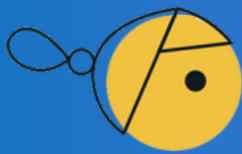
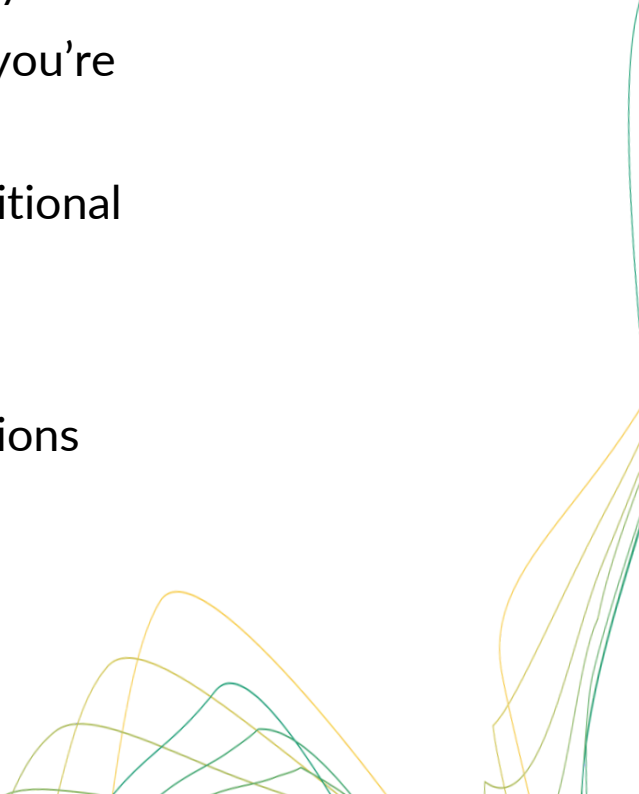


TOOLKIT 2

# DECODING COMMONS DATA



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- 
- Abstract line art in the bottom right corner, featuring several overlapping, flowing lines in shades of teal and yellow.

# Who is this toolkit for?

This toolkit equips you with the knowledge to navigate Commons with confidence, and understand what it provides.

The toolkit is designed for:

- **Academics**

Learn how to take your research to the next level by exploring the potential of data interpretation.

- **Institutions**

Gain insights for enhanced data navigation, informed decision-making, and meaningful mission contributions.

- **Community-Based Organizations**

Learn how to leverage data for informed decision-making, ensuring your initiatives resonate with the heart of your community.

- **Social Services Advocates**

Learn how data can be a powerful ally in understanding and addressing the needs of those you serve.

# Introduction

As a nonpartisan organization, **Measures for Justice does not advocate for specific reforms**, nor do we prescribe changes needed or interpret what the data might be suggesting about the level of services being meted out by counties. To do so would violate our mission to remain neutral.

More importantly, you know your own community and its needs the best. **We're here to help you access data that can help you understand it even better.** This toolkit will help ensure you understand and can responsibly engage with the data Commons provides, and put that data to use to advocate for the changes you want to see.

Commons can help you both answer questions that you might already have about your criminal justice system, and help you ask the leaders in your community the right questions too. In our first toolkit, **Welcome to Commons**, we posed the following question:

***How long does it take a misdemeanor case with defendants aged 18-25 to move through the system vs. a similar case with defendants aged 46-65?***

Let's explore how we can answer that using Commons.

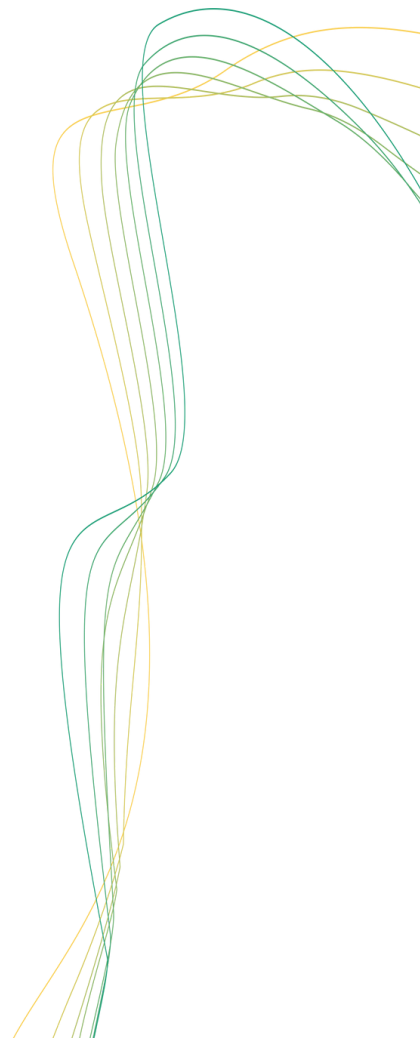


## STEP 1

# Start interpreting what you see

- A** Navigate to the correct measure (**Median Time from Offense to Case Closure under How Quickly Cases Move Through the System**), and do the following:
- B** Apply an Offense Severity filter of **Misdemeanor cases**
- C** Group by Defendant Age
- D** Pin the “Compare” box for age groups: All, 18 to 25, and 46 to 65

Now you're ready to start interpreting what you see.



