

**Case Processing in Nova Scotia Youth Court,  
April 1 to September 30, 2008-09 to 2011-12**

**Prepared by Policy, Planning and Research**

**Nova Scotia Department of Justice**

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## **Case Processing in Nova Scotia Youth Court**

Update: December 2011

Youth case processing time is defined as the average elapsed time from the accused's first appearance in youth court until final disposition. Nova Scotia excludes restorative justice cases and bench warrants when calculating case processing times and reporting on the corresponding case volumes. Cases involving restorative justice are excluded because, on average, these cases take over 200 days to complete, which artificially inflates overall processing times. Bench warrants are excluded because, once issued by the Court, the Court cannot control how long it takes to have that warrant executed.

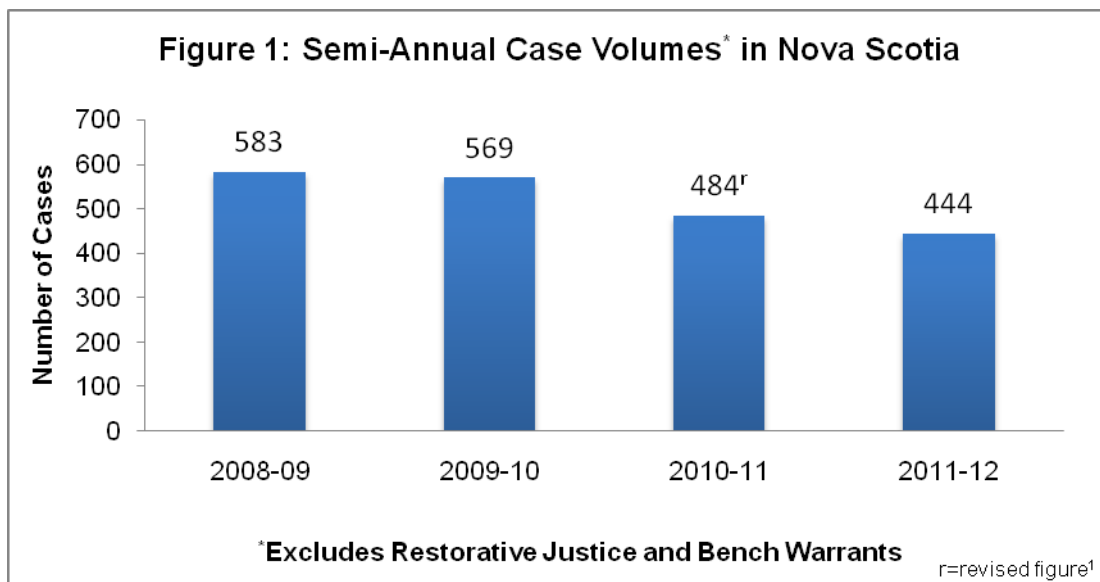
### ***Reducing Case Processing Times***

Reducing youth case processing times in the province remains a priority for the Nova Scotia Department of Justice and our justice partners. The Department recognizes that case processing times are impacted by a variety of factors throughout the justice system. Reducing case processing times to reach the target of 98 days requires the combined efforts of the Police, the Nova Scotia Public Prosecution Service, Legal Aid, the Judiciary, the Courts and Corrections. The Department continues to work with its justice partners to identify ways to reduce case processing times and to meet the established target of 98 days from first appearance to final disposition. Committees consisting of Department of Justice staff and justice partners have been established across the province to find local solutions for improving youth case processing times. In addition, some changes have been recently implemented which are expected to help reduce youth case processing times in the province. For instance additional youth court days have been added at some court locations.

## Processing Volumes

The volume of youth court cases continued to decline in the first half of 2011-12. Between April 1 and September 30, 2011, 444 youth cases were processed in the province, which is a decrease of 8% (40 cases) from 2010-11 (Figure 1).

In examining case processing volumes and times it is useful to examine results separately for multiple charge and single charge cases, as multiple charge cases are more complex and typically take longer to process. Of the 444 youth cases processed in 2011-12, 61% (272 cases) involved multiple charges while 39% (172 cases) involved single charges.



