

THE Compiler

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority Summer 2003



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Minority overrepresentation in the criminal and juvenile justice systems

By Daniel Dighton

Minority overrepresentation in the U.S. criminal and juvenile justice systems has been studied, written about, and debated for decades. Yet, like racial differences in our society in general, the problem persists, and the reasons for the continued disparity seem to be as complex as the solutions are illusive.

Overrepresentation of minorities in the juvenile justice system, especially among those in secure confinement, has been a particularly troubling phenomenon. Nationally, according to the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), minorities in 1997 accounted for about one-third of juveniles in the general population but about

two-thirds of juveniles held in secure detention facilities.

In Illinois, minorities make up a little more than a third of the juvenile population, but account for more than three-fourths of the juveniles held in secure detention. When it comes to the transfer of juveniles to adult criminal court, the numbers are even more extreme, particularly in Cook County, where minorities account for nearly all of the transfers.

This issue of *The Compiler* takes a look at minority overrepresentation in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. This article focuses in particular on a recent study of racial disparities in the

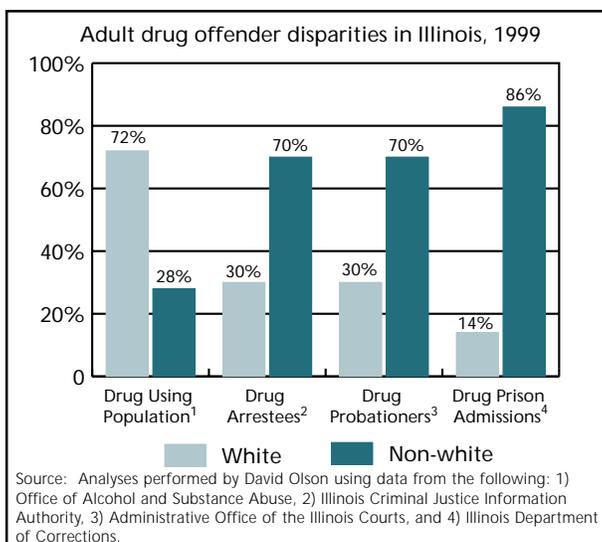
Model program seeks to ease disproportionate confinement of minority youth in Illinois.
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Cook County Juvenile Justice System conducted by the Authority for the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission.

State and national issue

In a report published in May 2000 by Human Rights Watch, an independent, New York-based group, Illinois was

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Incarceration of minority drug offenders soars in a decade

Minorities make up only about a quarter of the drug-using population, according to state surveys, but they account for the vast majority of drug offenders arrested, placed on probation, and incarcerated. Drug offenders have been the fastest growing population at the Illinois Department of Corrections for years, and by far most of these inmates are African American.

The number of adult drug-law violators in prison doubled between 1992 and 2002, rising from fewer than 6,000 inmates to more than 11,000, according to IDOC data. Eighty-six percent of prison admissions for drug offenses in Illinois in 1999 were minorities.

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Created in 1983, the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority is a state agency dedicated to improving the administration of criminal justice. Most of the work of the Authority falls into three major divisions: Research and Analysis; Information Systems and Technology; and Federal and State Grants Administration.

The Authority is governed by a 20-member board comprised of state and local leaders from the criminal justice system and members of the public. There is one vacancy on the board.

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Incarceration

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When Human Rights Watch, in a May 2000 report, pointed to Illinois as having the highest rate of black male drug offender admissions to prison in the nation, it caught a lot of people's attention.

Among those who took note was Melody Heaps, president of Treatment Alternatives for Safe Communities (TASC), a leading substance abuse assessment and case management organization in Illinois. She told Authority members in June that she was initially skeptical of the report. But when she discovered it was accurate, she became alarmed and determined to find out more about the extent of the problem in Illinois.

With funding from the Authority, TASC, and Dr. Arthur Lurigio of Loyola University Chicago, launched a research project to analyze the disproportionate confinement of minority drug offenders in Illinois.

TASC and Lurigio are planning a series of reports that will examine drug laws, arrests and prison admissions. They will attempt to make recommendations for collaborative opportunities and policy strategies. Specifically, they plan to provide further research on the drug market in Chicago, police calls for service and police presence in minority communities, access to treatment interventions in minority communities, and the impact of criminal histories on sentencing.

