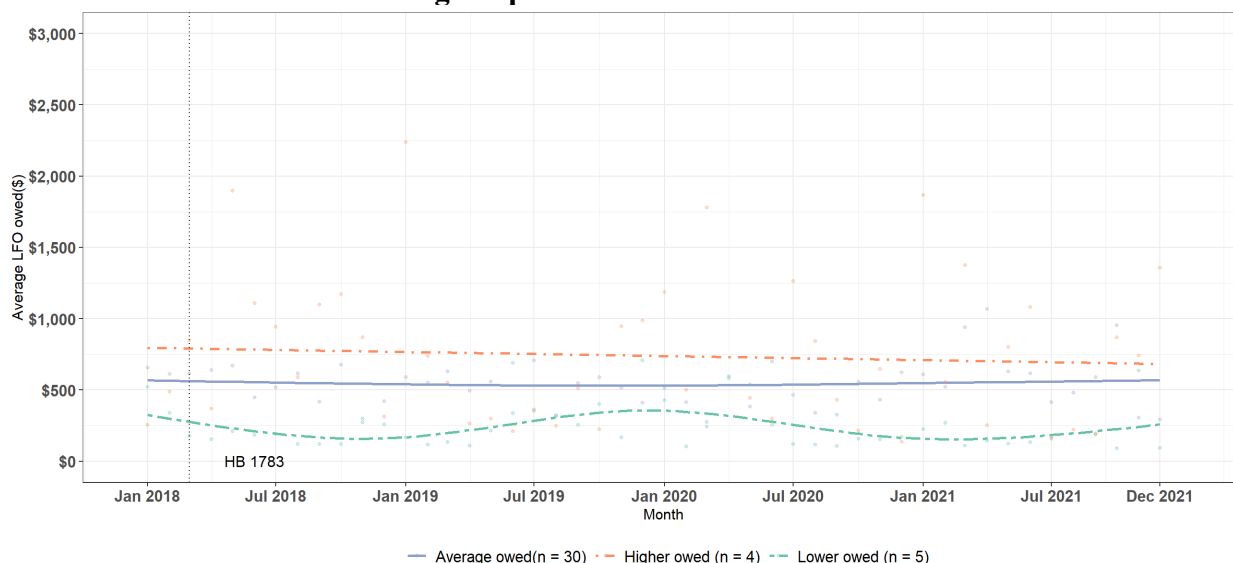
**Figure 61b. Courts were characterized by routinely generating average, or higher or lower than average unpaid debt in adult superior court cases.**



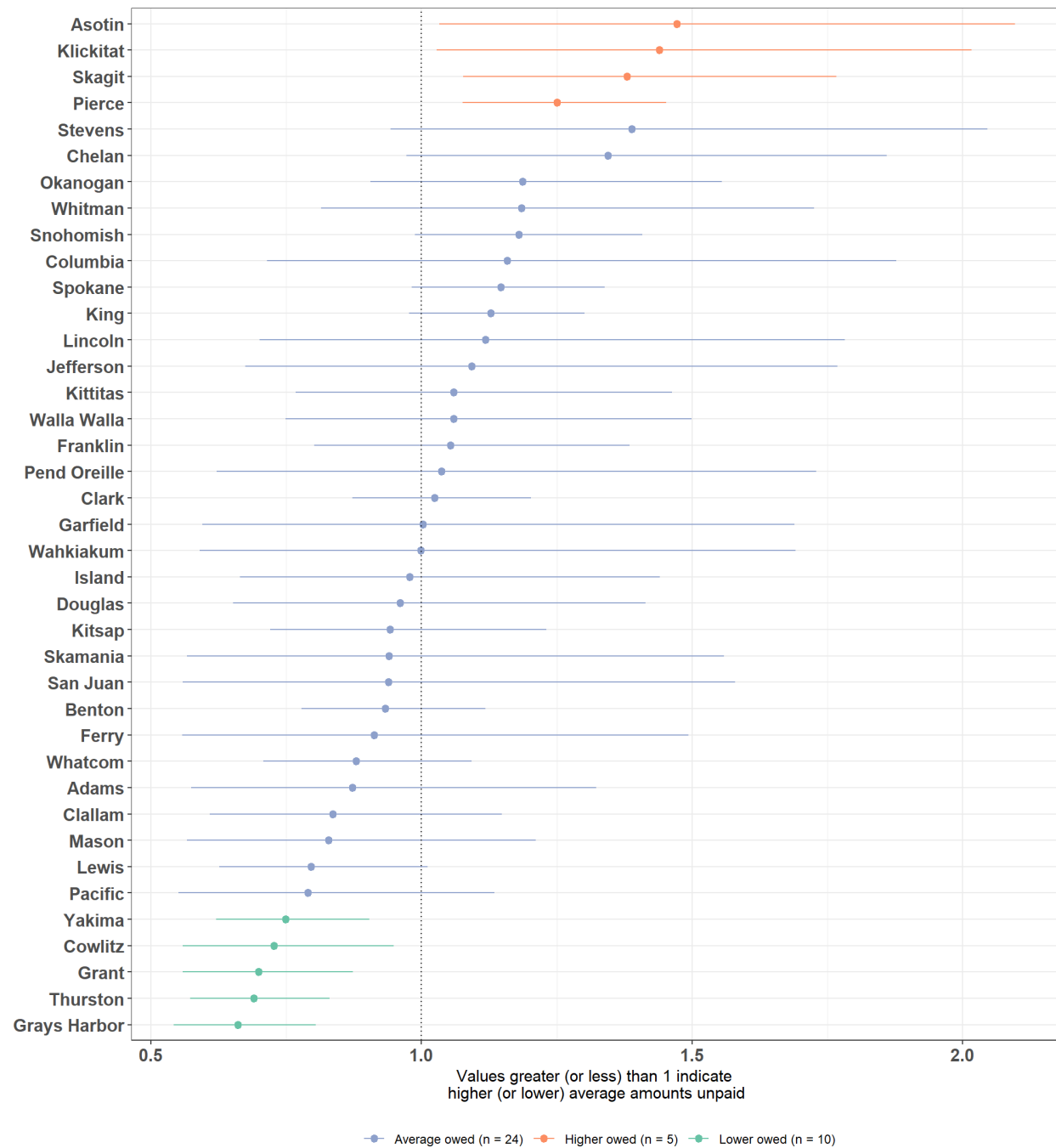
## Juvenile Courts

The average amount of unpaid LFOs per Juvenile Court case also varied by jurisdiction. As shown in Figure 62a, 77% of counties had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that did not significantly differ from the statewide average across all Juvenile Courts. About 10% of counties had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that was significantly higher than the statewide average. The remaining 13% of counties had an overall per-case average of unpaid LFOs that was significantly lower than the statewide average. The overall per-case averages of unpaid LFOs for all 39 counties are presented in Figure 62b.

**Figure 62a. Courts were characterized by routinely generating average, or higher or lower than average unpaid debt in Juvenile Court cases.**



**Figure 62b. Courts were characterized by routinely generating average, or higher or lower than average unpaid debt in juvenile court cases.**



## LFO Outstanding Debt by Offense Type

### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

Average per-case amounts of unpaid LFOs differed by the primary offense associated with the case in CLJs. Figure 63 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases filed in CLJs during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). Three offense types had overall average unpaid LFO amounts that did not differ significantly from the statewide average across all CLJs: misdemeanor other criminal, misdemeanor destruction, and misdemeanor alcohol offenses (e.g., minor in possession of alcohol, RCW 66.44.270.2A). Three offense types had overall average unpaid LFO amounts that were significantly higher than the statewide average, and six offense types had average amounts that were significantly lower.

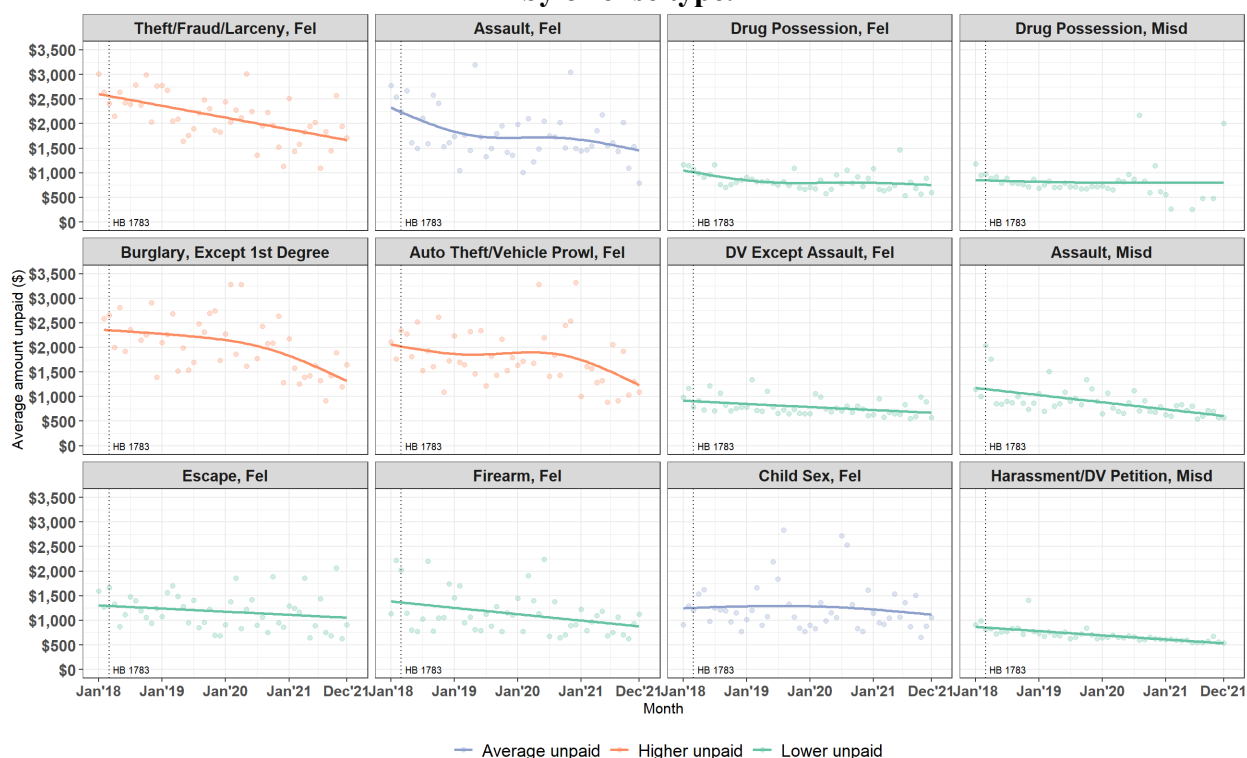
**Figure 63. Average unpaid debt generated each month in CLJs varied by offense type.**



