



JJPOC Racial and Ethnic Disparity Workgroup Consensus Statement

Mission

Connecticut is committed to eliminating racial and ethnic disparities of justice-involved youth to ensure fairness and equity for all youth, as outlined in the 2019-2021 Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee Strategic Plan. The Racial and Ethnic Disparity Workgroup, a legislatively-created committee of the JJPOC, promotes effective efforts to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities for youth in Connecticut's youth justice system and other youth-serving systems by:

1. **Recommending legislation** that is likely to have a measurable and positive impact on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system.
2. **Proposing policies** that state and local agencies can adopt to reduce or eliminate racial and ethnic disparities within the youth justice system.
3. **Promoting transparency and accountability** among state and local stakeholders, including data collection and reporting on racial and ethnic disparities and the efforts being made to eliminate those disparities.
4. **Developing a model of change** that gives benchmarks of success or a rubric to evaluate success.

Workgroup Priorities

As noted in the JJPOC Strategic Plan, “[w]hile much progress has been achieved in both the front end and deep end of Connecticut’s juvenile justice system by increasing alternatives such as diversion programs for justice-involved youth and reducing confinement, this progress has had a greater benefit for certain segments of the communities than others.”

Indeed, as the W. Haywood Burns Institute for Justice, Fairness, and Equity noted in a recently released report about national trends in youth justice, “The long-term consequences of youthful misbehavior for youth of color are numerous and oftentimes, extreme. Most young people are allowed to grow out of these behaviors without getting entangled in the justice system. However, youth of color are more likely to be arrested, prosecuted, sentenced, and incarcerated for these behaviors than are their White peers”¹

There is an urgent need for jurisdictions, including the State of Connecticut, to examine diversion efforts through the lens of racial and ethnic equity with the explicit goal of using diversion as a tool to reduce racial and ethnic disparities. Therefore, the Workgroup is focusing on the following activities.

1. **Recommending legislation** that is likely to have a measurable and positive impact on reducing racial and ethnic disparities in the youth justice system.
 - a. Developing baseline eligibility criteria for diversion throughout the state to promote equity and eliminate justice by geography.
 - b. Identifying and eliminating barriers to the development of innovative pre-arrest and pre-referral diversion programs.
 - c. Requiring regular and public data collection and accountability for entities responsible for early diversion by race, ethnicity, gender, geography, and reason for diversion.
2. **Proposing policies** that state and local agencies can adopt to reduce or eliminate racial and ethnic disparities within the youth justice system.
 - a. Developing recommended practices for Youth Service Bureaus and Juvenile Review Boards to ensure that diversion criteria and programs are equitable and effective for youth of color based on national research and best practices.
 - b. Identifying and promoting training for law enforcement agencies that would reduce arrests and referrals of youth of color for low-level offenses.
 - c. Consider statewide legislative proposals through an RED lens for within and outside of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee with insurance

¹ W. Haywood Burns Institute, *Stemming the Rising Tide: Racial & Ethnic Disparities in Youth Incarceration and Strategies for Change* (May 2016).

of accountability through reporting back to an appropriate committee

3. **Promoting transparency and accountability** among state and local stakeholders, including data collection and reporting on racial and ethnic disparities and the efforts being made to eliminate those disparities.
 - a. Coordinate efforts across and between functional workgroups of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Oversight Committee.
 - b. Supporting state and local data collection and analysis efforts that help identify opportunities to enhance access to and effectiveness of diversion for youth of color.
 - c. Develop and recommend data collection and reporting guidelines for state agencies and providers responsible for diversion programs.
 - d. Proposing research studies that can help assess the effectiveness and accessibility of diversion for youth of color in Connecticut.

Principles of Effective Racial and Ethnic Disparity Reduction Efforts

1. Existing and planned data collection activities prioritize accurate collection and reporting of data on youth of color at each major decision point in the juvenile justice system, including the ability to disaggregate data by race, ethnicity, gender, geography, age, and offense or reason for involvement at a particular decision point.
2. System stakeholders understand how implicit and explicit racial and ethnic bias and institutional and structural racism contribute to racial and ethnic disparities.
3. Reform efforts incorporate intentional and meaningful partnerships with impacted youth, families, and communities.
4. Reform efforts are grounded in quantitative and qualitative data that identify the causes of and contributors to racial and ethnic disparities.
5. Reform efforts identify policies and interventions that are most likely to have a positive and measurable impact on youth of color based on the identified cause or causes of disparities.
6. All training opportunities are linked to a clear work plan for how the training will support new or enhanced activities to reduce racial and ethnic disparities following the training and ideally provide for some technical assistance to support those activities.

7. Success is defined as (1) significant and measurable reduction or elimination of the overrepresentation of youth of color at a decision point, (2) significant and measurable reduction or elimination of disparate treatment of youth of color at a decision point, and/or (3) reduction in youth of color entering and moving deeper into the justice system.

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