Most of the drug offenders in prison are those who have been sentenced for Class 4 felony possession of a controlled substance. This is a low-level offense, but most of these offenders also had extensive criminal histories. This has been the trend since the mid-1990s, according to data published by IDOC.

In a recent *Research Bulletin* published by the Authority, Dr. David Olson, an

associate professor at Loyola University Chicago and senior scientist at the Authority, pointed out that more than 7,000 prison sentences were imposed for Class 4 felony possession in 2002, representing 20 percent of all prison sentences that year.

Class 4 felony possession carries sentences of one to three years in prison, and the average sentence was 19 months. But actual time served in prison averaged only a little more than five months, Olson noted. Few of these offenders have access to meaningful drug treatment before they are back out on the streets.

In the draft of an initial report on disproportionate incarceration of African Americans for drug offenses, Lurigio analyzed current research from a national perspective. He summarized with the following:

Historically, there have never been more persons imprisoned per capita in the United States than there are today. The explosion of the prison population is attributable largely to the war on drugs, which has placed an overriding emphasis on enforcement strategies to reduce illegal drug use and sales. Because drug enforcement strategies are more easily implemented in poor, underclass neighborhoods, they have led to the disproportionate arrest and incarceration of minorities, especially African Americans.

Racial disparities in sentences for drug offenses have wreaked havoc on poor African American communities, undermining family and neighborhood stability and diminishing the social capital of African American men and women. For many, convictions for felony drug offenses have led to disenfranchisement and exclusion from job and housing opportunities.■

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Minority overrepresentation

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singled out for having a higher rate of black male drug offenders admitted to prison than any other state. The same report found that Illinois was second only to Maryland in the percentage of black admissions to prison, with 74 percent of admissions being African Americans.

U.S. census figures show that African Americans make up a little more than 12 percent of the country's population, but they are far from a minority in the prison population. According to a July 2002 Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS) Bulletin, "Prisoners in 2001," Black males accounted for more than 43 percent of all inmates sentenced to state and federal prisons.

According to the BJS report, there were 585,800 black males in prison, compared to 449,200 white males and 199,700 Hispanic males. For young black males the numbers were particularly disturbing. An estimated 10 percent of black males age 25 to 29 were in prison in 2001. That compares to 2.9 percent of Hispanic males and 1.2 percent of white males in that age group.

There is no consensus on why minorities are overrepresented, and it may be for different reasons in different jurisdictions or parts of the country. A December 1999 OJJDP *Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, "Minorities in the Juvenile Justice System," pointed out that overrepresentation did not necessarily mean discrimination, although that was one possible explanation. The bulletin also stated that overrepresentation could result from the type and volume of crimes committed by minority juveniles, and thus have a behavioral and legal explanation. Ultimately, the bulletin concluded, "at the national level, questions regarding the causes of observed disparity and overrepresentation remain unanswered."

Seeing the problem

Judith A. Cox, of the Santa Cruz County (California) Probation Department, described her agency's efforts to address minority overrepresentation in a September 2000 article for *Building Blocks for Youth*. Cox wrote: "It is broadly recog-

nized that the overrepresentation of minority youth in juvenile institutions is caused by many factors, which exist in multiple domains: the Juvenile Justice System, socioeconomic factors, the educational system and the family."

But Cox's article detailed how Santa Cruz came to recognize that they had a problem with minority overrepresentation (in their case it was Latinos) and, with notable success, took steps to address it.

Much of what they did in Santa Cruz was guided by the work of James Bell of the W. Haywood Burns Institute in San Francisco, and the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI) of the Annie E. Casey Foundation. The JDAI has also been utilized in Cook County and other sites in Illinois.

An estimated 10 percent of black males age 25 to 29 were in prison in 2001.

"We realized that by examining our policies, procedures, practices and programs we could identify things over which we did have control," Cox wrote. "When we looked for clients who experienced barriers to service or lack of access, we found them. When we looked for points of subjective rather than objective decision making, we found them. When we looked for examples of cultural insensitivity, we found them. When we looked for unnecessary delays, which contributed to longer lengths of stay in detention, we found them."

Getting people to recognize that there is a problem with overrepresentation of minorities in the system has been a major obstacle to doing anything about it, said James "Chip" Coldren, president of the John Howard Association, a prison watchdog group based in Chicago.

"There are a lot of people that need to admit that there's a problem before you can take steps to solve it," Coldren said. "I believe strongly that a lot of us aren't comfortable talking about these issues. Until we become more comfortable talking about these things we're never going to solve them."