## Adult Superior Courts

Average per-case amounts of unpaid LFOs also differed by the primary offense associated with the case in adult Superior Courts. Figure 64 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases filed in adult Superior Courts during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). Two offense types had overall average unpaid LFO amounts that did not differ significantly from the statewide average across adult Superior Courts: felony assault and felony child sex offenses. Three offense types had overall average unpaid LFO amounts that were significantly higher than the statewide average, and seven offense types had average amounts that were significantly lower.

**Figure 64. Average unpaid debt generated each month in adult Superior Court cases varied by offense type.**

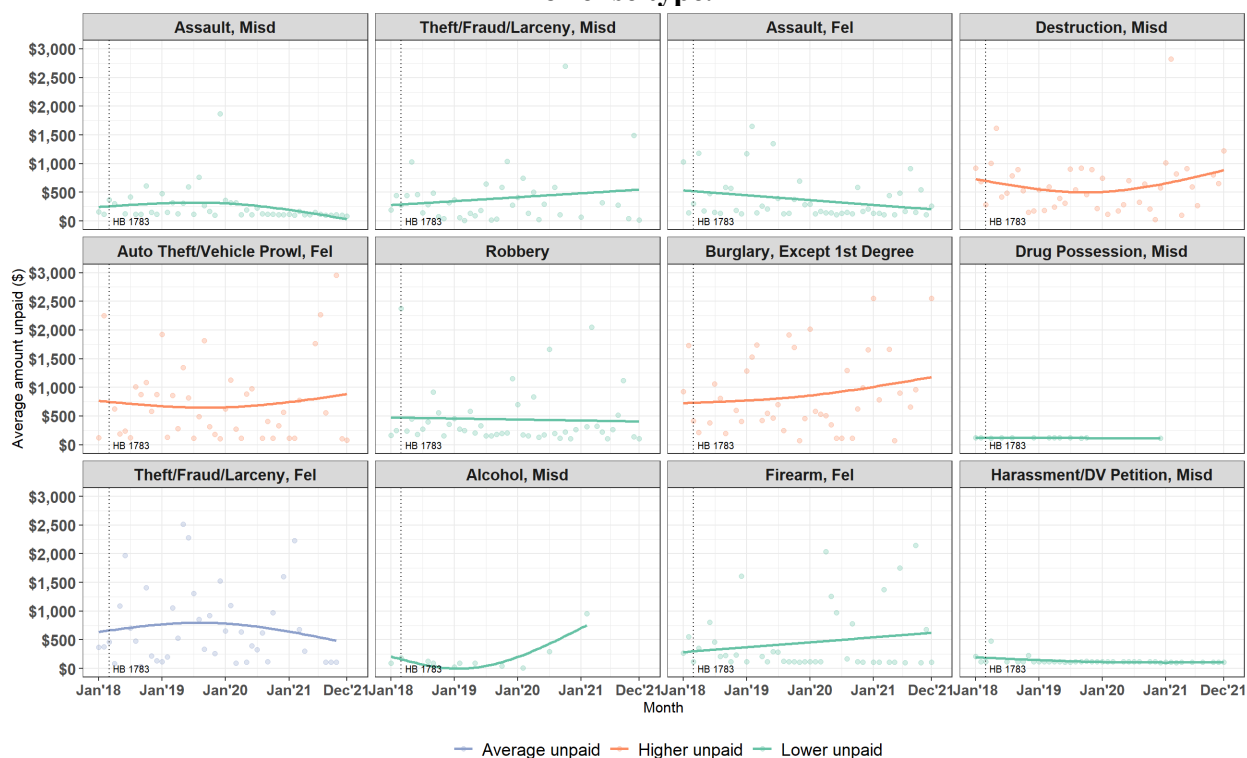




## Juvenile Courts

Average per-case amounts of unpaid LFOs also differed by the primary offense associated with the case in Juvenile Courts. Figure 65 shows the 12 most common primary offense types tied to LFO-eligible cases filed in Juvenile Courts during the study period, organized by most prevalent (upper left) to least prevalent (lower right). One offense type had an overall average unpaid LFO amount that did not differ significantly from the statewide average across Juvenile Courts: felony theft/fraud/larceny. Three offense types had overall average unpaid LFO amounts that were significantly higher than the statewide average, and eight offense types had average amounts that were significantly lower.

