



GIRLS IN THE MASSACHUSETTS JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

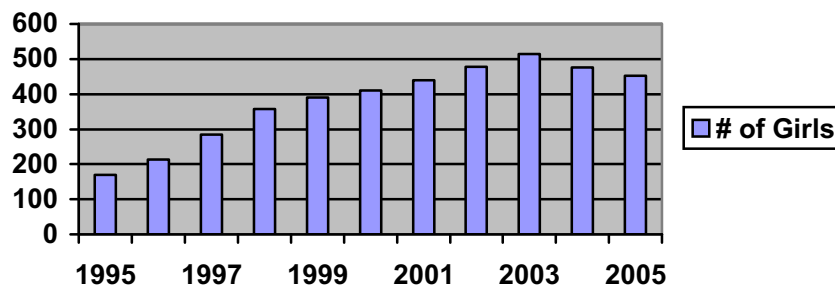
Fact Sheet June 2005

Over the last decade, there has been a dramatic increase in the number of girls in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system. Despite an overall drop in juvenile crime, girls are the fastest growing segment of the juvenile justice population – nationally and locally.¹

WHAT ARE THE NUMBERS?

- ◆ Although boys continue to represent the majority of youth served in the juvenile justice systems in the United States, girls now account for a significant portion of the overall population. In 2004, girls accounted for 23% of those held in pre-trial detention and 16% of those confined.²
- ◆ In Massachusetts:
 - the number of girls arrested tripled between 1991 and 2000³
 - in one decade (1995-2005), the number of girls in the custody of the Department of Youth Services (juvenile corrections) increased by 168%

**DYS Committed Female Caseload
on January 1 of each year from 1995-2005**



Massachusetts Department of Youth services: <http://www.mass.gov/dys> (accessed June 2005)

WHAT IS THE PROBLEM?

- ◆ Most theories of delinquency are based on male behavior, contributing to the development of a juvenile justice system with only boys in mind. Girls have **unique emotional, mental, physical, and social health needs**, most of which require girl-specific treatment:
- ◆ At least 70 percent of girls in the juvenile justice system report **histories of physical abuse and sexual abuse**.⁴

- ◆ Female juvenile delinquents are much likelier than boys to experience **post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), suicidal behavior, disassociative disorder, and borderline personality disorder.**⁵
- ◆ Girls in the system need access to medical care and family planning services as they are at **high risk for pregnancy and sexually transmitted disease**, and/or may come into the system already with children.⁶
- ◆ The racial disparities found among girls in the juvenile justice system raise troubling questions about the fairness of the system. **Girls of color, like boys of color, are over-represented at every stage of the Massachusetts' juvenile justice system.**⁷ An examination of the caseload of girls in the custody of the Department of Youth Services on May 1, 2005 (these are girls who had been committed by the court post-adjudication) shows that:
 - African-American girls are represented at rates more than three times their representation in the general population;
 - Hispanic girls are represented at rates two times their representation in the general population; and
 - White girls are represented at approximately half the rate of their general population.⁸
- ◆ Most of the agencies responsible for processing children in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system **fail to collect and analyze data on gender and race from all critical stages of the system**, or to ensure the information they do collect is reliable. Missing, for example, is such important information as the number and race of girls who are arraigned for delinquent charges each year, placed on probation, and found to have violated probation.

WHAT IS THE SOLUTION?

All agencies within the Massachusetts juvenile justice system must collect, analyze, and share data on gender and race from all critical stages of the system in order to understand and address this dramatic influx of girls into the system.

Based on that information, Massachusetts must invest in gender-specific programming and resources within the system to adequately address the needs of the growing number of girls in the juvenile justice system.

Struggle for life. Struggle for life. Been struggling too long.

- "Poetry and Songs" created by the girls from the Terri Thomas Girls' Assessment Program, distributed at the Center for Human Development's Conference *Through Her Eyes*, 2005

¹ American Bar Association, *Justice By Gender: The Lack of Appropriate Prevention, Diversion and Treatment Alternatives for Girls in the Juvenile Justice System*, 1 (May 1, 2001).

² Office of Juvenile Justice Delinquency Prevention, Publications, <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.org/pubs/principles>. (Accessed May 27, 2005).

³ Raw data provided to CFJJ from the Federal Bureau of Investigation, 1991-2000.

⁴ National Mental Health Association, *Mental Health and Adolescent Girls in the Justice System: Fact Sheet*, <<http://www.nmha.org/children/justjuv/girlsji.cfm>> (accessed Mar. 20, 2005); Joseph R. Biden, Jr., *What About the Girls? The Role of the Federal Government in Addressing the Rise in Female Juvenile Offenders*, 14 Stan. L. & Policy Rev. 29, 37 (2003).

⁵ *Supra*, note 2.

⁶ Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, *The Girls Initiative*, <http://www.djj.state.fl.us/Providers/comminvolve/listen.html> (accessed Aug. 27, 2004).

⁷ Dahlberg, Robin, "Disproportionate Minority Confinement in Massachusetts," ACLU Report (May, 2003).

⁸ Raw data of the number and race of girls in DYS custody on May 1, 2005, was provided by DYS to CfJJ. According to CfJJ's analysis of this data in relationship with the 2000 U.S. Census, 25% of the girls in DYS custody were African-American compared to 7% in the general population; 22% were Hispanic compared to 11% in the general population; and 39% were white compared to 74% in the general population.