**Source:** Justice Enterprise Information Network (JEIN), Nova Scotia Department of Justice.

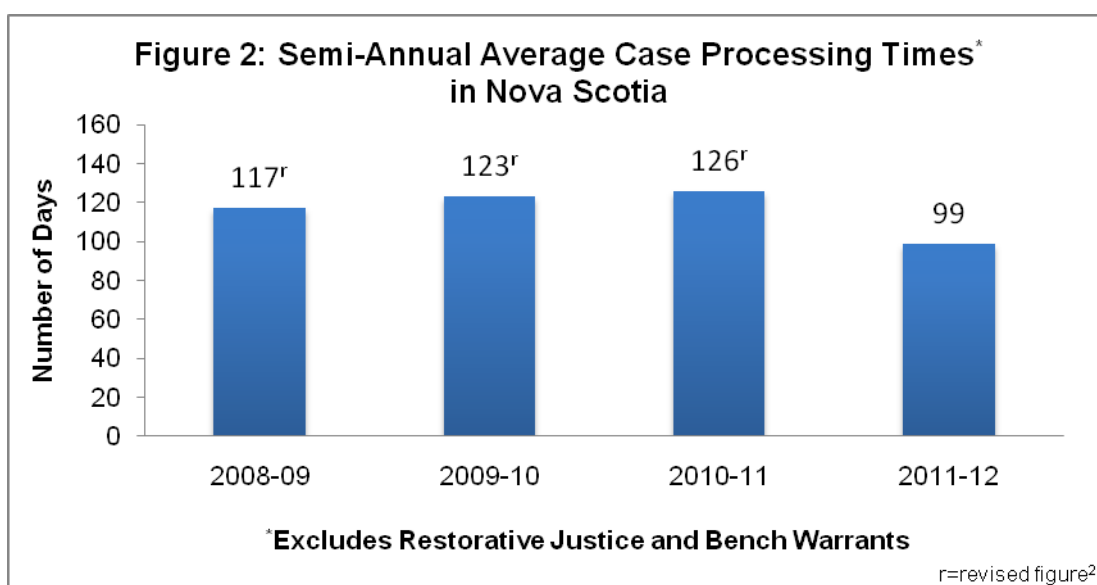
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<sup>1</sup> During analysis of the 2010-11 annual case processing times, one case was identified as involving restorative justice that had not been identified at the time of the 2010-11 semi-annual analysis. This case has been removed.

## Case Processing Times

In the first half of 2011-12, case processing times decreased to 99 days, or one day above the targeted 98 days. This represents a decrease of 27 days (21%) from the previous year (Figure 2).

Multiple charge cases took an average of 113 days to process while single charge cases took an average of 76 days to process. As compared to the same time in the prior year, the average time to process multiple charge cases decreased by 32 days (22%) and the time to process single charge cases decreased by 8 days (10%).



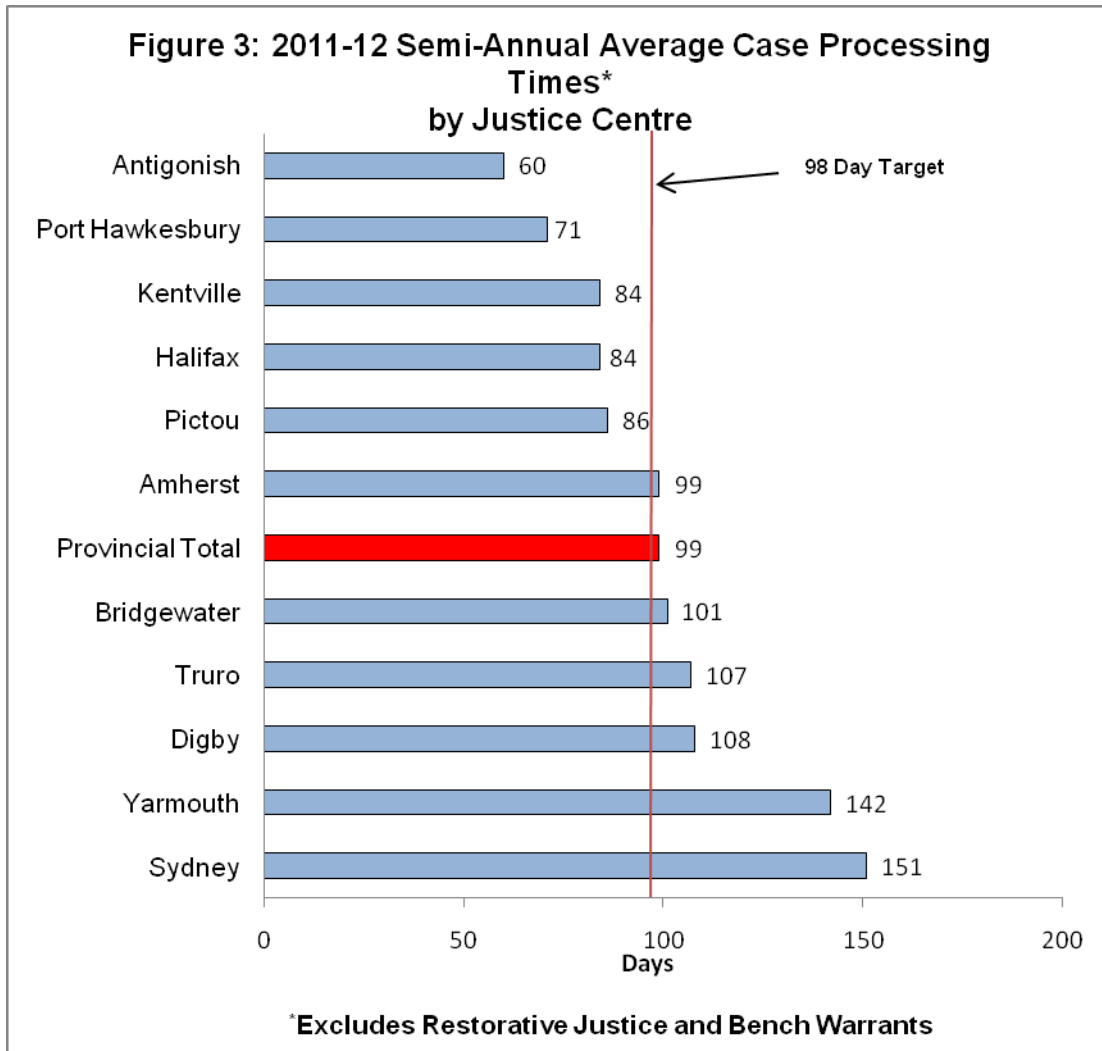
**Source:** Justice Enterprise Information Network (JEIN), Nova Scotia Department of Justice.