**Figure 65. Average unpaid debt generated each month in Juvenile Court cases varied by offense type.**

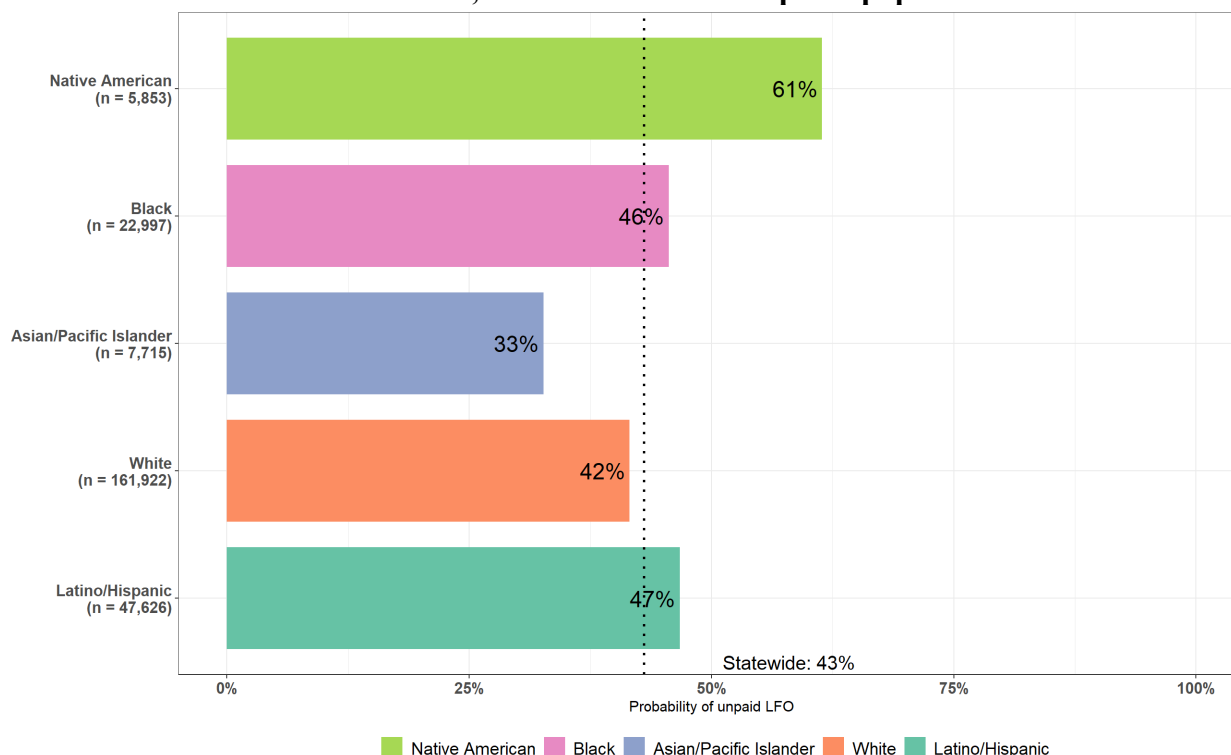


## LFO Outstanding Debt by Demographic Characteristics

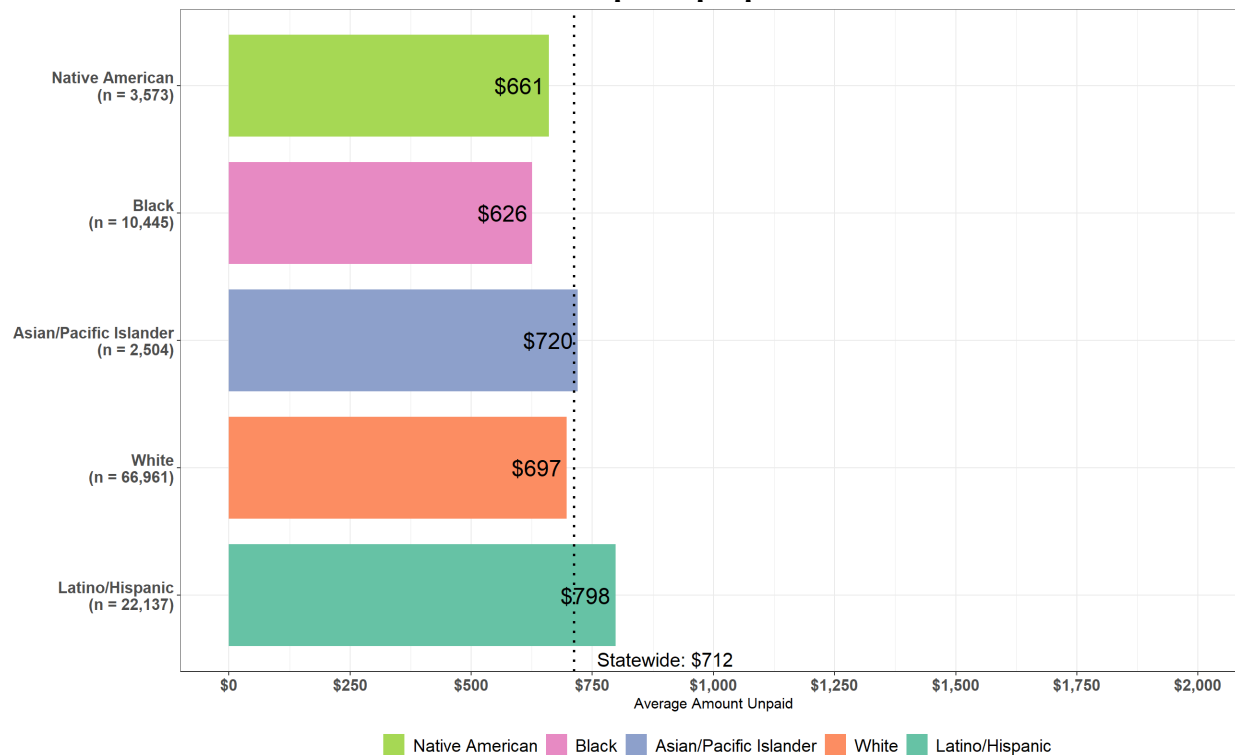
### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

The percentage of CLJ cases filed during the study period with remaining unpaid LFOs in the fall of 2023, as well as the average amount of unpaid LFOs, varied by demographic characteristics. As shown in Figure 66, statewide, 43% of cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021 that resulted in an LFO imposition had remaining unpaid LFO amounts in the fall of 2023. LFO cases involving Native American individuals had the highest rate of cases with outstanding debt (61%), while cases involving Asian/Pacific Islander individuals had the lowest rate (33%). As shown in Figure 67, while the average amount owed per case was \$721, cases involving Latino/Hispanic individuals had the highest average amount owed (\$798) and cases involving Black individuals had the lowest average amount owed (\$626).

**Figure 66. Probability of having unpaid LFO debt in CLJ cases was highest in the Native American, Black and Latino/Hispanic population.**

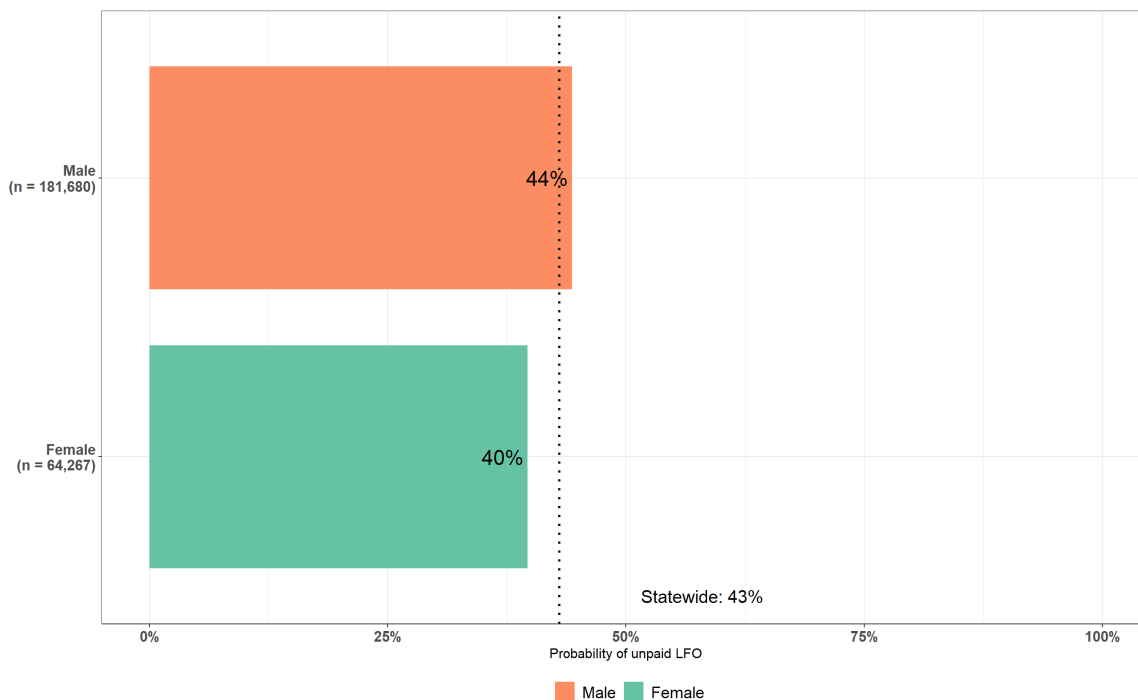


**Figure 67. Average amounts of unpaid debt in CLJ cases tended to be higher for Latino/Hispanic people.**

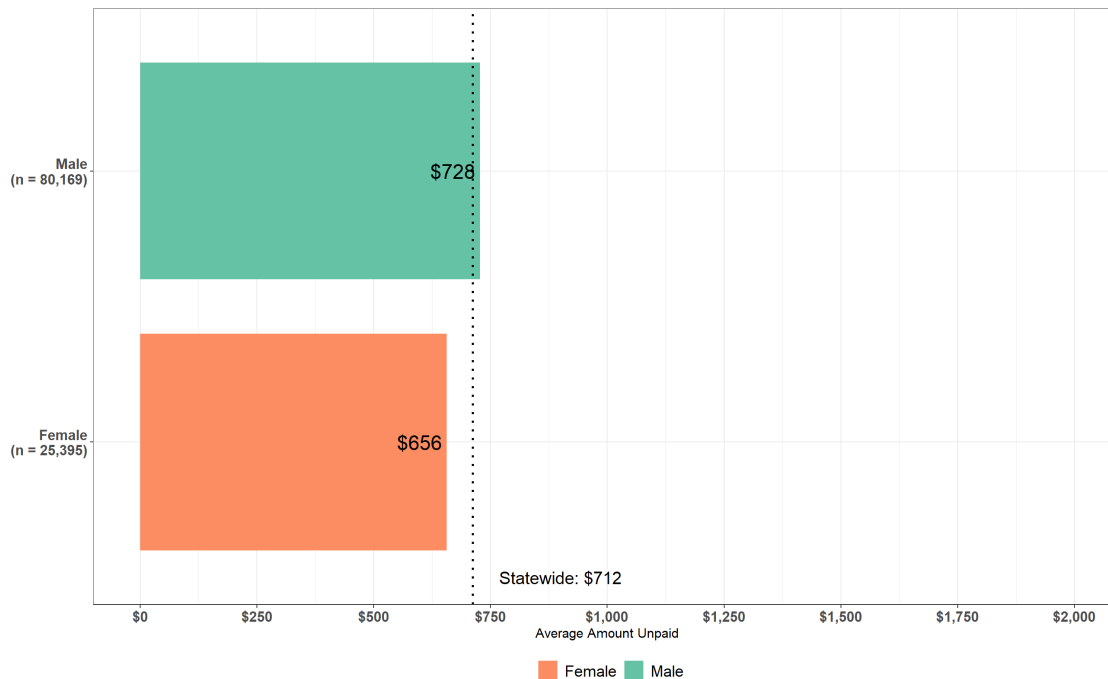


Outstanding LFO debt in CLJs was also associated with both gender and age. About 44% of cases involving male individuals that resulted in LFOs had remaining debt in the fall of 2023, compared to 40% of cases involving females (see Figure 68). Cases involving males also had a higher per-case average amount of unpaid LFOs (Figure 69). Cases tied to individuals in the age categories 26-30, 31-35, and 36-40 were more likely to carry LFO debt than cases involving young or older individuals (Figure 70). However, cases involving individuals 25 and under had the highest per-case average of unpaid LFO amounts (Figure 71).