In East Baton Rouge, it might look like this:

**A** Case Flow Data / Median Time from Offense to Case Closure

Measure

Median Time from Offense to Case Closure

**B** Filter ▼ Clear

Offense Severity: Misdemeanor ✕

**C**

Data Range Monthly - All Data ▼

Group By Age ▼

### Median Time from Offense to Case Closure - July 2022

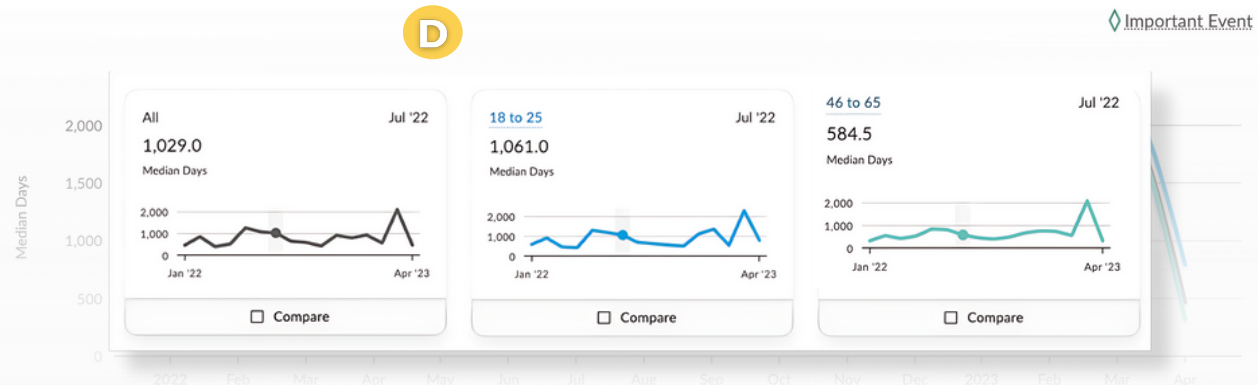
Filtered by: Offense Severity: Misdemeanor

Age (Shows cases broken down by defendant age.)