Debates over disproportionate minority representation tend to get bogged down over whether there is bias in the system and how it can be measured, Coldren said. Data collection is about the only method available for studying the issue,

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New director

Kane steps down

Dr. Candice M. Kane resigned as executive director of the Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority effective Aug. 1. Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich named Lori G. Levin to take over as head of the Authority beginning Aug. 4.

Dr. Kane had been executive director since May 1999. Prior to that, she served as acting executive director, a position she took over in December 1996. Dr. Kane came to the Authority in 1985, and before becoming director served as an associate director, responsible for the Authority's Federal and State Grants Unit. In that role she was responsible for federal and state grant programs in the areas of law enforcement, corrections, victim services, violence against women and motor vehicle theft prevention.

Dr. Kane has been an adjunct faculty member at the University of Illinois at Chicago and the University of Chicago. She earned a doctorate from Northwestern University and a law degree from Northern Illinois University.

Levin takes over

Lori G. Levin comes to the Authority from the Cook County State's Attorney's Office, where she was supervisor of the Seniors and Persons with Disabilities Division. She oversaw attorneys who prosecute persons charged with felonies against the elderly and disabled in the Criminal Division as well as attorneys who handle involuntary commitment and treatment cases in the Mental Health Courts of the County Division. Her duties have included not only the supervision of attorneys, victim-witness personnel and administrative staff, but also the drafting and implementation of legislation, training of police and hospital personnel and community outreach. Levin has served on legislative task forces, most recently as the Illinois State's Attorney's Association representative on the Senate Resolution 373 Mental Health Task Force.

Prior to the reorganization of the Public Interest Bureau, she was the Supervisor of the Mental Health Division. Before that, Levin was assigned to the Felony Trial Division, where she was a first chair for 10 years. During her tenure, she tried bench and jury trials, primarily violent crimes cases.

Levin is a past vice-chair for Professional Development/CLE and was a longtime council member of the American Bar Association's Criminal Justice Section.

Research

JRSA profile of girls committed to the IDOC Youth Centers

The Authority, in collaboration with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC), is conducting an in-depth examination of the backgrounds, needs, and services received by female delinquents who have been committed to IDOC. Supported with a grant from the Justice Research and Statistics Association, this project seeks to develop research, programming, and policy recommendations to help implement gender-specific programming for female delinquents. The project entails examining existing information collected by IDOC on each female inmate. These data are being used to develop a profile of girls residing in IDOC. In addition, more detailed and exploratory data will be collected through focus groups of IDOC staff members on working with girls, girls' unique needs, and the types of services that may help girls return successfully to their communities. Additionally, a detailed inventory of the programs offered through IDOC and the characteristics of the girls receiving these programs, in combination with the needs assessment, will assist in identifying service gaps. The final report is expected to be completed in the fall.

Supplemental Funds for Methamphetamine Enforcement: A Process Evaluation

Initiated in March, this project will be carried out by researchers at Illinois State University. In 2002, four drug task force programs (East Central, West Central, South Central and Quad City) received supplemental funding from the Authority to facilitate investigations related to methamphetamine production. At the time of their application these four task forces, drawing from agencies in 18 counties, were comprised of 44 officers from 29 local agencies and the Illinois State Police. The supplemental funding allowed for hiring seven additional officers for one year and for a variety of items in support of task force activities (such as bulletproof vests). This project will use site visits, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and data from quarterly reports to assess how the supplemental money has been used, to identify the uses for which it has proven most beneficial, and the uses

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but it is not a particularly effective way of measuring actual bias. "It's just a very, very crude way of measuring the problem," he said. "But at some point you just have to accept that there is a problem."

According to Authority Senior Research Analyst Phillip Stevenson, one of the co-authors of the Authority's report on disproportionate minority representation in Cook County, the bigger problem is with the social and economic disparities that exist in our society, which in turn lead to disparities in the criminal justice system.

"If you really want to address disparity, you really have to look beyond the criminal justice system. You have to look at the risk factors. This isn't a problem that's just a criminal justice problem," Stevenson said.

Coldren echoed that sentiment. "By the time a person ends up in a prison cell, there's a long history of social failure that has happened," he said.