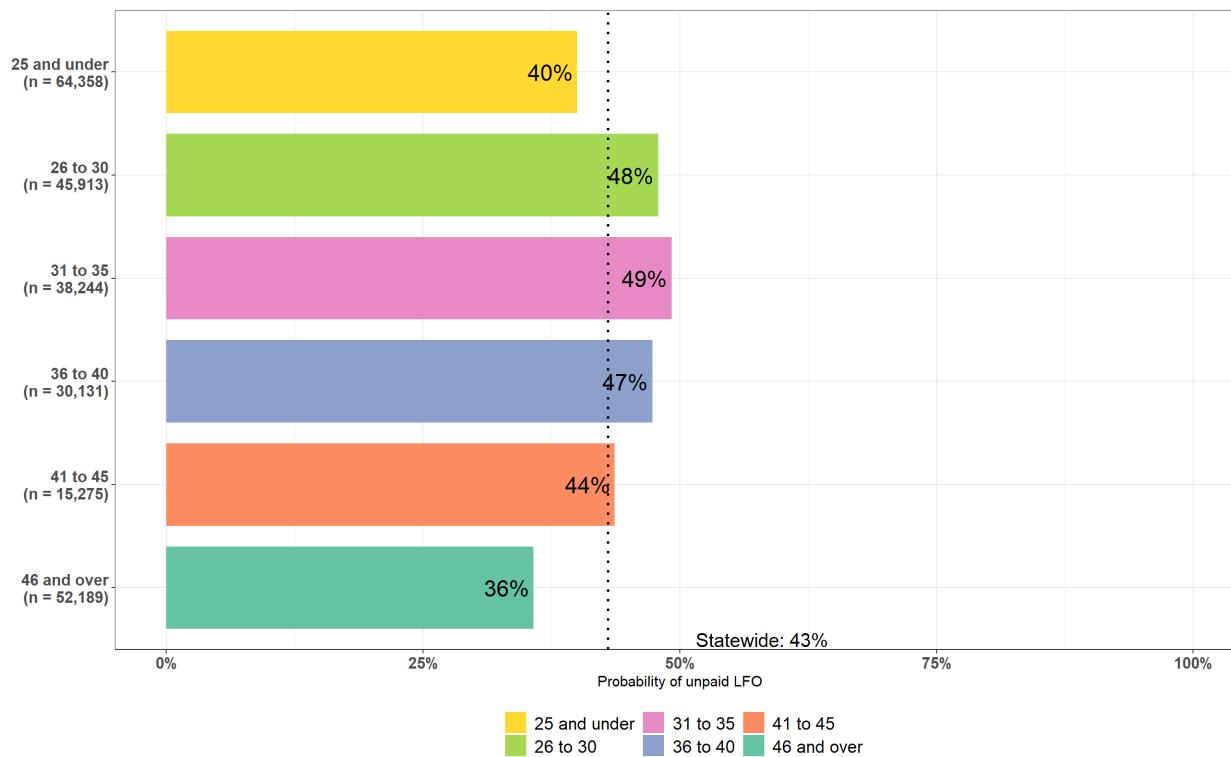
**Figure 68. Females had slightly lower probability of unpaid debt given an LFO in CLJ cases.**



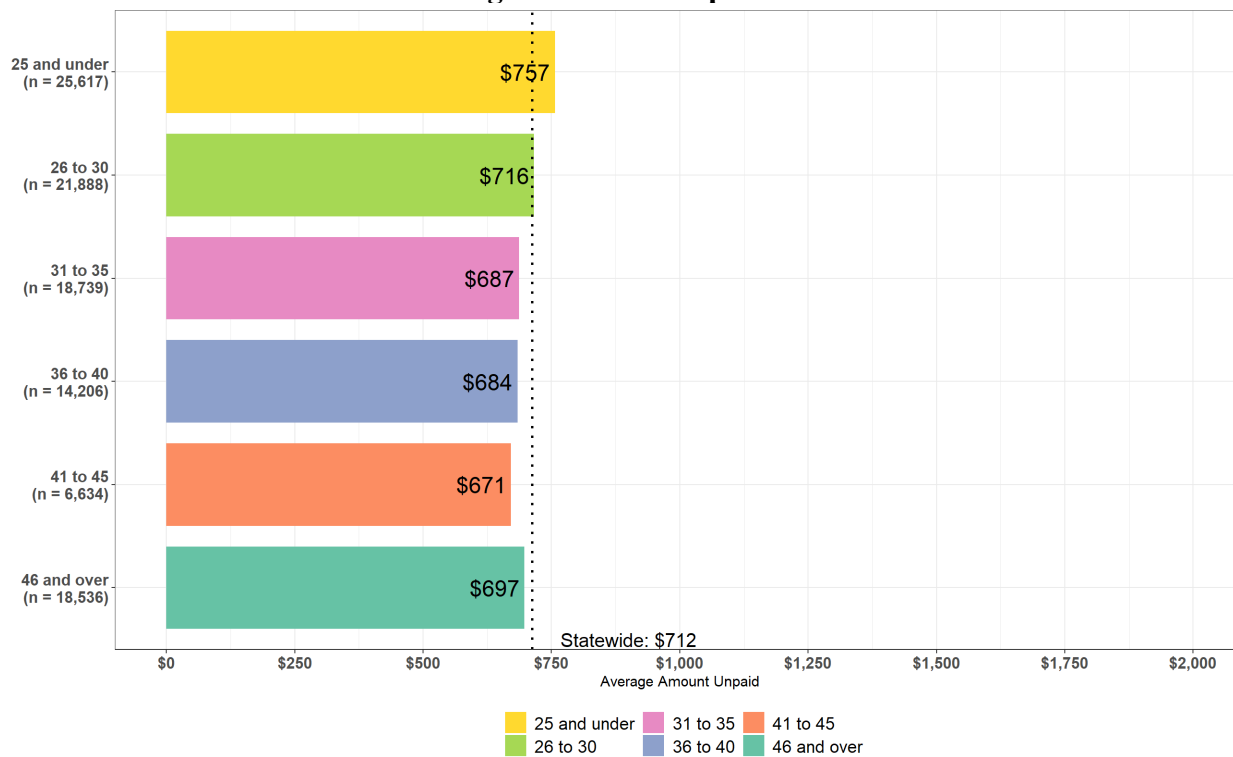
**Figure 69. Males tended to have higher amounts of unpaid debt in CLJ cases with LFOs.**



**Figure 70. People 46 and over had the lowest probability of unpaid debt given a CLJ case with an LFO.**



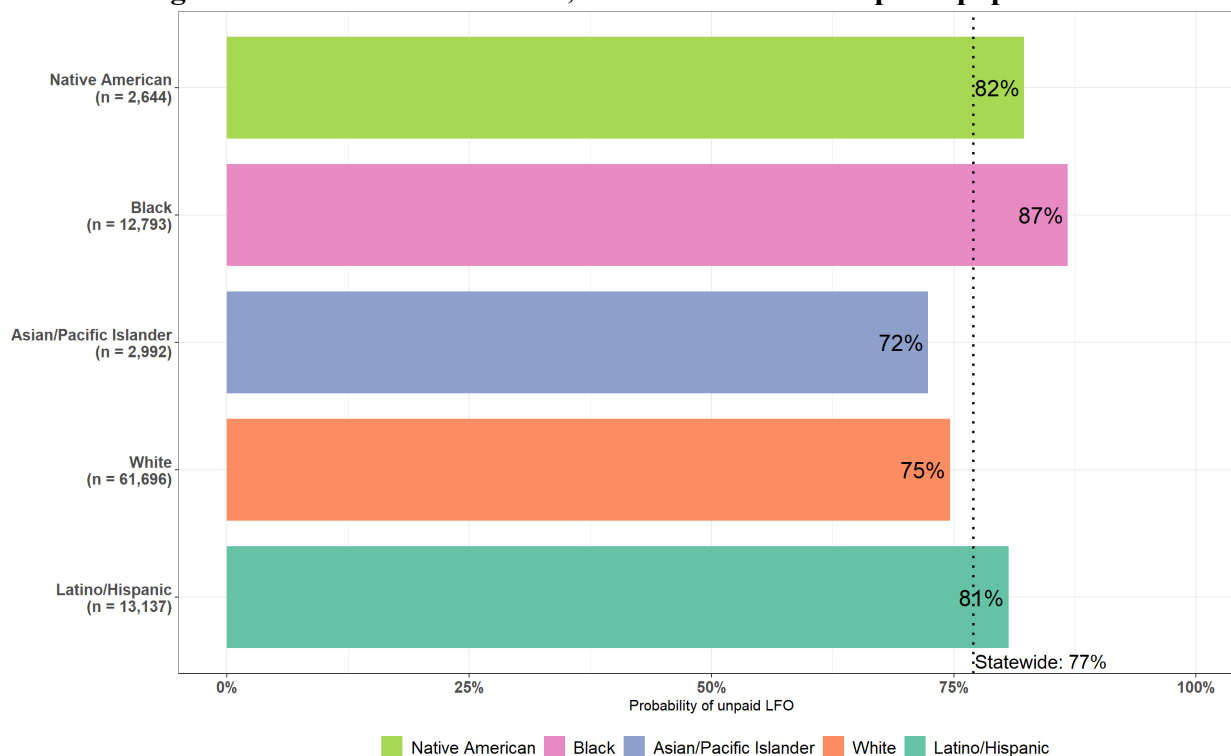
**Figure 71. People 25 and under with LFOs in a CLJ case tended to have the highest average amount of unpaid debt.**



## Adult Superior Courts

The percentage of adult Superior Court cases filed during the study period with remaining unpaid LFOs in the fall of 2023, as well as the average amount of unpaid LFOs, varied by demographic characteristics. As shown in Figure 72, statewide, 77% of cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021 that resulted in an LFO imposition had remaining unpaid LFO amounts in the fall of 2023. LFO cases involving Black individuals had the highest rate of cases with outstanding debt (87%), while cases involving Asian/Pacific Islander individuals had the lowest rate (72%). As shown in Figure 73, while the average amount owed per case was \$1,571, cases involving Asian/Pacific Islander individuals had the highest average amount owed (\$1,737) and cases involving Native American individuals had the lowest average amount owed (\$1,165).