All ● 1,029.0 Median Days

18 to 25 ● 1,061.0 Median Days

46 to 65 ● 584.5 Median Days



## STEP 2

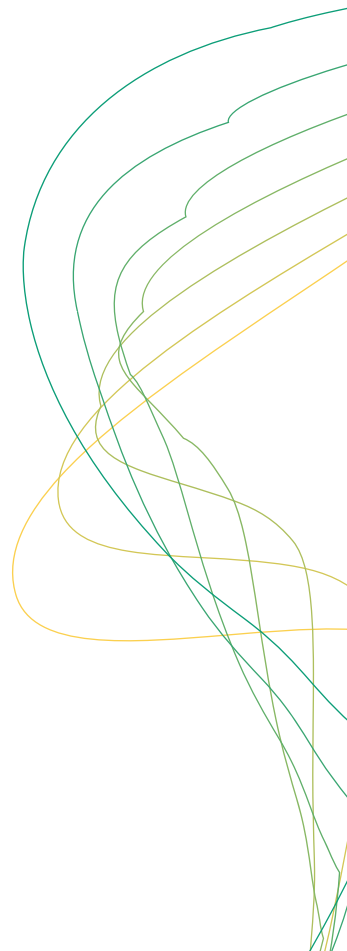
# Get familiar with what you're reading

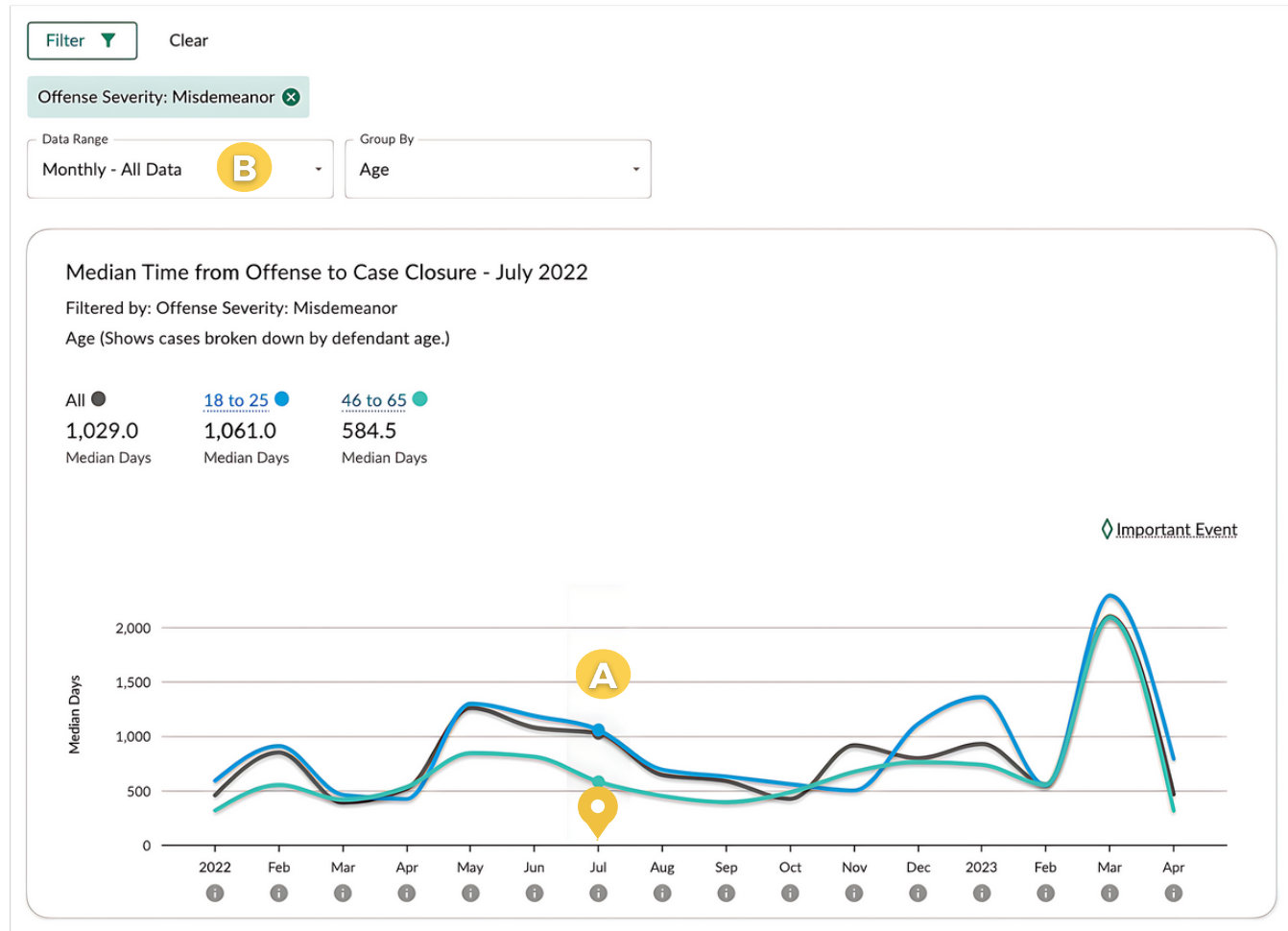
Key questions you might consider are:

**What is the time period I am most interested in?**

- A** Hover over any of the points on the chart or
- B** Change the time frame by clicking on the dropdown option in the upper left corner

In this example, we might look at July 2022, but you can also choose to look at a full quarter, or a full year's value on the measure.

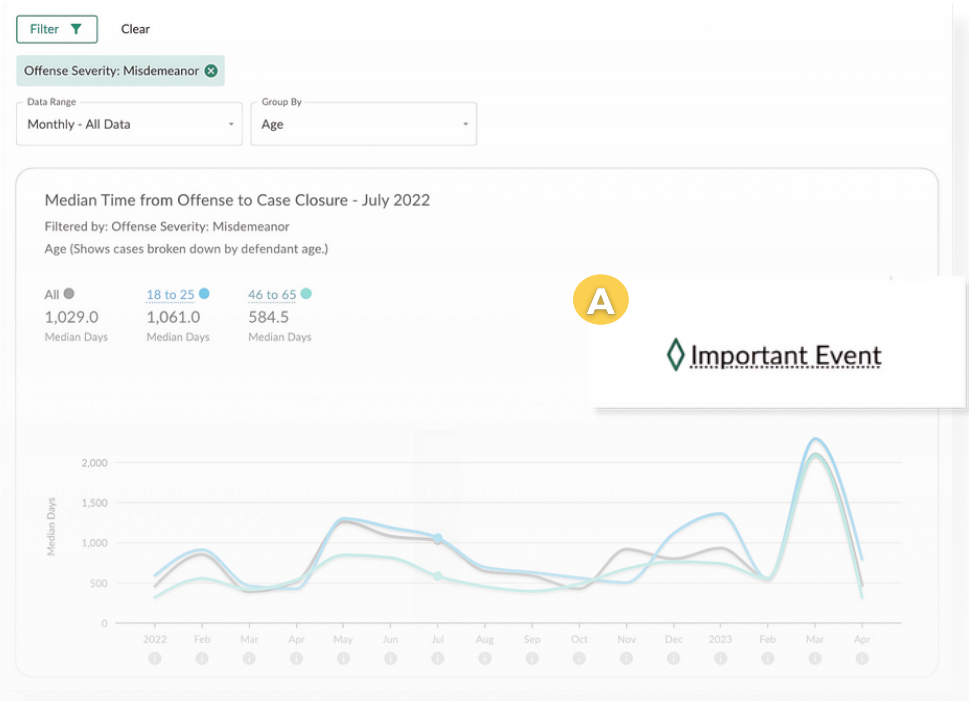




## Why is this important?

- The larger the time frame, the more data (and therefore more information) to work with.
- The smaller the time frame, the more you can hone in on what was happening in the community or in your prosecutor's office that factors into the value.