Federal funding mandate

Regardless of the debate over its root causes, disproportionate confinement of minority youth has been a "core requirement" under the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act since 1992. What this means is that to qualify for Formula Grants under the act, states must determine if disproportionate confinement exists and demonstrate efforts to reduce it where it exists. To be in compliance states must submit plans outlining their strategy for meeting the act's requirements.

In Illinois, the Juvenile Justice Commission, part of the Department of Human Services, is responsible for administering the Formula Grants and ensuring compliance with the JJDP Act requirements. To assist in their efforts, the commission requested and funded the Authority's study of the Cook County Juvenile Justice System.

Written by Stevenson and Research Analyst Timothy Lavery, with assistance

from additional staff researchers, the two-part report provides a detailed examination of racial disparities at different decision-making points in the juvenile justice system in Cook County. The report will not be publicly available until formally approved by the Juvenile Justice Commission, which is expected in September, but the commission generously gave permission for some highlights to be featured in this

"If you really want to address disparity, you really have to look beyond the criminal justice system. You have to look at the risk factors. This isn't a problem that's just a criminal justice problem."

article.

The report looked at minority overrepresentation at different stages in the juvenile justice system, including arrest, referral to court, sentencing, and confinement. The report does not attempt to settle the debate over whether there is bias in the system, or why there is overrepresentation of minorities. What the study did was examine each decision-making point to determine where the greatest disparities exist so that resources can be targeted and strategies developed to try and bring about change. "It is the first step in addressing the problem," Stevenson said.

The Authority's study found disparities throughout the system, but African American juveniles were heavily overrepresented at the arrest stage, which seemed to fuel overrepresentation at later stages in the system. The later stages also contributed to overrepresentation of African Americans, but to a lesser extent, the authors noted.

"We found a huge disparity at the front door, at the arrest stage. It's really the front door of the system that sets the foundation for the disparity that follows," Stevenson said.

The juvenile population in Cook County in 1999 was estimated to be 40 percent white (Caucasian), 33 percent African American, and 21 percent Hispanic. But among juveniles arrested in the county that year, 63 percent were African American, 24 percent were white, and 12 percent were Hispanic.

The extent of African American youth being arrested and entering the juvenile

justice system is even more pronounced when Chicago is considered separate from Cook County. In 1999, African Americans accounted for 79 percent of all juveniles arrested in the city.

After analyzing arrests, the authors looked at the number of juveniles that moved to the next stage, or decision point, in the system. So, as a starting point, the number of African American juveniles in the general population was used for measuring their representation among all arrests. At the next stage, the number of African American juveniles arrested was used as the base population, or the denominator in the equation, for analyzing their referrals to the state's attorney's office, and so on. This equation provided a disparity index for measuring if a certain group was overrepresented at successive stages in the system.

As juveniles progressed through the system, some cumulative overrepresentation of African Americans was found in police referrals of juvenile cases to the state's attorney's office, delinquency petitions filed, delinquencies, and sentences of confinement. As a result, overrepresentation of African Americans increased at each stage of the system.

Confinement

When it came to confinement, the study found that during the years 1996-1999, of all juveniles in Cook County sentenced to secure custody (either to the Cook County Juvenile Temporary Detention Center, or to the Juvenile Division of the Illinois Department of Corrections), 77 percent were African American, 15 percent were Hispanic, and 7 percent were white (Caucasian).

White juveniles were underrepresented in all stages leading toward confinement. After the arrest stage, whites were most underrepresented in police referrals of cases to the state's attorney's office, and sentences to the Department of Corrections.

Countywide, the percentage of white juveniles in the system decreased at every stage of the process, whereas, for African American juveniles, the percentage in the system increased at every stage.

Hispanics were similar to whites in that they were underrepresented at the arrest stage, but, unlike whites, they were overrepresented in police referrals of

cases to the state's attorney's office. Hispanics were slightly underrepresented in delinquency petitions, and about evenly represented, based on their population, in delinquencies and commitments to the Department of Corrections. Overall, Hispanics were underrepresented in the juvenile justice system, but their representation increased slightly as they progressed through successive stages.

Whites and Hispanics tended to be overrepresented when it came to alternative sentences that would keep them from being confined in secure detention facilities. These alternatives included dropping the charges and continuance under supervision.

The detention of juveniles after they have been arrested but before they stand trial is far more common for African Americans than whites. The Authority's study found that significantly more African American juveniles were screened to determine if they should be held in secure detention prior to trial. As a result of those screenings, the vast majority of those who were held in detention were African American.

