



## "JUST FACTS" FACT SHEET MAY 2008

Please join CfJJ in urging the Legislature to include language in the fiscal 2009 budget to **mandate the collection of basic statistical juvenile justice data.**

### THE PROBLEM

Massachusetts fails to collect the basic statistical data it needs to understand how its juvenile justice system is operating. As a result, it is blindly funding a system without the metrics to assess either its fairness or effectiveness.

Here, for example, are some questions for which we should have answers – but don't:

- ◆ How many youth are arrested each year, and for what offenses? (Many police departments do not collect or report this data.)
- ◆ Who are these youth? (Data on race, ethnicity, gender, and age of youth are not reported as they move through the various decision points in the system.)
- ◆ What communities are most affected by juvenile crime? (Home zip codes of juveniles in contact with the juvenile justice system are not tracked.)
- ◆ How do youth of different races, ethnicities, and genders, fare as they move through the juvenile justice system? (Again, this data is not reported at all key decision points.)

Moreover, collection of data on race and ethnicity at each decision point in the juvenile justice system is required by the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. By failing to collect this data, Massachusetts risks losing federal grants which have in the past funded important prevention and intervention programs, including the only current alternative to detention program in the Commonwealth.

### THE SOLUTION

By inserting simple language in the FY 2009 budget, the Legislature can solve this problem by requiring each agency and department in the juvenile justice system to collect and make public statistical data on the race, ethnicity, gender, age, type of offense charged, and home zip code of youth with whom they come in contact.

## TALKING POINTS

- ◆ Without knowing the basic facts about who is being served by our juvenile justice system and what happens to them at each decision point in the system, we can't spot or track trends, develop effective responses, or rationally determine budget priorities.
- ◆ Moreover, without that data we can't evaluate whether programs designed to improve the system are working.
- ◆ By not collecting data required by the JJDP, Massachusetts risks the loss of federal grant money that is needed to fund important prevention and intervention programs.
- ◆ **Policymakers – and taxpayers – deserve to have the facts. We can't have a fair and effective juvenile justice system without them.**

“We can have facts without thinking but we cannot have thinking without facts.”

-John Dewey