**A** You might see the “**Important Event**” marker in your data visualization, that could impact the Measure. Simply hover over it to learn more about the event and its possible impact on the data.



In East Baton Rouge, it might look like this:

Case Flow Data / Median Time from Offense to Case Closure



Measure

Median Time from Offense to Case Closure

**A** This measure shows the median number of days between when an offense took place and when the defendant was sentenced or when the case was disposed. sentence date is not available.<sup>[1]</sup>

Data updated on Oct 10, 2023 SEE LESS ^

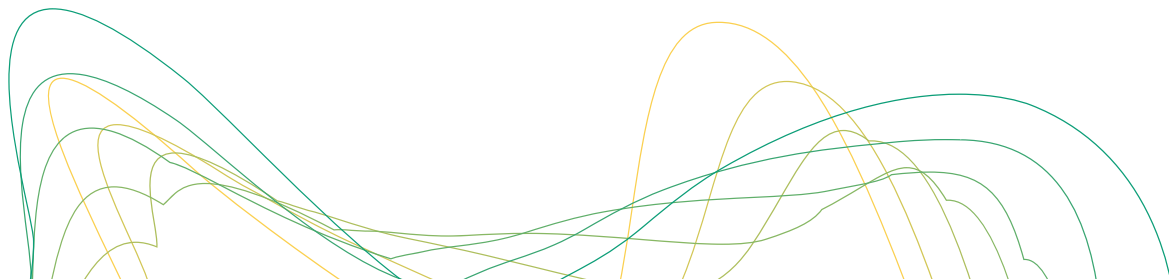
Data are based on the most detailed information available at time of publication and will be updated as more details are available ([Release History](#)).

## How is this Measure actually calculated?

- A** You can find the calculation in the brief description of the Measure at the top of the Measure page. You can also find it at the bottom of the page, where you'll also be able to read the source.
- In this example, the measure is a median calculation, which tells you the middle point in a distribution. This means that half of the cases (50%) fall above and below the value. This is a useful way to find the “average” without it being skewed by extremely high or low outliers.

## Why is this important?

- In the Commons platform, you are given a lot of information about the way the data are retrieved and standardized. It is valuable to pause and familiarize yourself with where the data come from, and whether or not you can access the methodology used to get the values you see.
- The way that you might interpret a percent value is different from an average calculation - either medians or “mean” averages.
- Sometimes, **the types of cases that are included or excluded from a Measure help make it easier to interpret the findings.**  
For instance, in this example, the calculation is only applied to cases that have been closed, because it is hard to know how long a case takes to close if it hasn’t yet reached its end.





## PAUSE AND REVIEW

# Pause here and review what you've learned so far.

In the Commons platform, you are given a lot of information about the way the data are retrieved and standardized. It may be helpful to take a break and review what you have learned so far.



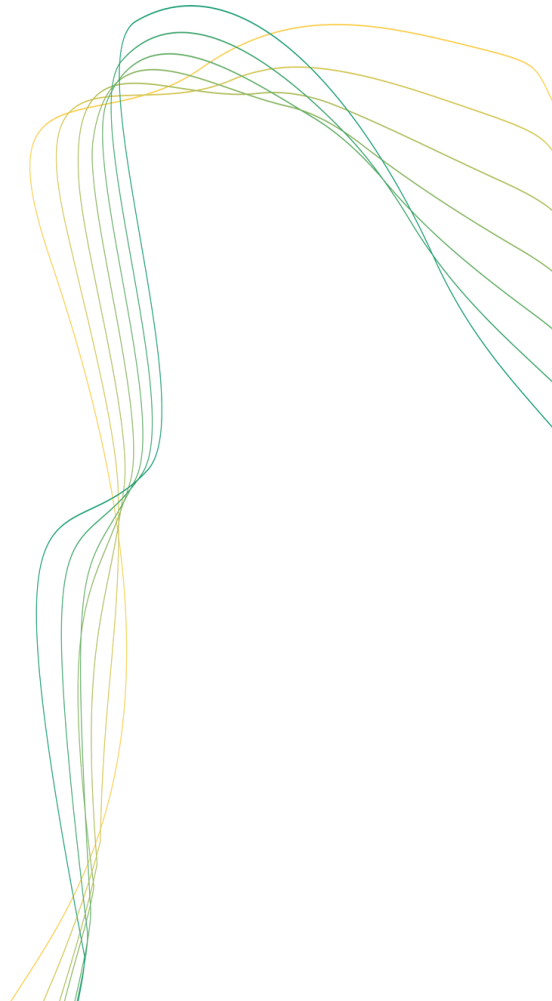


### STEP 3

## Check the page for additional information

**You might consider the table of information at the bottom of the page.**

In this example, **A** the table provides a big list of numbers. For median measures, this table includes some other summary statistics like the mean average, the lowest (minimum) number of days, and the highest (maximum) number of days a case might have taken that month, as well as the total number of cases.





