



THE COMMONWEALTH OF MASSACHUSETTS
OFFICE OF THE CHILD ADVOCATE
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MARIA Z. MOSSAIDES
DIRECTOR

November 7, 2022

Dear Mr. Clerk,

I am pleased to submit to you the following report on behalf of the Juvenile Justice Policy and Data (JJPAD) Board:

- Racial and Ethnic Disparities at the Front Door of Massachusetts' Juvenile Justice System: Understanding the Factors Leading to Overrepresentation of Black and Latino Youth Entering the System

As part of the Board's legislative mandates, we were tasked with *(iii) the identification and evaluation of any gender, racial and ethnic disparities within the juvenile justice system and recommendations regarding ways to reduce such disparities*¹. This report aims to address that mandate.

As discussed in the report, the Board finds that while significant progress has been made in limiting the number of youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system, racial and ethnic disparities remain stubbornly high. These disparities are greatest at the "front door" of the system – the arrest and application for delinquency complaint stage. The Board's analysis found that In Massachusetts, compared to white youth, **Black youth were over three times more likely to be the subject of an application for complaint** to the Juvenile Court, and **Latino youth were almost twice as likely**. Disparities are even greater in *how* youth are arrested (through a custodial arrest or summons to appear in court). In FY21, **Black youth were over four times more likely to experience a custodial arrest than their white peers, and Latino youth were almost three times more likely**.

The report finds that offense severity (i.e., felony or misdemeanor), offense type (e.g., person, weapon, property) and the region a youth is arrested in can partially, but not fully, explain overall racial and ethnic disparities in youth entering the juvenile justice system. However, as the report describes, research in other jurisdictions supports the hypothesis that police department policies, practices, and officer decision-making are also at least partially responsible for these disparities in Massachusetts. As such, the Board has put forth seven recommends the state can take to reduce disparities in the juvenile justice system.

The report is attached to this email, and is available for download at <https://www.mass.gov/doc/racial-ethnic-disparities-at-the-front-door-of-massachusetts-juvenile-justice-system-understanding-the-factors-leading-to-overrepresentation-of-black-and-latino-youth-entering-the-system/download>.

Our office is happy to further discuss this report with you and/or your staff. Please contact Melissa Threadgill, our Director of Strategic Innovation, with any questions. She can be reached at Melissa.Threadgill@mass.gov.

Thank you,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Maria Z. Mossaides", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Maria Z. Mossaides
Director, Office of the Child Advocate

¹[M.G.L. Chapter 119, Section 89](#)