There continued to be significant variation across the province in youth case processing times for the first six months of 2011-12. Average case processing times for the Antigonish, Port Hawkesbury, Kentville, Halifax and Pictou Justice Centres were below the target of 98 days. Bridgewater, Truro, Digby, Yarmouth and Sydney were above the provincial average of 99 days, while Amherst's average case processing time was equal to the provincial average (Figure 3).

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<sup>2</sup> During analysis of the 2010-11 annual case processing times, one case was identified as involving restorative justice that had not been identified at the time of the 2010-11 semi-annual analysis. This case has been removed from the analysis presented here, thus reducing average case processing time by one day for 2010-11. In addition, 3 cases were identified with incorrect end dates (1 case in 2009-10 and 2 cases in 2008-09). These end dates were corrected resulting in a reduction of one day in average case processing times for 2008-09 and 2009-10.

Between the first half of 2010-11 and 2011-12, there were decreases in average case processing times at eight of the Justice Centres (Halifax, Kentville, Pictou, Truro, Antigonish, Port Hawkesbury, Yarmouth and Digby). These Justice Centres represented nearly three-quarters (73%) of the youth case volume for the first 6 months of 2011-12.



**Note:** Case processing times are not presented for Dartmouth due to the small number of cases.

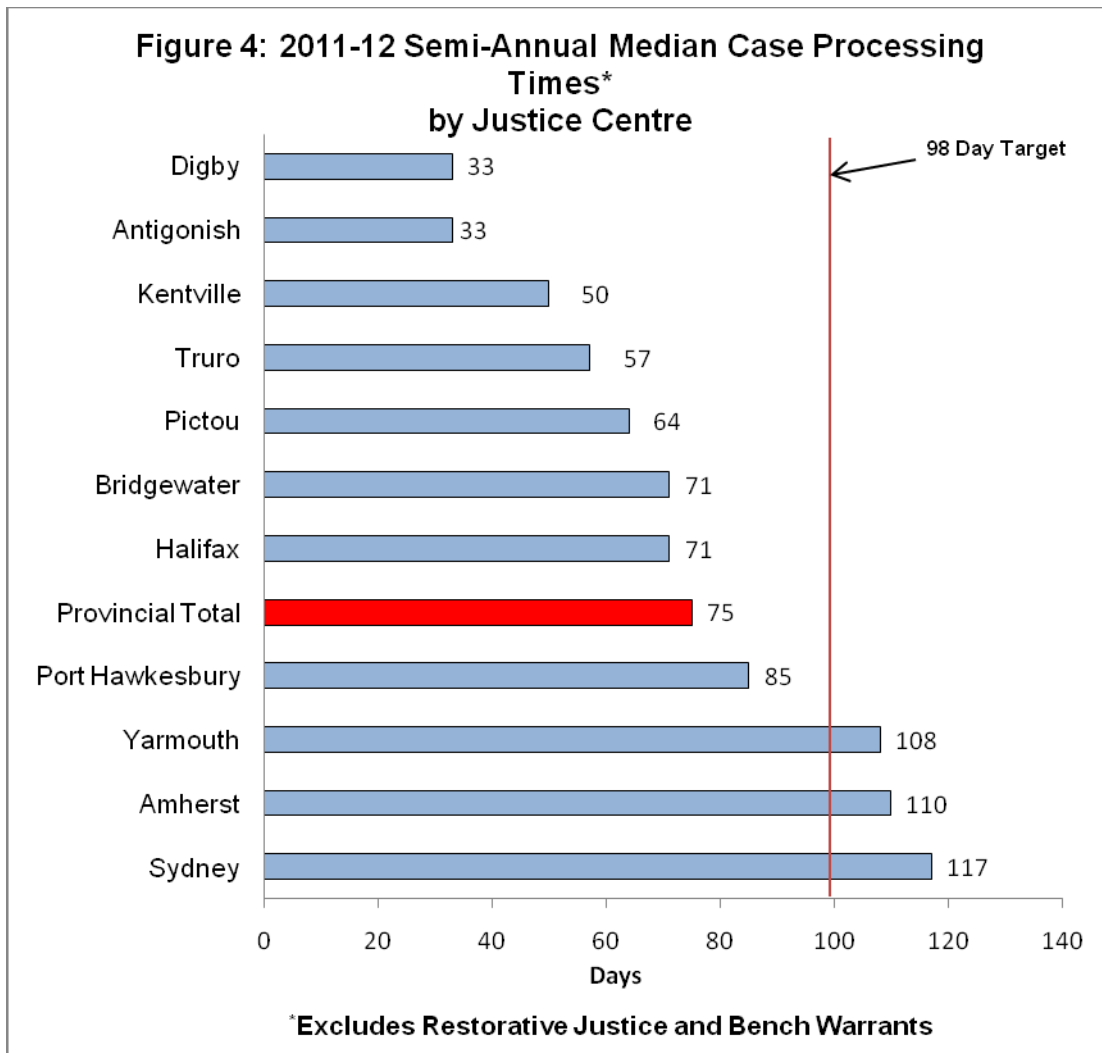
**Source:** Justice Enterprise Information Network (JEIN), Nova Scotia Department of Justice.

