

# Conclusion

This report provides all the readily available juvenile justice and risk factor data on youth in Illinois to juvenile justice professionals and policymakers. The data in this report gives users a better understanding of who is being served by the juvenile justice system and who is at risk of becoming involved in the juvenile justice system from both a statewide and county perspective.

Notable findings include:

- A 27 percent increase in the juvenile arrest rate between 2000 and 2005.
- A 33 percent decrease in the rate of juvenile delinquency petitions and a decrease of 3 percent of the rate of juvenile court adjudications between 1995 and 2005.
- A 40 percent decrease in the rate of juvenile detention admissions between 1995 and 2005
- A decrease of 12 percent in the rate of juvenile probation caseloads between 1995 and 2005.
- A 7 percent increase in the rate of juvenile incarceration, but a 45 percent decrease in the number of court commitments to the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice from FY99 to FY04.
- Black youth in Illinois were six times more likely to be arrested and incarcerated in 2004, and eight times more likely to be detained in 2005, compared to white youth.

# Recommendations

## ***Improve the quantity and quality of juvenile justice data***

A significant need exists for more quantity and better quality data on youth in Illinois. Although available data can describe to state and county practitioners a great deal about the youth they serve, much more is unknown about youth in the juvenile justice system, and there are significant limitations to the data that are available. Additionally, the absence of reliable and consistent race and ethnicity data on youth at all stages of the juvenile justice system process are barriers to a full understanding of the problem of disproportionate minority contact.

AOIC is developing a new database system that will include race data on delinquency petitions and adjudications. More changes system-wide and statewide are needed to improve the quantity and quality of Illinois' juvenile justice data.

Steps that are needed to improve the quality of juvenile justice data in Illinois include not only improving the quality of data currently being collected by various state and local agencies, but also identifying areas in which new or additional data is needed. For example, improvements to the Juvenile Monitoring Information System should be considered. Although JMIS makes detention data more readily accessible, data entry errors lead many to question the quality of the

data. Many of these errors have been eliminated through the new eJMIS system, to which detention centers enter data using a web-based form that notifies the user when an improper value has been entered. However, some counties do not have the technological capacity to submit data in this manner. Additionally, Cook County does not report to JMIS, which makes it difficult to have a complete understanding of the Illinois detention population. Eliminating errors in data entry and making eJMIS accessible to all counties would give juvenile justice practitioners and policymakers a more complete and accurate understanding of detention utilization.

In addition to improving the quality of existing data collection mechanisms, new data collection mechanisms are needed to capture data that is not being collected. For example, it is not possible to answer the simple question of how many youth by race and ethnicity are adjudicated delinquent in Illinois each year. This data would provide a better understanding of the issue of disproportionate minority contact in Illinois.

This absence of data on youth transfers to criminal court is another example of a gap in juvenile justice data in Illinois. The number of transfers to criminal court has not been reported since 1999. Although JMIS monitors the number of transfers in the detention population, reporting transfers in this manner underreports the number of transfers in the state. Additionally, given that the state legislature has created a task force to monitor the use of transfers, this data would need to be collected in order to facilitate their work.

The amount of restitution collected and community service hours completed are no longer collected. These data were one of the few ways to attempt to measure the use of BARJ. Other measures of BARJ in the juvenile justice system need to be developed, including the number of BARJ programs and victims services in Illinois. Finally, while ISP collects the numbers of expungements, adult and juvenile counts are combined, so the number of juvenile expungements annually is unknown. These are a few of many examples of gaps in juvenile justice data in Illinois that hampers the use of data to inform juvenile justice practice and policy.

Comprehensive juvenile arrest data, submitted by local police departments and available through computerized criminal history records, also have limitations. Trends in the youth arrest data derived from criminal history records mostly reflect mandated reporting and enhanced technology rather than actual arrest trends in Illinois. Furthermore, CCH data will always be limited to arrests documented by an arrest fingerprint card submitted to ISP. The Authority, through its direct computer linkage with the CCH system, continues to monitor CCH data to improve accuracy.

### **Monitor juvenile justice data**

The data currently being collected should be monitored on a regular basis to ensure accuracy and timeliness. Making such data available to practitioners and policymakers would provide a basis for well-informed decisions, as well as responses to changes in system policies and practices. Significant changes to the juvenile justice system, such as legislation, occur often and should be documented with the goal of better understanding the impact of those changes. Regular monitoring of juvenile justice data also allows for the discovery of discrepancies in the data and

leads to collaborative efforts that improve quality of the data. Annual monitoring allows the pertinent agencies to detect these problems early and address discrepancies.

## **Reduce disproportionate minority contact**

It is evident that minorities are over-represented in the Illinois juvenile justice system. While data are not readily available to describe the magnitude of the problem at every juvenile justice system decision point, disproportionate minority contact should be studied, monitored, and addressed on a continual basis.

Race data is available at the arrest, detention, and IDOC commitment stages, and an analysis of these data illustrate the pervasiveness of the problem across Illinois. Concentrating on better understanding the impact that juvenile justice system practices and policies have on DMC, and changing the practices and policies that unfairly result in minority involvement with the juvenile justice system, are well placed to begin problem-solving efforts.

The Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission has funded efforts to implement the Burns Institute model for reducing minority over-representation in the juvenile justice system. The model brings together stakeholders in the juvenile justice system and leads them through a data-driven, consensus-based process that focuses specifically and intentionally on reducing disproportionate minority confinement.

If an evaluation of the model shows that it is effective at reducing disproportionate minority contact in the pilot sites, the initiative should be expanded across the state. Weaknesses in the model should be addressed. Given the national achievements of the model, it is worth the effort to work toward its success in Illinois.

## **Support gender-specific programming**

Female involvement with the juvenile justice system is on the rise. However, most juvenile justice systems in the U.S. are not designed to handle the specific needs of female delinquents. The importance of creating programs geared toward female offenders stems from research and theory on how genders develop identities and relationships differently, with unique pathways to crime and delinquency. Due to the inherent difference in female pathways to crime, including issues such as sexual abuse, pregnancy, and single parenthood, gender-specific programs are needed.<sup>23</sup> Developing, implementing, and monitoring gender-specific programming in Illinois will create an environment that realistically addresses the treatment needs of females in the juvenile justice system.

## Further recommendations

The recommendations described above focus on improving the quality of juvenile justice data in Illinois and briefly touch on two significant issues currently facing Illinois' juvenile justice system, disproportionate minority contact and gender-specific programming. These are not, however, the only issues facing Illinois' juvenile justice system. Other recommendations include:

- Study the prevalence of youth with mental disorders in the juvenile justice system.
- Gauge impact of increases in methamphetamine use and abuse.
- Monitor prevalence of gang-involved youth in Illinois juvenile justice system.
- Research the use and outcomes of evidence-based practices.
- Seek explanations for jurisdictions' reductions in juvenile crime compared to others.
- Measure the use of balanced and restorative justice-based practices.

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## Notes

<sup>23</sup> Bloom, Barbara E., and Stephanie S. Covington, 1998, "Gender-Specific Programming for Female Offenders: What is it and Why is it Important?," paper presented to the American Society of Criminology, Washington, November 11-14, 1998, 1-4.