The study analyzed 45,474 juvenile cases that were screened for detention in Cook County during the years 1996-1999. Of those cases, African Americans accounted for 80 percent of screenings, Hispanics accounted for 14 percent, and whites accounted for 5 percent. Following those screenings, 19,740 juveniles were held in secure detention, and the breakdown by race was virtually the same as for the screenings.

Transfers to adult court

Under Illinois law, the cases of juveniles charged with certain offenses are automatically transferred to adult criminal court. These include offenses such as first-degree murder and aggravated criminal sexual assault. Also, certain drug and weapons offenses, if committed on or near public school grounds or a public housing building, are automatically transferred to criminal court.

Due to the large number of African Americans living in dense urban areas filled with public schools and public housing developments, automatic transfers have had a strikingly disproportionate impact on African American juveniles.

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Research continued

for which it has not been as helpful as originally planned.

County juvenile justice profiles

With the assistance of a grant from the Justice Research and Statistics Association, staff researchers are developing comprehensive statistical profiles for each of Illinois' 102 counties. These profiles will contain a host of data and information relative to juvenile justice planning, problem identification and problem solving, including a section that focuses on assessing disproportionate minority representation. The profiles will also include data on juvenile court activity, demographics, and risk factors. Some of the profiles are available in printed form and are downloadable from the Authority's website. The remaining profiles are scheduled for completion this summer.

Upcoming project evaluations

In collaboration with the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) and a host of other advisory entities, Authority staff issued a request for proposals for the evaluation of Illinois' Going Home Program. This major offender reentry program will be funded through a partnership of contributing federal agencies and in concert with a number of Chicago-area government, community, and faith-based organizations. The Authority is partnering in the effort by providing federal funds and technical assistance for its evaluation. The proposals are being reviewed by Authority and IDOC staff.

The evaluation of CLEAR, the Citizen and Law Enforcement Analysis and Reporting project, will continue with a grant to the University of Illinois at Chicago. CLEAR is a major initiative of the Chicago Police Department to integrate information systems and processes within the department. The continued evaluation will focus on the the introduction of high-priority applications, and the resources and processes needed to develop and implement the major components of CLEAR. The project is slated to begin Sept. 1 and continue for a year.

For more information on these programs visit our website, www.icjia.state.il.us, or call 312-793-8550.

Grants

Grant designations received

The Authority received a \$14.5 million designation from the U.S. Department of Justice for federal fiscal year 2003 to administer **Victim of Crime Act (VOCA)** grant programs. Funded with fines paid by those convicted of violating federal laws, VOCA supports direct services to violent crime victims.

The Authority also received a \$4.9 million designation from the U.S. Department of Justice for federal fiscal year 2003 to administer **Violence Against Women Act (VAWA)** grant programs. VAWA funds are used to improve the response of the criminal justice system to victims of sexual assault and domestic violence.

LLEBG grants awarded

The Authority recently designated \$955,159 in federal fiscal year **2002 Local Law Enforcement Block Grants (LLEBG)** to 56 local law enforcement agencies for officer safety equipment. These funds will provide 21 new squad cars, 19 in-squad video systems, and numerous in-squad communication systems, such as mobile data terminals.

Innovative probation programs slated

The Authority will administer \$500,000 in federal fiscal year **2001 Edward Byrne Memorial State and Local Law Enforcement Assistance Formula Grant** funds to support innovative probation programs in Illinois. A variety of probation programs will be implemented with this funding, including projects involving adult sex offender management, mentally ill and substance abuse offender management, and gender-responsive probation for juvenile females. Innovative probation projects move current probation toward practices that research has indicated are the best for targeted populations. Proposals for these programs were due July 2.



The Authority study found that automatic transfers in Cook County were overwhelmingly made up of African Americans. The researchers looked at data on 1,539 juvenile cases transferred to criminal court during the years 1996-1999. Of those, 85 percent were African American, 12 percent were Hispanic, and 3 percent were white.

A similar study by the Cook County Public Defender's Office looked at transfers in 1999-2000, and found that of 393 transfers in Cook County, 87 percent were African American, 13 percent were Latino, and less than 1 percent — just three juvenile transfers — were Caucasian.

The public defender's study also noted that of the juveniles who were transferred, well over half were for drug offenses, and more than half were first-time offenders with no prior convictions in juvenile or adult court. The study found that many of the cases that were transferred were not prosecuted, and of the drug cases that were transferred, most ended with sentences of probation.