### Median Time from Offense to Case Closure

Filtered by: Offense Severity: Misdemeanor

Age	Apr '22	May '22	Jun '22	Jul '22	Aug '22	Sep '22	Oct '22	Nov '22
<b>Median Days</b>	521.0	1,263.0	1,080.5	1,029.0	646.0	590.0	426.0	919.0
<b>Average Days</b>	632.7	1,611.9	1,283.7	1,655.9	966.2	854.8	636.9	1,272.2
<b>Minimum Days</b>	3,722	9,845	6,453	11,049	4,840	5,815	7,762	5,907
<b>Maximum Days</b>	542.4	1,363.3	1,016.7	1,811.8	922.0	895.9	856.3	1,174.3
<b>Standard Deviation Days</b>	136	404	342	183	211	167	139	120
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	1.4%	1.5%	2.3%	2.1%	1.9%	1.2%	1.4%	1.6%
<b>Unknown Days Offense to Closure</b>	426.5	1,301.5	1,188.5	1,061.0	694.0	632.0	562.0	503.0
<b>18 to 25</b>	690.0	1,742.7	1,424.7	1,608.6	1,036.4	912.2	772.8	996.3
<b>Average Days</b>	27	99	27	41	30	63	94	46
<b>Minimum Days</b>	3,722	7,973	5,211	10,735	4,554	5,815	7,762	2,944
<b>Maximum Days</b>	686.7	1,452.5	1,091.4	1,859.5	988.8	1,024.4	1,272.3	967.0
<b>Standard Deviation Days</b>	40	110	92	42	59	45	39	35
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	0.0%	1.8%	1.1%	0.0%	1.7%	2.2%	2.5%	0.0%
<b>Unknown Days Offense to Closure</b>	534.0	1,178.0	1,080.0	938.5	690.5	641.5	404.0	1,023.5
<b>26 to 35</b>	653.3	1,604.1	1,218.9	1,508.4	1,042.5	918.3	569.6	1,406.9
<b>Average Days</b>	41	31	60	37	30	67	40	120
<b>Minimum Days</b>	2,588	9,845	4,396	4,670	4,815	3,480	2,256	3,695
<b>Maximum Days</b>	509.5	1,403.1	805.7	1,399.6	925.9	878.5	533.4	1,196.9
<b>Standard Deviation Days</b>	48	129	105	68	52	60	46	46
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	2.0%	0.8%	0.9%	4.2%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Unknown Days Offense to Closure</b>	318.0	1,461.0	923.0	1,029.0	698.0	590.0	232.5	1,094.0
<b>36 to 45</b>	555.4	1,377.9	1,195.9	1,653.1	916.3	713.9	501.5	1,498.0
<b>Average Days</b>	29	23	75	16	42	30	51	119
<b>Minimum Days</b>	2,532	4,249	6,133	9,350	4,840	3,592	1,931	5,907
<b>Maximum Days</b>	512.9	938.9	1,016.3	1,838.7	876.6	630.7	529.6	1,360.2
<b>Standard Deviation Days</b>	27	81	71	41	49	33	32	26
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	0.0%	1.2%	1.4%	2.4%	0.0%	2.9%	3.0%	3.7%
<b>Unknown Days Offense to Closure</b>	536.0	847.5	814.0	584.5	453.5	396.0	488.0	675.5
<b>46 to 55</b>	565.9	1,424.4	1,197.5	1,860.7	850.5	822.7	608.6	1,256.8
<b>Average Days</b>	48	102	36	91	26	27	72	189
<b>Minimum Days</b>	1,015	5,580	6,453	11,049	4,520	3,424	1,835	3,457
<b>Maximum Days</b>	320.8	1,383.0	1,303.8	2,645.6	922.7	1,045.8	454.3	1,281.2
<b>Standard Deviation Days</b>	19	56	52	24	46	26	19	10
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	0.0%	1.8%	5.5%	0.0%	2.1%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
<b>Unknown Days Offense to Closure</b>	673.0	1,083.0	1,184.0	—	134.0	—	145.0	—
<b>56 to 65</b>	673.0	1,083.0	1,300.7	—	134.0	—	145.0	—
<b>Average Days</b>	538	179	446	—	134	—	145	—
<b>Minimum Days</b>	808	1,987	2,248	—	134	—	145	—
<b>Maximum Days</b>	190.9	1,278.4	668.6	—	0.0	—	0.0	—
<b>Standard Deviation Days</b>	2	2	6	—	1	—	1	—
<b>Total Number of Cases</b>	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	—%	0.0%	—%	0.0%	—%
<b>Unknown Days Offense to Closure</b>	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

## Why is this important?

- If you are more interested in the **A** average (mean) calculation, the table gives you that information.
- You can also see how many cases are involved in the calculation per month. This latter number might give you some insight as to whether you should look at a bigger time range to increase sample sizes. For instance, while the overall measure in this example includes 183 cases, in one of your comparison groups (age=46-65), there are only 24 cases available for analysis.