**Figure 72. Probability of having unpaid LFO debt in adult superior Court cases was highest in the Native American, Black and Latino/Hispanic population.**



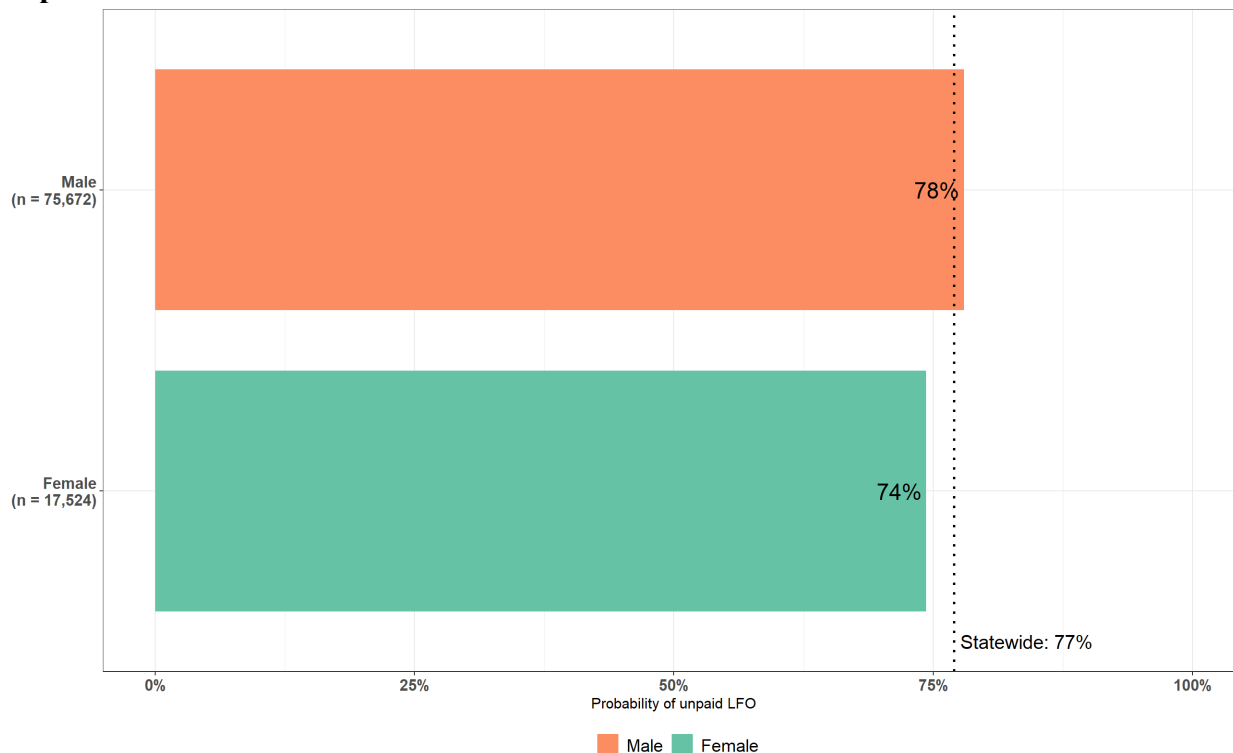
**Figure 73. The Asian/Pacific Islander population tended to have higher amounts of unpaid debt in adult Superior Court cases with LFOs.**



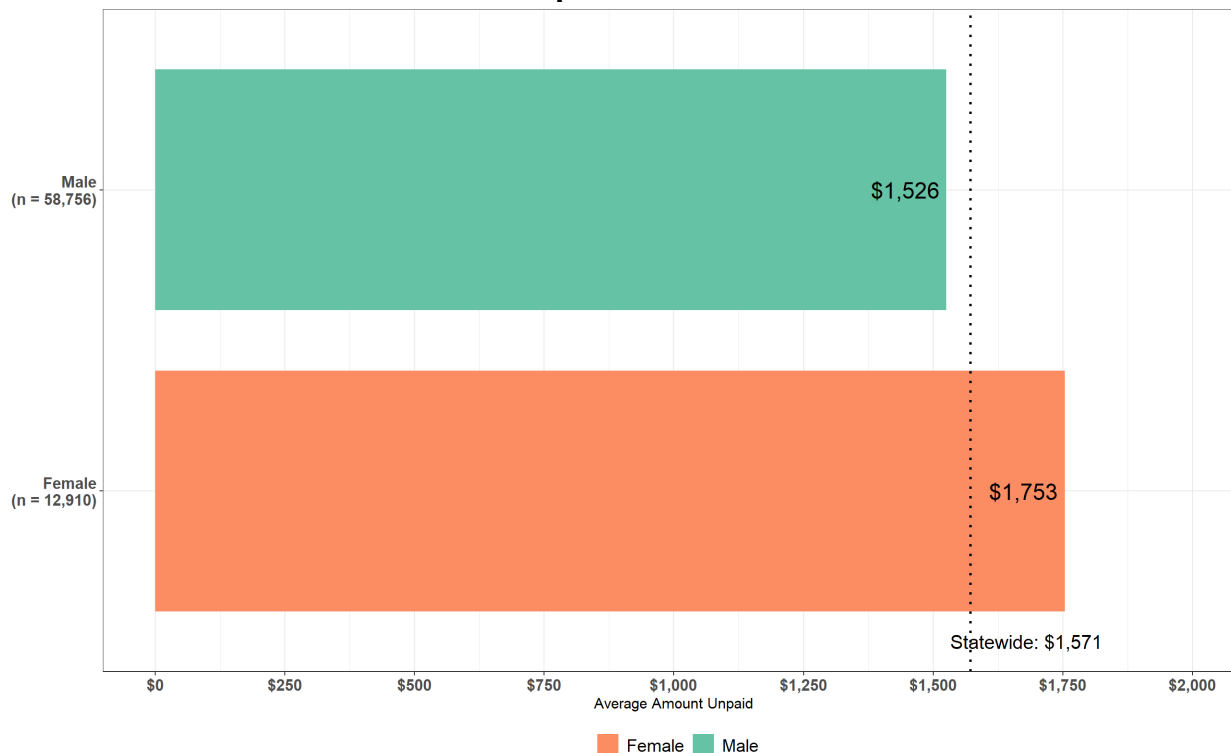


Outstanding LFO debt in adult Superior Courts was also associated with both gender and age. About 78% of cases involving male individuals that resulted in LFOs had remaining debt in the fall of 2023, compared to 74% of cases involving females (see Figure 74). However, cases involving males had a lower per-case average amount of unpaid LFOs than females (Figure 75). Cases involving individuals in the oldest age category, 46 and older, were the least likely to carry LFO debt (Figure 76). Cases involving this same age group also had the lowest per-case average unpaid LFO amounts (Figure 77).

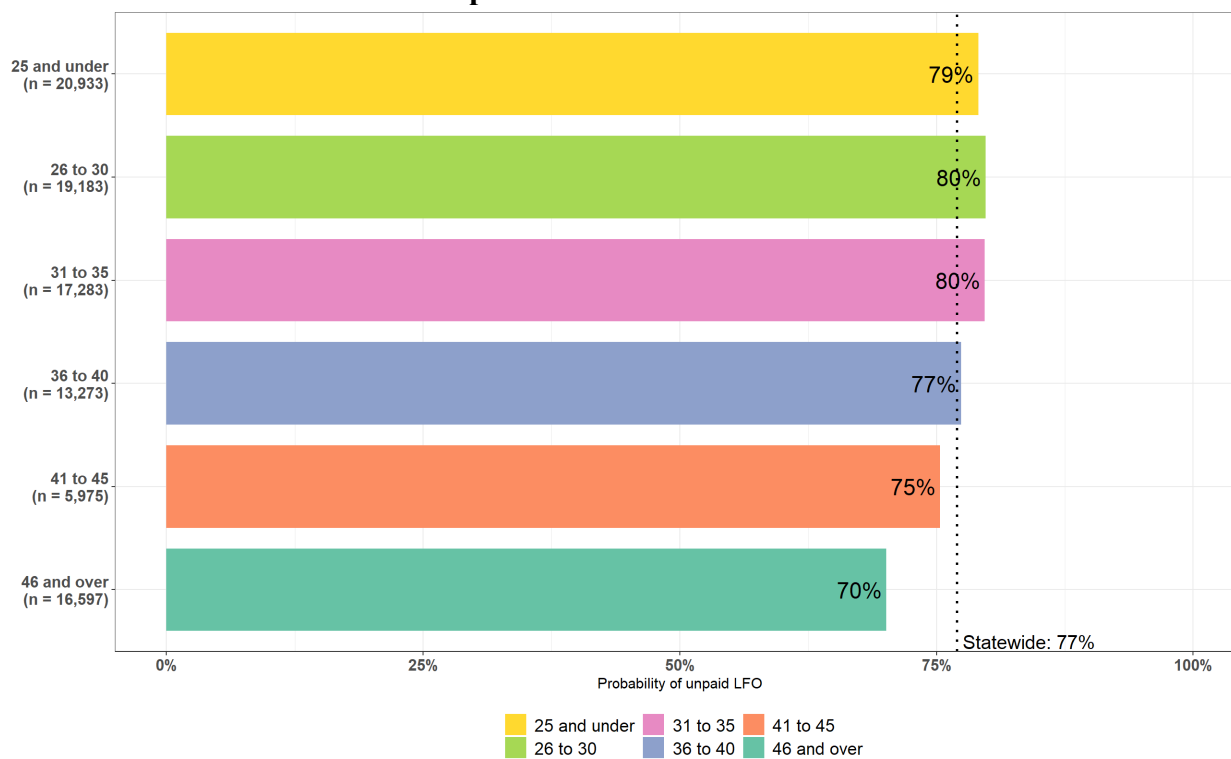
**Figure 74. Females had a slightly lower probability of unpaid debt given an LFO in adult Superior Court cases.**



