

Know Your Rights: Child Requiring Assistance (CRA) Cases

This fact sheet is for educational purposes only. Nothing here should be considered legal advice. Please consult a lawyer for more specific information. *Updated as of March 2026*

Key Terms

- **Offense:** An illegal act; a breach of law or rule.
- **Minor:** Someone under the age of 18.
- **Preliminary Hearing:** A hearing at which the judge decides whether there is enough evidence to require a hearing to decide whether someone is a “child requiring assistance” or if the case should be dismissed.
- **Expungement Order:** A court order to destroy or seal a record of a criminal conviction, treating it as if it never occurred.
- **DCF:** Department of Children and Families.
- **CRA:** A child between the ages of 6 and 18 who has been charged with a behavior that is an offense only because they are a minor (may also be referred to as a “status offender”).

Who can File an Application:

- **A CRA application can be filed by someone who is a:**
 - Parent/guardian, school district official, or a police officer.

Under what Circumstances Can a CRA Application be Filed?

- Child under 18:
 - Runaway: Repeatedly runs away from home.
 - Stubborn: Repeatedly fails to obey the lawful and reasonable commands of their parent or guardian, and whose behavior results in the parent or guardian not being able to care for the child adequately.
 - Sexually Exploited: Has been sexually taken advantage of or exploited.
- Child under 16:
 - Habitual School Offender: **Repeatedly** fails to obey lawful and reasonable school regulations.
 - Truant: Is **not excused and willfully** fails to attend school for more than 8 days in a school quarter.

What are Your Rights When a CRA Application has Been Filed:

You have the right to:

- Attend all court hearings related to the CRA application.
- Be given an attorney to represent you for free.
 - This lawyer will not be the same one who represents the person who filed the CRA application. This lawyer should speak for you and advocate for what you want.
- A language interpreter if you prefer to speak a language other than English.
- A sign language interpreter.
- Another court review the decisions of a Juvenile Court Judge makes on your case.

If the CRA application is being filed for **habitual school offender or truancy** issues:

The school must show that you chose not to attend school (had purposeful, unexcused absences) for more than 8 days in the quarter, and that they took specific steps to improve your attendance.

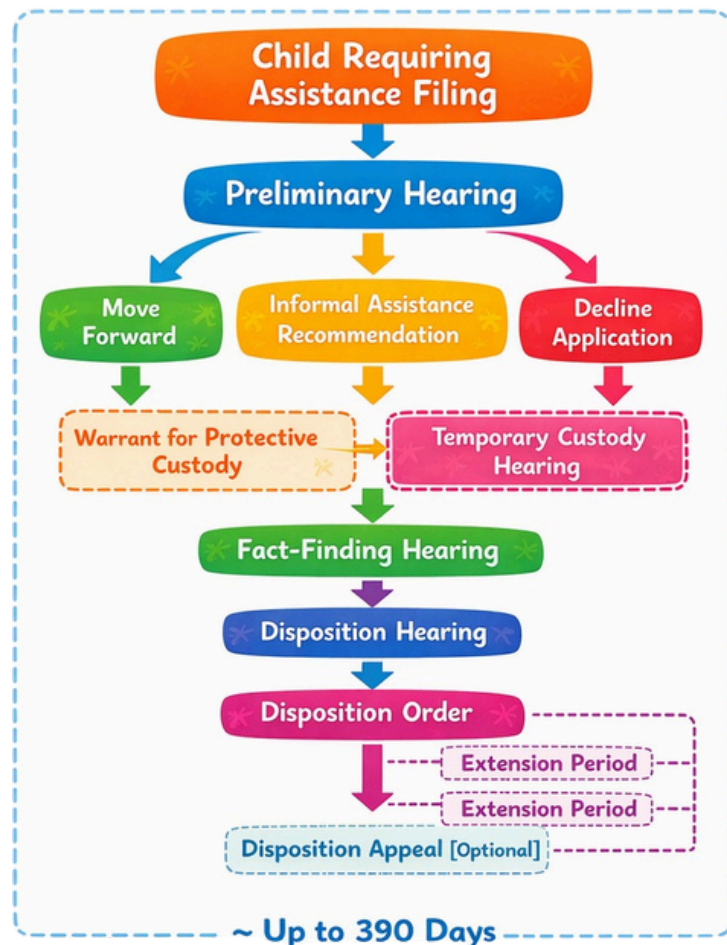


Filing: A person who wants to file a CRA application may go to the Clerk's Office in Juvenile Court and ask for an application.

Preliminary Hearing: the first hearing in the CRA process. At the hearing, the **judge will decide** to:

1. **Dismiss** the case because no reason to believe the child needs assistance.
2. **Refer** an alternative, **Informal Assistance** (probation officer gives you support for 90 days). When this is over, the Court might:
 - a. Dismiss the case and issue an expungement order.
 - b. Escalate the CRA application by scheduling a fact-finding hearing.
 - c. Extend the informal assistance period for another 90 days if both parties agree.
3. **Accept** the CRA application and schedule a fact-finding hearing.

*If you do not attend, the Court will mail a letter to you and your parent/guardian requiring you to go to court. If you still do not attend, the judge may issue a **Warrant of Protective Custody** (an order for a police officer to pick you up and bring you to court for your hearing).*



Temporary Custody Hearing: hearing where the judge will decide whether to allow you to go home to your parent/custodian/guardian or to have the Department of Children and Families (DCF) care for you for 15 days and up to 45 days.

Fact-Finding Hearing: At the fact-finding hearing, the judge will decide whether you committed an offense and if you are a Child Requiring Assistance.

1. If you **agree** that you are a CRA, the Conference and Disposition Hearing will be scheduled.
2. If you **do not agree**, then the judge will hear evidence to decide whether you are in fact a Child Requiring Assistance.

Conference: provides you with an opportunity to engage with what options might be best to help you. Your parent/guardian/custodian, the probation officer, and DCF will be present.

Disposition:

- At the Disposition **Hearing**, the judge will determine what Disposition Orders should be entered to help you.
- The first Disposition **Order** will last for 120 days. At the end of this period, at the Disposition Review Hearing, the judge will review your progress and either dismiss the case or extend the order for 90 days.
- You have the **right to appeal** the Disposition Order.

Learn more about the process here:



<https://www.homelessyouth.org/en/us/massachusetts/child-requiring-assistance-cases>

Legal Questions? Mass Bar Dial A Lawyer



<https://www.massbar.org/public/dial-a-lawyer>
(First Wednesday of every month, 5:30-7:30 PM): (617) 338-0610