**A**

### 36 to 45

Average Days	75
Minimum Days	6,133
Maximum Days	1,016.3
Standard Deviation Days	71
Total Number of Cases	1.4%
Unknown Days Offense to Closure	2.4%

### 46 to 65

Average Days	36
Minimum Days	6,453
Maximum Days	1,303.8
Standard Deviation Days	52
Total Number of Cases	5.5%
Unknown Days Offense to Closure	0.0%

### Over 65

Average Days	1,300.7
Minimum Days	446
Maximum Days	2,248
Standard Deviation Days	668.6
Total Number of Cases	6

Jun '22

Jul '22

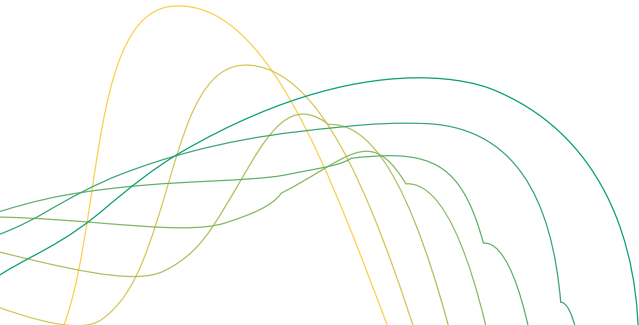
<b>i</b> 923.0	<b>i</b> 1,029.0
1,195.9	1,653.1
75	16
6,133	9,350
1,016.3	1,838.7
71	41
1.4%	2.4%
<b>i</b> 814.0	<b>i</b> 584.5
1,197.5	1,860.7
36	91
6,453	11,049
1,303.8	2,645.6
52	24
5.5%	0.0%
<b>i</b> 1,184.0	<b>i</b> —
1,300.7	—
446	—
2,248	—
668.6	—
6	—

## You might also read through some of the footnotes(1) or glossary terms.

- In this example, **A** the footnote available helps you review the calculation in more detail, and you can get more information about what a median is, and how MFJ defines the terms within the calculation - offense, defendant. **B** The glossary terms give more detail on what a closure represents (sentenced, case disposed).

### Why is this important?

- While the calculation obviously impacts how you interpret the values you see, the context around what the data represent matters when you start to talk about next steps. Reading the definitions not only helps you better understand what is factored into the measure itself, but gives you additional language to use with policymakers when sharing your findings.



Case Flow Data / Median Time from Offense to Case Closure

Measure

Median Time from Offense to Case Closure

This measure shows the median number of days between when an offense took place and when the defendant was sentenced or when the case was disposed, if the sentence date is not available.<sup>[1]</sup>

Data updated on Oct 10, 2023 [SEE MORE](#) ▾

FILTER ▾

Offense Severity: Misdemeanor ✕

CLEAR

Data Range

Monthly - All Data ▾

Group By

Age ▾

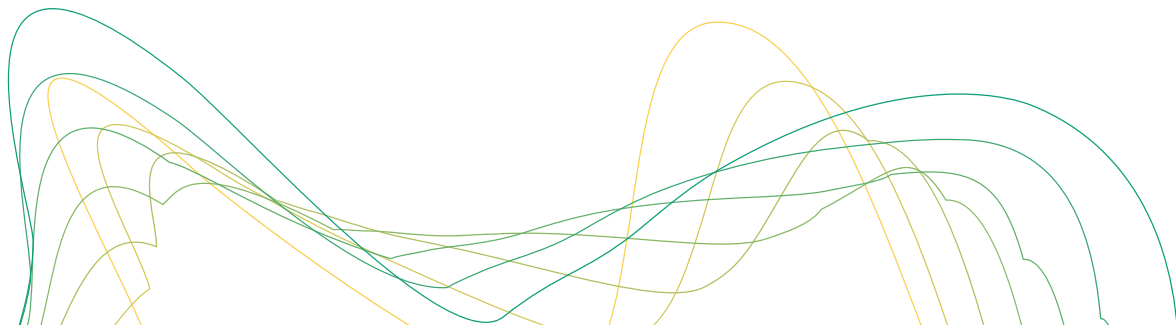
B

**Defendant:** A person or entity formally accused (charged) of committing a criminal offense.

See the full [glossary of terms](#).

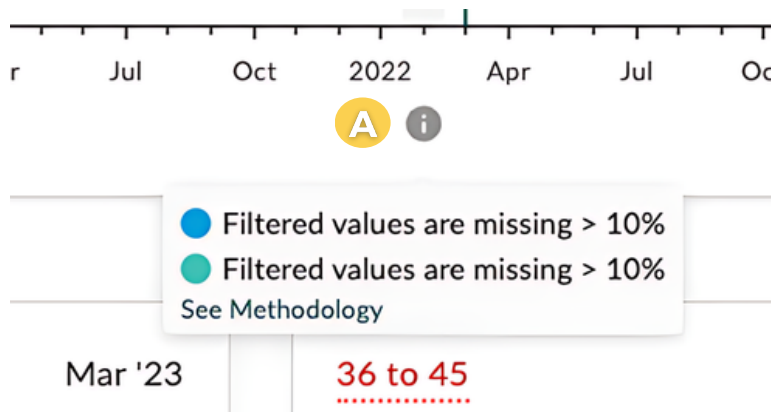
A

**Calculation:** Middle point of the distribution of days between offense and disposition across all cases resolved.



## You might see a little information graphic ⓘ next to any given value.

- A** This information indicates that in many of the months, the data are unknown for 10% of cases in the file.