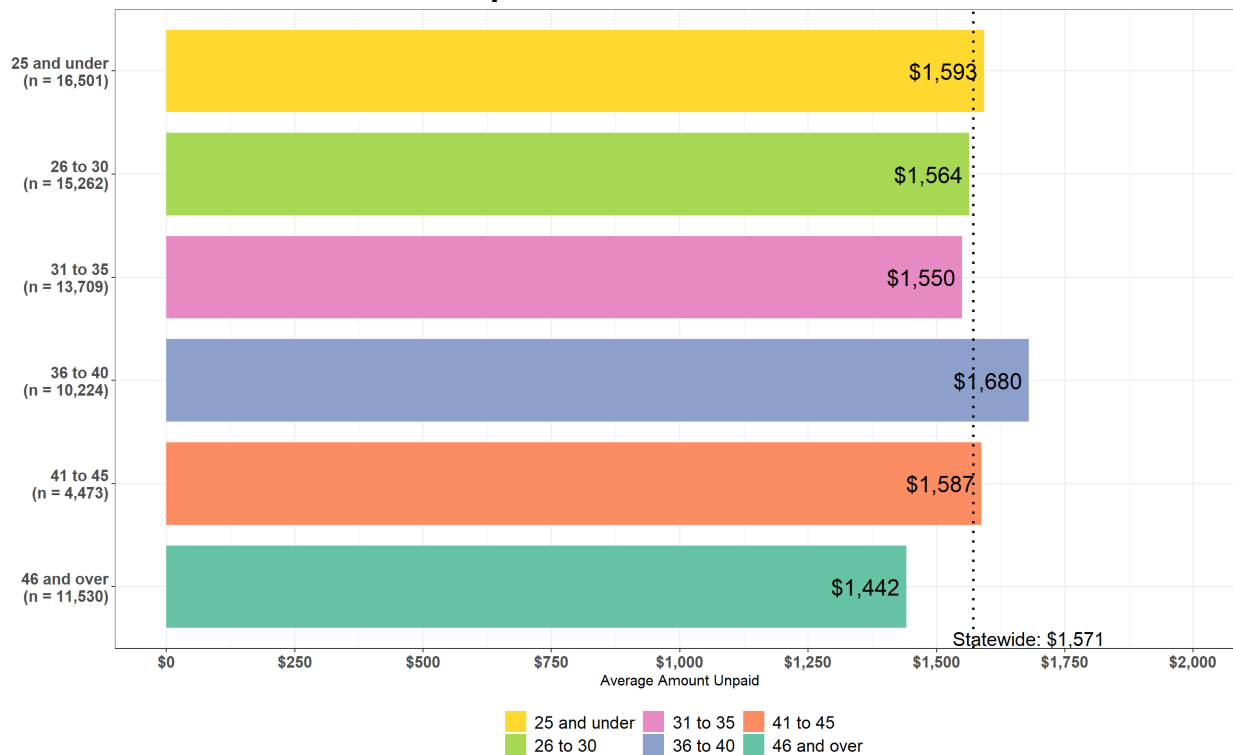
**Figure 75. Females tended to have higher amounts of unpaid debt given an LFO in adult Superior Court cases.**



**Figure 76. People 46 and over had the lowest probability of unpaid debt given an adult Superior Court case with an LFO.**



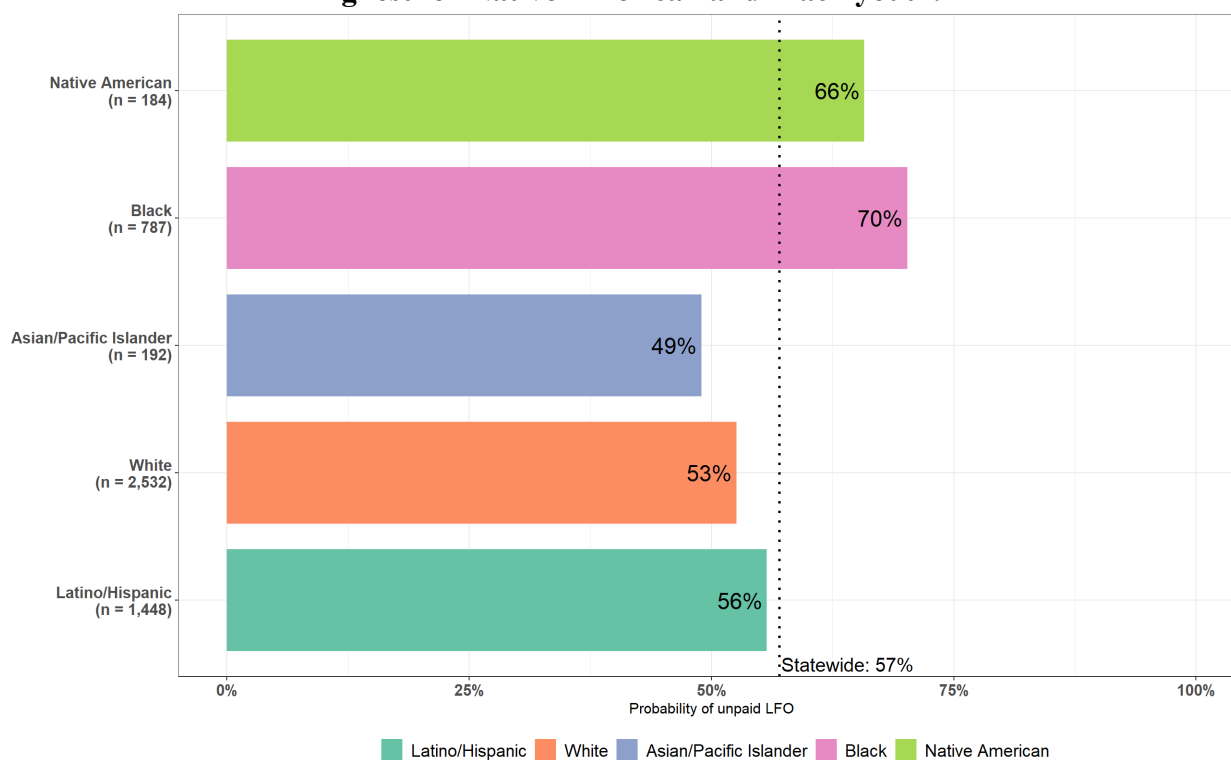
**Figure 77. People 46 and over had the lowest average amount of unpaid debt given an adult Superior Court case with an LFO.**



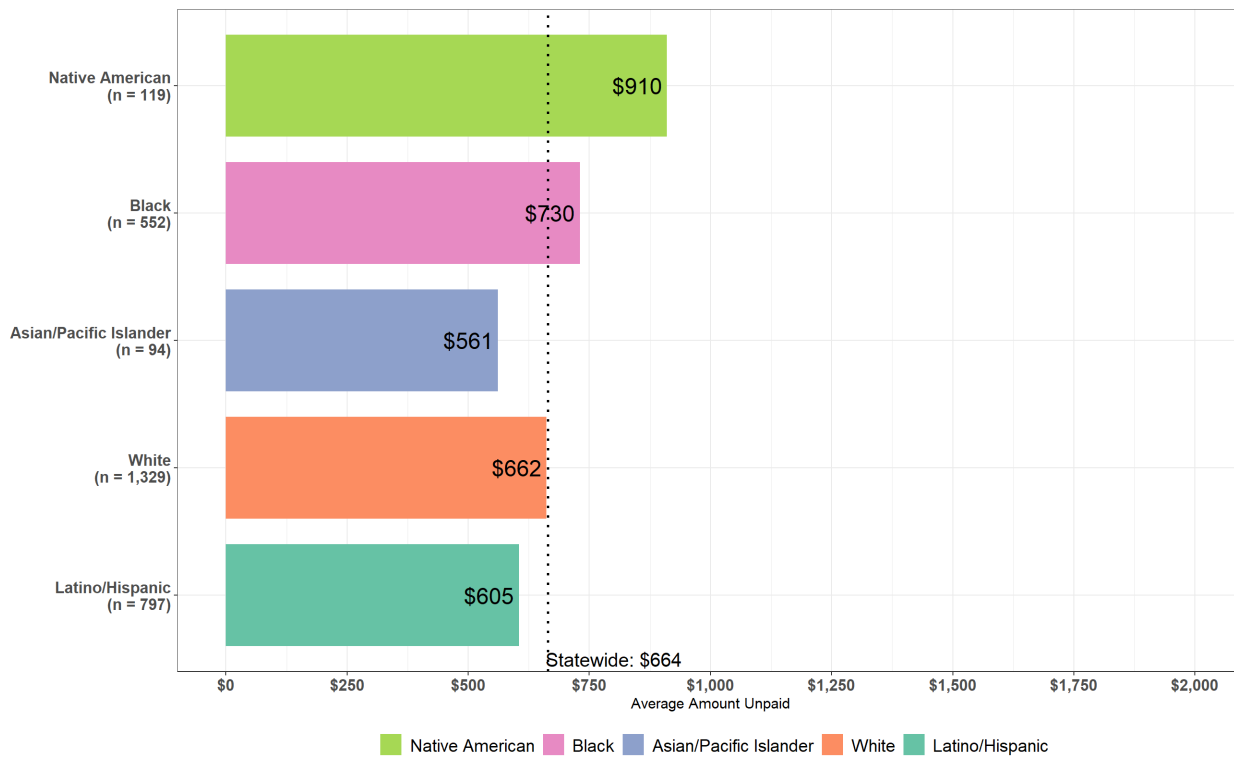
## Juvenile Courts

The percentage of Juvenile Court cases filed during the study period with remaining unpaid LFOs in the fall of 2023, as well as the average amount of unpaid LFOs, varied by demographic characteristics. As shown in Figure 78, statewide, 57% of cases filed between January 1, 2018 and December 31, 2021 that resulted in an LFO imposition had remaining unpaid LFO amounts in the fall of 2023. LFO cases involving Black individuals had the highest rate of cases with outstanding debt (70%), while cases involving Asian/Pacific Islander individuals had the lowest rate (49%). As shown in Figure 79, while the average amount owed per case was \$664, cases involving Native American youth had the highest average amount owed (\$910), while cases involving Asian/Pacific Islander youth had the lowest average amount owed (\$561).

