

PRESS RELEASE

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ACLU report *Locking Up Our Children* highlights troubling racial disparities in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system

Advocates call on the Legislature to require the collection and dissemination of basic statistical data needed to address these racial disparities

Boston - Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CfJJ), the only statewide juvenile justice advocacy organization in Massachusetts, urges the Patrick administration, Legislature and Judiciary to work together to solve the troubling racial disparities in the system.

“Just a quick visit to any secure detention facility will show you the stark racial disparities described in the ACLU report,” says Lael Chester, Executive Director of CfJJ. “It’s obvious that the majority of kids being held are kids of color.”

Massachusetts is not alone; almost every state in the country has identified racial disparities in their juvenile justice systems. Congress, recognizing this widespread problem, requires all states to identify and address the disparities in order to receive funding through the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act. Massachusetts’ failure to comply puts this federal funding in jeopardy.

“Talking about race is not easy; people feel defensive and tend to point their fingers at others,” explains Lael Chester. “But you can’t ensure a fair and effective juvenile justice system unless you directly address these racial disparities.”

As a first step, Massachusetts should make the collection and dissemination of basic statistical data a prerequisite for state funding of all agencies that work directly with the youth in the system in order to track and understand the problem. At key decision points, like detention, agencies should report the race, ethnicity, gender, age and home zip code of the youth as well as the type of offense charged.

“I hope my colleagues in the Legislature will make this a priority,” says Representative Kay Khan, Democrat from Newton, who filed an amendment to the House Budget to require the collection of data and also has filed legislation (H. 3881) to create additional alternatives to detention. “The cost is minimal and the gain is invaluable.”

For more information about Citizens for Juvenile Justice, please visit www.cfjj.org.
For a copy of the ACLU Report *Locking Up Our Children* please visit www.aclum.org/lockingupkids