## Why is this important?

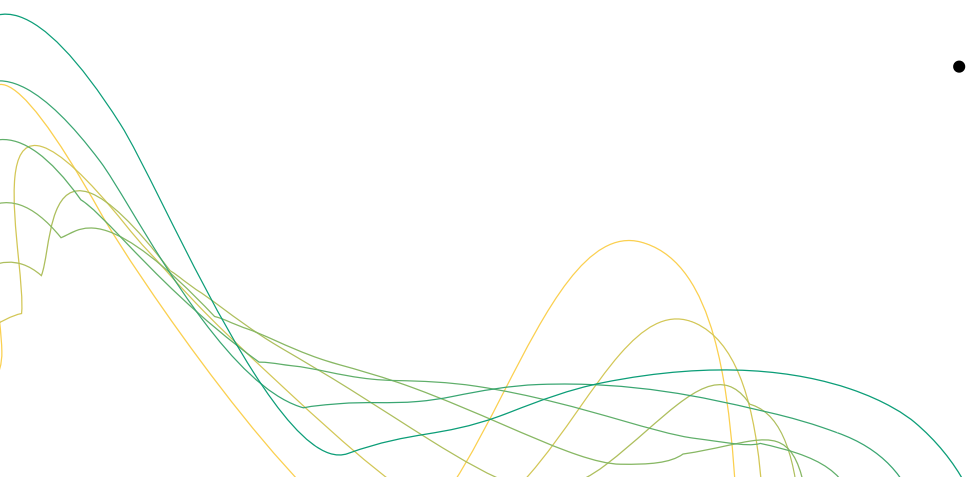
- This is not meant to alarm you, but to provide more context for reliable interpretation and use. Sometimes when you have a very small number of cases, if you're missing a lot of data, it can be hard to know if there's something about those missing cases that would help in your interpretation. MFJ will suppress information that is too unreliable, but it is responsible to at least flag when the missing values are higher than we'd expect.