**Figure 78. Probability of having unpaid LFO debt in Juvenile Court cases was highest for Native American and Black youth.**

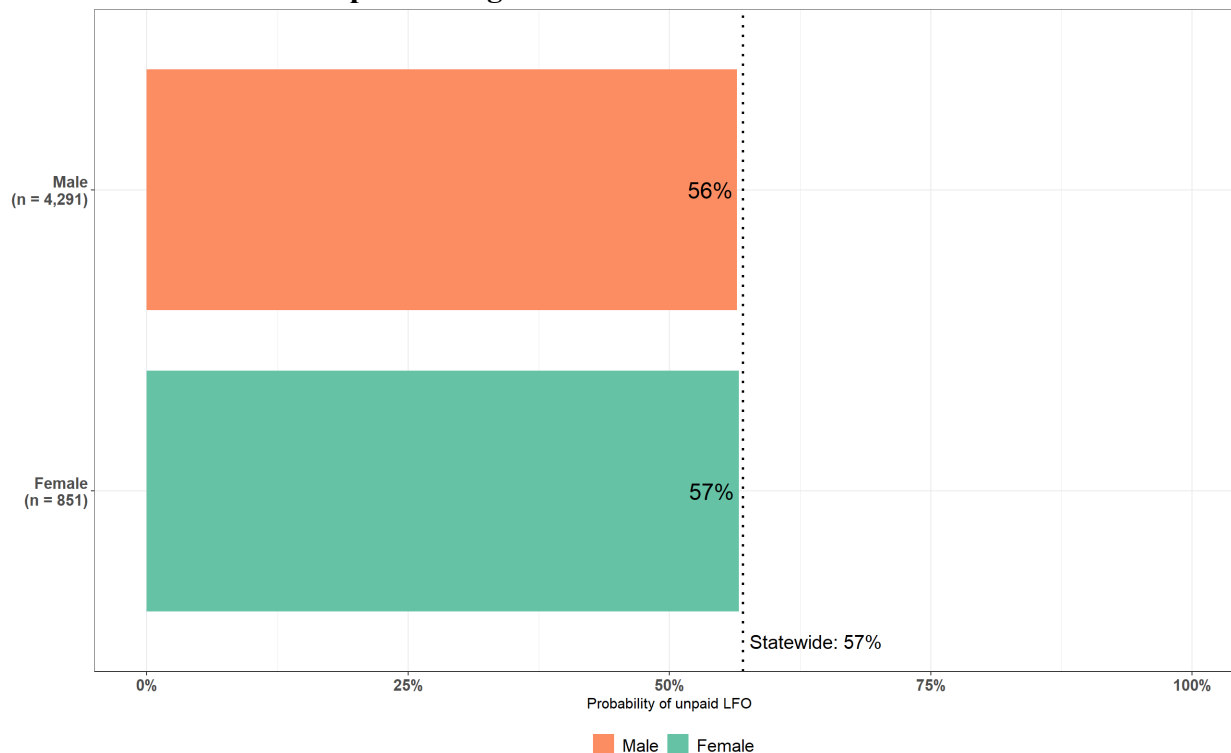


**Figure 79. Native American and Black youth had the highest average unpaid debt in Juvenile Court cases with an LFO.**

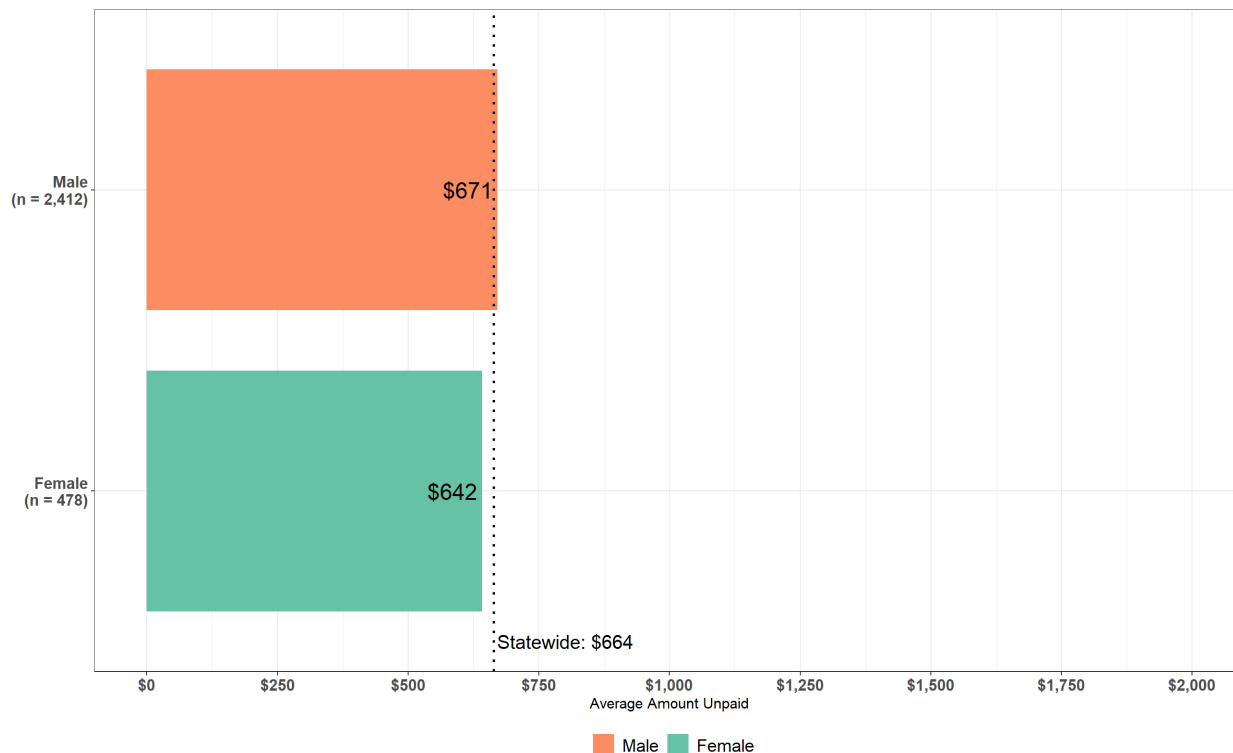


Outstanding LFO debt in Juvenile Courts was also associated age, while gender was less of an influencing factor. Roughly equal percentages of cases involving male and female youth resulting in LFOs had remaining debt in the fall of 2023 (see Figure 80). Cases involving males had a slightly higher per-case average amount of unpaid LFOs than females (Figure 81). Cases involving youth in the two oldest age categories were the least likely to carry LFO debt (Figure 82). However, cases involving youth in the youngest age category had the lowest per-case average unpaid LFO amounts (Figure 83).

