



St. Louis County Circuit Court

105 South Central Avenue
Clayton, Missouri 63105

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

RACE NOT A SIGNIFICANT FACTOR IN DETERMINING OUTCOME OF JUVENILE COURT HEARINGS FOR DELINQUENT YOUTH

Services Needed to Help Reduce Court Referrals will be Topic of Community Meeting Dec. 4

CLAYTON, MO – Nov. 28, 2018 – Race was not a significant factor in determining which youth were found delinquent at court hearings in the St. Louis County Family Court during the first half of 2018, according to a report released today. Instead, risk factors including age, a history of previous infractions and the actual legal charges were used in delinquency findings.

The report examined the way juvenile cases were handled at each step in the legal process. Those steps include informal referrals of juveniles made by schools and law enforcement for behavior that did not result in filed charges; secure detention before adjudication; adjudication; formal disposition of more serious cases that result in commitment to the Missouri Department of Youth Services; and certification of juveniles as adults for felonies such as murder. The report is required twice a year under the terms of an agreement reached between the Family Court and the U.S. Department of Justice in 2016. The latest report compared juvenile data from juvenile cases filed in the first half of 2018 to those for all of calendar year 2017.

Continuing a positive trend from last year, the report found no evidence of disproportionality for black youth at the key decision points of adjudication, court supervision, and certification as adults. In addition, there was no evidence of disproportionality for Hispanic or Asian/Pacific Islander youth. The court also made modest progress in reducing racial disparities in the rate at which formal petitions were filed against juveniles.

Black youth aged 10-17 accounted for nearly 68 percent of all court referrals in calendar year 2017, although they make up only slightly more than 31 percent of the population in St. Louis County. Consequently, black youth accounted for the majority of all court referrals, as well as the majority of formal cases at every decision point examined in the report.

Because a disproportionate number of black youth were referred to the court, they were overrepresented at the front end of the juvenile justice process, the report found. However, this overrepresentation diminished as youth moved deeper into the system, and racial disparities disappeared entirely among youth formally charged with crimes. It remains rare for juveniles in St. Louis County who commit the most serious offenses to be given the most serious consequences, such as commitment to the Missouri Department of Youth Services or certification to stand trial as adults. Because the number of such cases is so small, there was not enough data to determine whether race was a factor in the court's decision-making.

The majority of cases referred to Family Court in the first six months of this year did not result in formal processing, but were handled informally by the St. Louis County Juvenile office. Among those youth whose referrals were handled informally, black youth were more likely than white youth to be "counseled and warned", which represents a less restrictive outcome for black youth, rather than placed on informal adjustment. However, among those youth who did enter into informal adjustment contracts, black youth were more likely than white youth to be placed under supervision.

However, the report found that racial disparities persist, and in some cases worsened slightly, in the first half of 2018 compared to 2017.

For example:

- Black youth were 5.4 times more likely than white youth to be referred to court, an increase from 4.6 in 2017;
- Black youth were 2.4 times more likely than white youth to be sent to secure detention, a slight increase from 2.3 in 2017;
- White youth were 1.3 times more likely than black youth to be diverted from formal court processing and referred into community programs, an increase from 0.9 in 2017;
- Black youth were 1.9 times more likely than white youth to be petitioned by the court, a slight decrease from 2.1 in 2017

"Once juveniles are referred to our court, we remain fully committed to ensuring equity at every step in the process," said Family Court Administrator Ben Burkemper said.

"However, this report underscores the urgency of our ongoing work with our community partners, school resource officers and personnel, law enforcement, and families to keep youth from entering the juvenile justice system in the first place," Burkemper said. "For youth with more serious behaviors, our shared challenge is finding more robust and effective services to help them get and stay on the right track."

The Family Court and the St. Louis County Children's Services Fund will hold a public meeting Dec. 4 at 6 p.m. at the University City Board of Education Building, 8136 Groby Road, 63130 to hear community concerns. Judges, advocates and court staff will discuss current initiatives to keep children out of the juvenile justice system, as well as efforts to promote fairness and equity for those who are in the juvenile justice system.

A complete copy of the report can be found here: <http://wp.stlcourtscourts.com/wp-content/uploads/PDF/FC/ThirdBiAnnualDMCFinal1118.pdf>

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