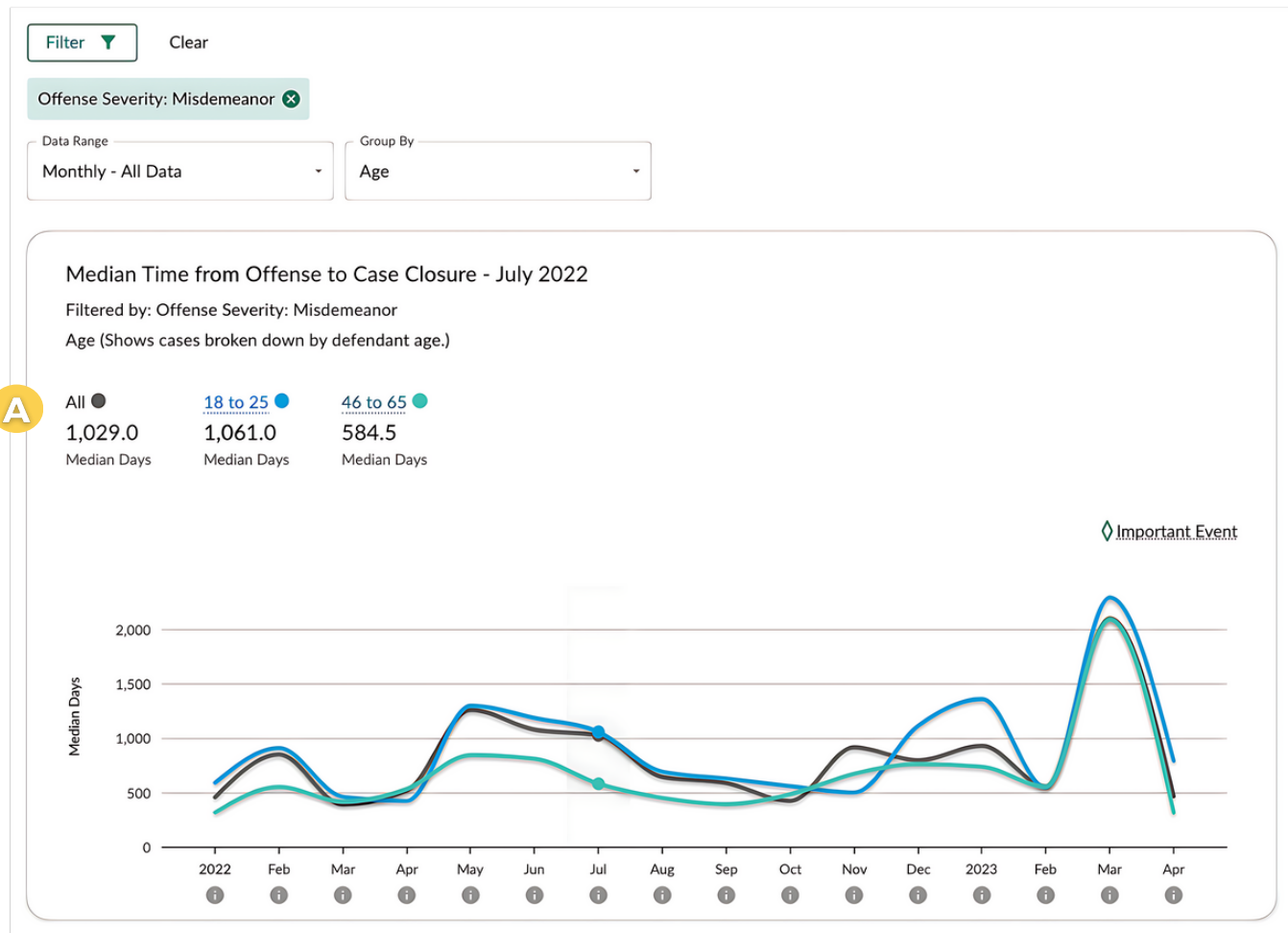
## STEP 4

# Answer the question

Then consider what else would help you decide whether the finding is actionable.

*How long does it take a misdemeanor case with defendants aged 18-25 to move through the system vs. a similar case with defendants aged 46-65?*

- A** In July, 2022, misdemeanor cases took an average (median) of 1,029 days to close.
  - Misdemeanor cases with defendants aged 18-25 took much longer to close (1,061 days) than cases with defendants aged 46-65 (584.5 days), on average.
  - The average time to closure for misdemeanor cases in both groups spikes in March, 2023.
- 





**Notes:**

- There were twice as many cases involving defendants aged 18-25 (count=42) than cases involving defendants aged 46-65 (count=24).
- The measure is calculated using only cases that have been closed, as of the latest update of data in October, 2023.
- Data are missing in >10% of cases for some months in this measure.

**Is there anything else you would want to know to take action? You might consider the following areas of inquiry:**

- Would it help to know anything about the office's resources?
- In this example, could it be valuable to know how many attorneys are carrying a caseload during the time period?

**Are there any statutory or policy related rules that dictate how quickly cases must move throughout the system?**

- In this example, are there jurisdiction specific considerations for statute of limitations for misdemeanors, or possible diversion opportunities for cases involving clients of a certain age?

**Is there any research that could inform best practices?**

- In this example, does the American Bar Association recommend misdemeanors be closed in a maximum amount of time? Have law scholars pointed to the impact that long case durations might impact individuals at different stages of their life?

## STEP 5

# Write down your questions

Write down what other questions you have about the findings, and what context would help you identify opportunities for change.

Share your ideas with your local criminal justice agency (prosecutors office or police department) or your local criminal justice community group to engage in conversation.

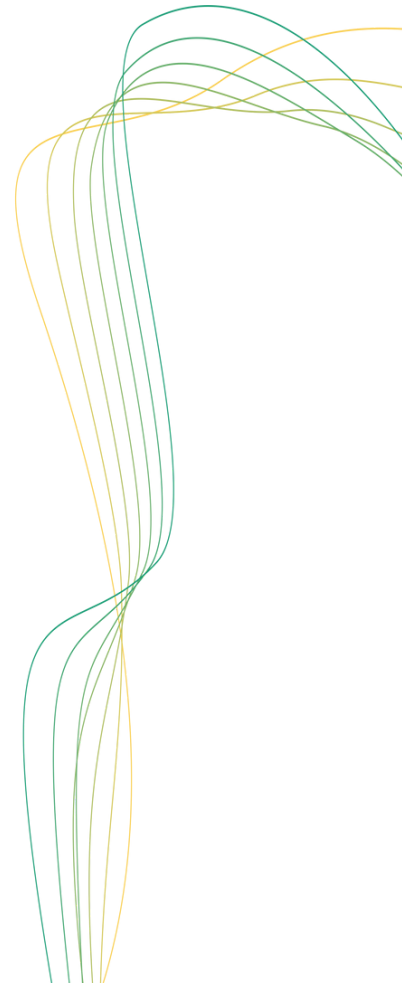
### When interpreting data, be:

- **Cautious:** Ensure you've reviewed all of the material provided, and asked questions about who is managing the data, how, and from what source. [\[Steps 1-3\]](#)
- **Curious:** Ask questions when you have them, and be willing to explore alternative explanations. [\[Step 4\]](#)
- **Collaborative:** Rely on the expertise of other community members who can provide more context, or take steps related to your findings that will have an impact on cases, institutions, and the communities they serve. [\[Step 5\]](#)

# Conclusion

Having access to your community's criminal justice data in Commons empowers you to drive change.

With insights for enhanced data navigation, you can understand and responsibly engage with the data Commons provides, and put that data to use to advocate for the changes you want to see.



# Contact Us

**MEASURES FOR JUSTICE**

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Provided by Measures for Justice