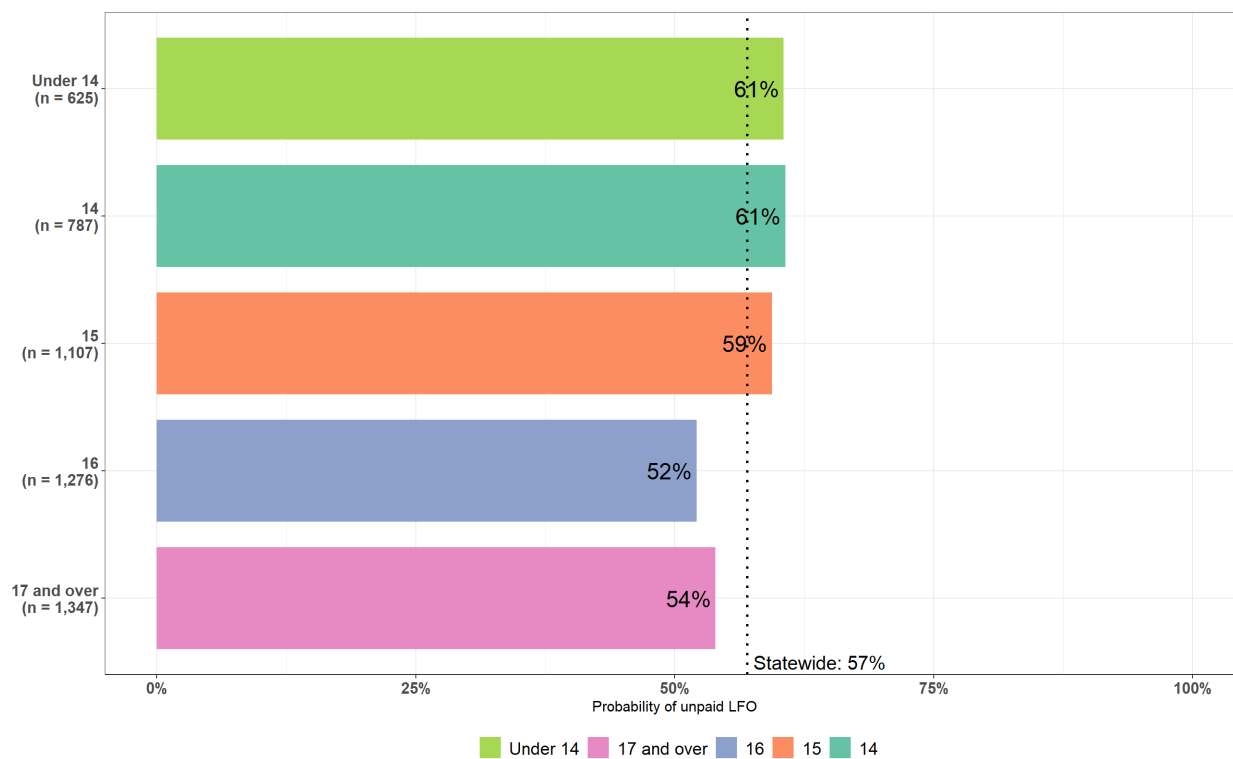
**Figure 80. Female and male youth had effectively the same probability of having unpaid debt given a Juvenile Court case LFO.**



**Figure 81. Female youth had slightly lower average amounts of unpaid debt in Juvenile Court cases with LFOs.**



**Figure 82. Youths 14 and under had the highest probability of unpaid debt in Juvenile Court cases with an LFO.**



**Figure 83. The population 17 and over tended to have the highest amounts of unpaid debt in Juvenile Court cases.**



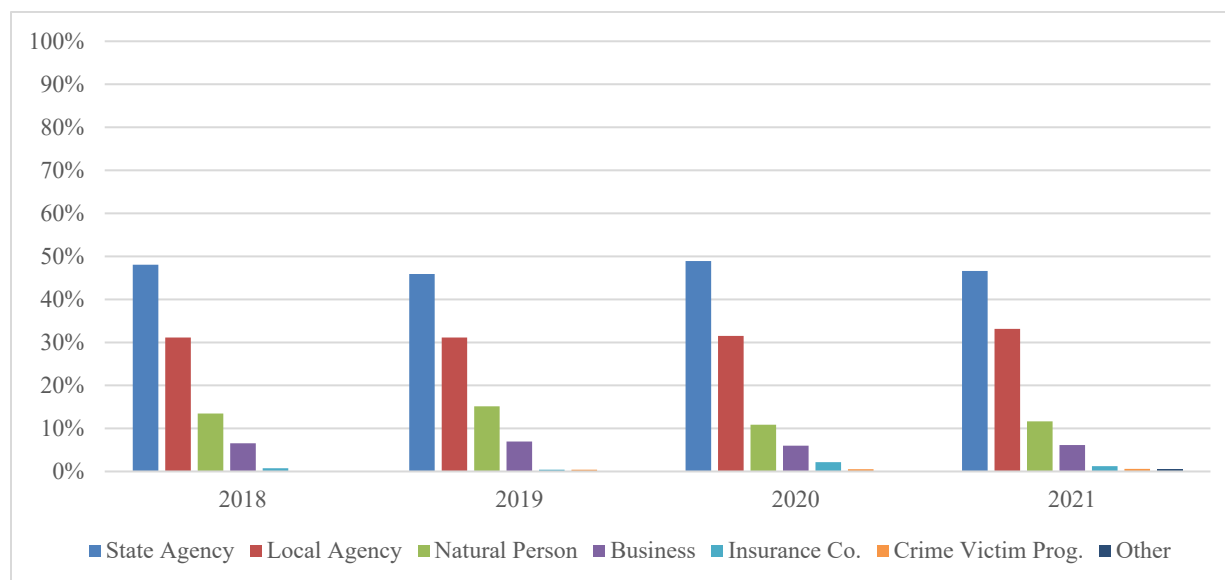


## Restitution Ordered by Victim Type

### Courts of Limited Jurisdiction

The data management systems used by most CLJs<sup>13</sup> include a field to record the party owed restitution. However, this field contains free text data, which presents challenges for analyses, given tens of thousands of records across the study period. To assess the question of restitution victim type, we selected a 5% random sample of restitution victims for cases filed in each year of the study period.<sup>14</sup> The victims were then grouped into seven categories: state agency; local agency; natural person; business; insurance company; crime victim compensation program; and other. Figure 84 shows the breakdown of restitution victim types by year. Patterns remained consistent across the study period, with state agencies being the most common victim type ordered restitution, followed by local agencies.

**Figure 84. State agencies were the most common victim type in CLJ restitution cases from 2018 through 2021**



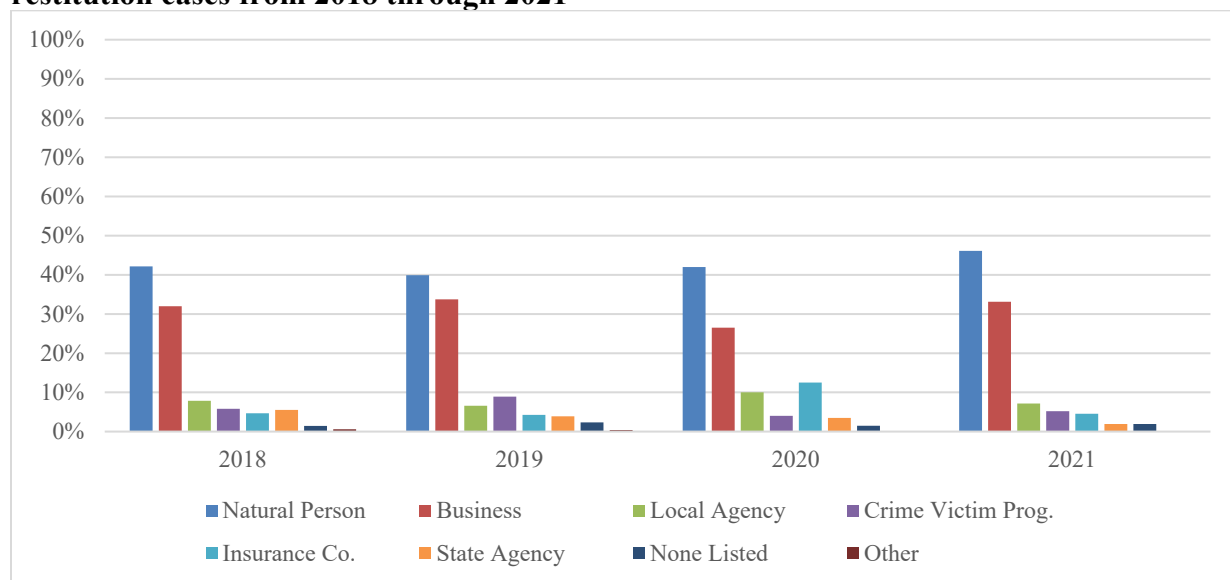
<sup>13</sup> These analyses exclude data from King County District Court, Seattle Municipal Court, and Spokane Municipal Court.

<sup>14</sup> Note that this represents 5% of victims listed, not 5% of the amount owed. It also does not reflect payments made, just restitution ordered.

## Superior Courts (Adult and Juvenile)

As with CLJs, the data management systems used by Superior Courts<sup>15</sup> also include a free text field to record the victim when restitution is ordered. We selected a 5% random sample of restitution victims for adult and juvenile Superior Court cases filed in each year of the study period. The victims were then grouped into eight categories: state agency; local agency; natural person; business; insurance company; crime victim compensation program; other; and none listed. Figure 85 shows the breakdown of restitution victim types by year. Patterns remained consistent across the study period, with natural persons being the most common victim type ordered restitution, followed by businesses.

**Figure 85. Natural persons were the most common victim type in Superior Court restitution cases from 2018 through 2021**



<sup>15</sup> These analyses exclude data from King County Superior Court.

## Conclusion and Next Steps

This preliminary report addressed many of the questions posed by the Legislature regarding trends in LFO imposition and outstanding debt for the previous five years. We will produce a final LFO report, containing additional analyses, which will be published prior to July 1, 2024. Additional areas of analyses will include:

- LFOs disaggregated by type (i.e., fines, fees, and restitution)
- Payments made by court users and adjustments made by courts
- More detail about restitution victim types

Additionally, the analysis completed to date have laid the ground work for the Washington State Center for Court Research to further develop a program of recurring study and monitoring of LFO processes and outcomes by jurisdiction, offense type and impacted population.

### References

Delostrinos, C., Bellmer, M., and McAllister, J. (2022). *The Price of Justice: Legal Financial Obligations in Washington State*.

### Recommended Citation

Jones, K., Gilman, A., and Wang, W. (2023). *Legal Financial Obligations in Washington's Courts: Preliminary Report to the Legislature*. Olympia, WA: Washington State Center for Court Research, Administrative Office of the Courts.



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