As a consequence of having their cases automatically transferred, many juveniles, especially those who had no prior contact with the juvenile or criminal justice systems, did not have access to the rehabilitative services typically offered in the juvenile system.

Risk factors

The Authority's study looked at risk factors that may contribute to delinquency. Among the areas analyzed were poverty, family violence, and education. The researchers found that African American juveniles in Cook County had the highest rates of exposure to the specific risk factors analyzed, and greater exposure to risk factors that might lead them to behavior that would result in contact with the juvenile justice system.

The researchers speculated that the presence of these risk factors might also influence decision-making as cases progress in the system, and thus have an impact on overrepresentation of African Americans beyond the arrest stage.

Cox, in her article on Santa Cruz, noted that some risk factors, such as unemployment or gang involvement, could result in an unintentional racial bias.

When these factors are given extra points in screening for risk, Cox wrote,

“the scale may cause a higher number of minority youth to be detained for the same offenses for which other youth are released.”

The tremendous impact of decisions leading to deeper involvement in the system for juveniles, especially decisions leading to detention, makes it particularly important to have objective, standardized, and validated screening assessment tools, Stevenson said.

Without effective assessment tools it becomes extremely difficult to prevent inherent prejudices, cultural differences, and other biases from influencing decision-making. Factors such as family structure and support for the juvenile, or home environment and location of the home, over which most youths do not have control, can play a role in risk assessments of juveniles and whether they are held in detention.

Stevenson said he questions whether those assessments are always valid. “Maybe we're punishing kids for the sins of their parents, or their community,” he said.

Importance of data

Data collection on juveniles by ethnicity, at key decision points in the system, is vital to efforts aimed at reducing disproportionate minority representation. It is the first step in identifying a problem and creating a strategy to bring about change.

As Cox wrote about the Santa Cruz experience:

The examination has now become an on-going effort directed towards continuous improvement, rather than a defense of the status quo. While it remains true that there are societal issues, which make minority youth vulnerable to the risk factors for delinquency, our work has taught us (and research supports this) that individual justice agencies can exacerbate the disparity at each decision point. A close examination of the data and practices at each decision point can create a positive effect.■

(Daniel Dighton is a public information officer with the Authority.)

Burns Institute model seeks to reduce minority youth confinement at four sites in state

Despite the attention it has received over the years, very little headway has been made in addressing minority overrepresentation in the juvenile justice system.

In the latest effort to bring about change, the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, part of the Department of Human Services, has launched an innovative program in four communities across Illinois. The program is based on a model developed by James Bell of the W. Haywood Burns Institute and first implemented in Seattle in 1999.

In November 2002, Peoria became the first site to implement the Burns Institute model in Illinois. Programs were started in the winter and spring of 2003 in the Chicago neighborhood of Lawndale, at a site in Chicago's south suburbs, and at a site in St. Clair County. The model also has been implemented in San Jose, California, San Francisco, Phoenix, and Kansas City, Missouri, for a total of nine programs. Strategies using aspects of the model have been used in Portland, Oregon, and Santa Cruz, California.

The sites in Illinois provide geographic diversity and target areas with high crime rates and high concentrations of minorities in the juvenile justice system. In Peoria, for instance, the program focuses on an area on the south side of the city with the highest concentration of juvenile detainees. Lawndale is one of the most impoverished and crime-ridden areas of Chicago.

The Burns Institute model has three phases, which focus on three key decision points in the juvenile justice system that can lead to confinement: police decisions to arrest, probation decisions to detain, and the decisions of prosecutors and judges at sentencing. A primary objective is to reduce the proportion of minority juveniles held in secure detention while waiting to go to court. By closely scrutinizing

these decision points the program seeks to reduce minority confinement by 10 percent at its sites in three years.

According to Juvenile Justice Commission members and Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC) Coordinator Carlus "Dee" Gully, the Peoria site is showing great promise. At a recent DMC committee meeting, commission members praised the degree of cooperation and commitment to the program among participating community leaders and justice officials. Gully said bringing key people together, recognizing there is a problem, and having a desire to make changes is essential to the program's success.

Community leaders and local officials must acknowledge they have a problem with overrepresentation of minorities and seek assistance before the Burns Institute will implement a program, said Michael Finley, the Burns Institute site manager overseeing the Illinois programs. "We don't go to places to convince them they have a problem," he said.