### **Median Case Processing Times**

The median is also an important measure to consider when examining youth case processing times. The median represents the midpoint at which half of cases fall below

and half fall above. While average case processing times can be impacted by a small number of unusually long or short cases, the median case processing time is not impacted by such cases.

In the first six months of 2011-12, the median youth case processing time for the province was 75 days. In other words, one-half of the cases in the province were completed within 75 days or 23 days below the targeted 98 days (Figure 4). For Digby, Antigonish, Kentville, Truro, Pictou, Bridgewater, Halifax and Port Hawkesbury, half of the youth cases were completed in less than 98 days. For the remaining Justice Centres (Yarmouth, Amherst and Sydney), the median was above 98 days, indicating that more than one-half of the cases were above the 98 day target.



**Note:** Case processing times are not presented for Dartmouth due to the small number of cases.

**Source:** Justice Enterprise Information Network (JEIN), Nova Scotia Department of Justice.

## ***Case Processing Times by Type of Offence***

In the first half of 2011-12, average case processing times were longer for violent offences (117 days) than property (109 days) or other offences (78 days). Compared to the prior year, the average case processing time increased for property offences (up 6 days or 6%) and decreased for both violent offences (down 55 days or 32%) and other offences (down 34 days or 30%).

## ***Serious Charges<sup>3</sup>***

Based on the recommendation of Commissioner Nunn, the Nova Scotia Department of Justice has established a target of seven days from the time a youth is charged with a serious offence to the time he/she appears in court<sup>4</sup>.

In the first half of 2011-12, serious charges took an average of 9 days to appear in youth court in Nova Scotia, which is 2 days above target.

## ***Pending Charges***

For young persons charged with a non-serious offence and who have pending charges (defined as 3 or more criminal charges within the preceding year) the Department established a target of seven days from the time the young person is charged to his/her appearance in youth court.

In the first half of 2011-12, youth with pending charges took an average of 8 days to appear in youth court in Nova Scotia (excluding the Justice of the Peace Centre), which is 1 day above the 7 day target.

For more information contact Judith McPhee, Executive Director, Policy and Information Management, at (902) 424-2691.

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<sup>3</sup>A serious charge is defined as one or more of the following offences: murder, manslaughter, infanticide, criminal negligence causing death, other offences causing death, attempted murder, conspiracy to commit murder, aggravated sexual assault, sexual assault with a weapon, other sexual offences (i.e., sexual interference, invitation to sexual touching, etc.), aggravated assault, assault with a weapon or causing bodily harm, criminal negligence causing bodily harm, kidnapping, hostage taking, abduction under 16, child pornography (possession and production), robbery, extortion, use of explosives causing death/bodily harm, arson, Criminal Code motor vehicle offences which endanger the public (i.e., dangerous driving, impaired driving, and motor vehicle theft), firearms offences, and home invasions.

<sup>4</sup> In instances where a youth's first appearance was indicated as the Justice of the Peace Centre, the next scheduled appearance date is used in measuring elapsed time for serious and pending charges. In a small number of these cases a bench warrant was issued or held at the first scheduled appearance. These cases have been excluded from the analysis of serious and pending charges.