Betsy Clarke, a member of the commission and president of the Juvenile Justice Initiative, said the Peoria program could become a national model, based on the work they have done so far. She said Illinois is on the forefront with the initiative, which is being watched by other juvenile justice officials around the country.

"The work that James (Bell) is doing here is cutting edge," Clarke said.

The work at each site in the program is tailored to the unique characteristics of the area. Each site has an advisory board comprised of high-level officials from local agencies and community leaders. Each site also hires a coordinator to manage the project.

(Continued on back page)

Technology

Governor promotes justice information integration efforts

Gov. Rod R. Blagojevich in June formally introduced a strategic plan calling for the integration of state, county, and local justice information systems throughout Illinois. The governor also signed an Executive Order establishing the Illinois Integrated Justice Information System (IJIS) Implementation Board, which is charged with coordinating the development of systems that will enhance information sharing. The 23-member board will include local, county, and state criminal justice officials.

IJIS surveys analyzed

Staff have completed an analysis of the criminal justice agency information management surveys, which were sent to a statewide sample of police departments, sheriffs' departments, state's attorneys' offices, circuit court clerks' offices, and probation departments. Overall, the survey results illustrated that very little electronic data exchange is taking place between agencies, even in jurisdictions where justice agencies have developed various automated systems. A summary of responses to each of the five surveys is posted on the IJIS website: www.icjia.state.il.us/ijis. A summary report of survey findings is being prepared, and will be posted to the website upon completion.

Systems upgrades

PIMSNet, the Authority's replacement for its 22-year-old police records management system, is now up and running. Mt. Prospect was the first agency to implement the new system. Several other agencies have begun converting old PIMS data to the new system and will be running it in the near future. Authority staff hope to have all PIMS agencies converted to PIMSNet by the end of June 2004.

The Authority is implementing a new Area-Wide Law Enforcement Radio Terminal System (ALERTS) to replace the legacy ALERTS system. ALERTS provides mobile data services to 347 law enforcement agencies in Illinois. The new system is based on the Microsoft Windows 2000 platform and will allow Authority developers to more easily adapt ALERTS to the changing needs of users.

Burns Institute

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All four sites in Illinois are still in the program's first phase, which consists primarily of data collection. Detailed arrest data is gathered to pinpoint the nature and extent of involvement in the system among minority youth in the targeted area. They look at where kids live and where and when crimes are occurring.

This first phase also consists of "community mapping," which involves gathering data on resources in the community, such as schools, libraries, churches, parks, and other places that can provide services for young people. The mapping also looks at problem areas, such as vacant lots and buildings and high crime spots. Youths from the area are recruited to participate in this phase to identify weaknesses and suggest improvements for the community.

The local participants decide what is important and what they want to map. Through this process they can see what is accessible to youths, whether resources are going to the right areas to meet the needs of kids, and identify things about the area that are either

positive or negative for minority youths.

"What we're trying to do is make people be very specific, and just think through this stuff," Finley said.

Phase two of the program focuses on risk assessment and the decision-making surrounding court referrals and detention. During this phase, policies and practices are analyzed to determine if they are having a disproportionate impact on minorities. Participants analyze ways in which resources in the community can be used to make changes to help minority youth, and they also look for ways to improve the handling of court referrals and detentions.

Phase three focuses on court practices and sentencing decisions. Participants look for ways to utilize community resources to find alternatives to confinement and assist youths involved in the criminal justice system, including re-entry programs for youths in confinement.

The Burns model is built on the premise that disproportionality in the system is not simply the result of cir-

cumstances, such as poverty or class differences, or from a specific bias in the system. "It's a whole bunch of complex factors that revolve around how we make decisions about kids," Finley said.

The model emphasizes taking subjectivity out of the decision-making process through the use of objective risk assessment instruments. Data collection and the documentation of decision-making outcomes throughout the juvenile justice process are vital to bringing objectivity to the system, Finley said.

He compared the Burns model to being on a diet, where you carefully write down everything you eat during the day and suddenly realize why you are overweight. With the Burns model, officials track outcomes through regular data collection to pinpoint problem areas. They then continue to use data collection to track their progress in bringing change to the system.

"It's not rocket science," Finley said, "or any ideas that are earth-shattering." ■

— Daniel Dighton

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