

Addressing Disproportionate Minority Contact in the Juvenile Justice System



Visit the GCC web page pertaining to Disproportionate Minority Contact
<http://www.ncgccd.org/planning/dmc/dmc04.cfm>

The North Carolina Initiative

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Disproportionate Minority Contact

Background

Perhaps the most heated debate in juvenile justice is the reality of Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) with the juvenile justice system. This elevated contact further generates disproportionate confinement in detention centers or training schools for both racial and ethnic minorities (*American Indian, Alaska Native, Black or African American, Hispanic or Latino, and Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islanders*).

Several causes for this phenomena have been proffered, each likely holding some portion of the true causes. Identifying causes of minority overrepresentation generates passionate debate, but does little to foster any positive resolution. Racial and ethnic discrimination, socio-economic factors, legislative overreaching with unintended consequences, or because minority youths commit disproportionate numbers of crimes are the most common positions. The time is here to bring all of these positions to the table, work to ensure the juvenile justice system is fair and equal for all youth, and seek meaningful solutions to the issue.

The DMC issue was brought to light by the Coalition for Juvenile Justice in their 1988 report to Congress entitled "*A Delicate Balance*." This report presented many concerns which are today accepted by professionals in the field of minority overrepresentation.

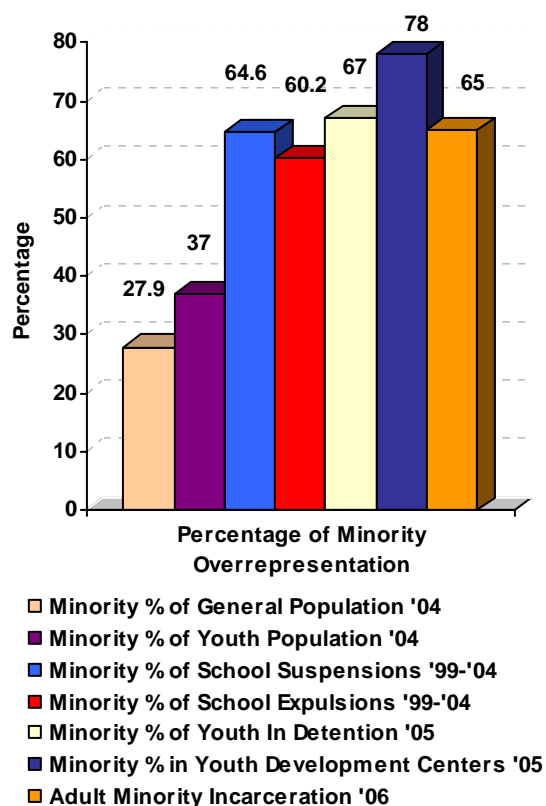
- Minority youth are overrepresented at all levels of the juvenile justice system.
- While minority youth do commit more violent crimes, this does not fully explain the disproportionate levels of detention/incarceration rates.
- Economic, family and community forces play as much of a role in disproportionate rates of arrest and incarceration for racial and ethnic minorities as does the decisions of officials in each level of the juvenile justice system.

In large part, this report helped encourage Congress to compel states to adopt alternative strategies and address the issue of DMC in their state plans. The legislation further ties Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention funding to compliance with DMC reduction efforts.

For more in depth information on disproportionate minority contact and DMC reduction initiatives in North Carolina, go to <http://www.ncgccd.org/PDFs/SystemStats/winter06.pdf>

As in many states, North Carolina has identified some critical elements of DMC. Minority youth represented approximately 78 percent of the 428 youths committed to Youth Development Centers and 67 percent of the 5,144 juveniles detained at state detention facilities in 2005¹. Disparities exist at many critical decision points along the juvenile justice continuum including cases referred to juvenile court and those transferred to the adult system. Similar disparities exist in school suspensions and expulsions data. Minorities, particularly African-Americans, receive both short and long-term suspensions in disproportionate numbers². Negative academic experiences is a risk factor for future contact with the juvenile justice system.

Disproportionate Outcomes



There is much debate over causes of the disproportionately greater percentages of minority contact with the juvenile justice system, criminal justice system, school suspension and expulsion programs. The data depicted in the chart on the previous page represents the realities of the problem. The Governor's Crime Commission is working to gain a clearer understanding of DMC and promote changes.

What Is Being Done In North Carolina

The North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission (GCC) has taken the statewide lead to address both the consequences and implications of DMC. With the establishment of a permanent DMC Subcommittee, the GCC seeks to implement and evaluate effective DMC reduction initiatives across the juvenile justice system, both at the local and state level. The ultimate goal of this effort is to foster a fair juvenile justice system for youth regardless of ethnic or social background. In addressing this goal, the GCC has:

- Partnered with four demonstration counties (New Hanover, Guilford, Forsyth and Union) to develop and demonstrate effective DMC reduction strategies with the goal of developing a best practices guide to share with other jurisdictions across the state in reducing DMC.
- Collaborated with the North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (DJJDP) in funding a uniform data collection system – NC-JOIN (North Carolina Juvenile Offender Information Network) – in order to allow for accurate data collection at each key decision point in the juvenile justice process. Ultimately, NC-JOIN will assist juvenile justice professionals in identifying disparities between ethnic groups at similar decision points for similar offenses, which will allow for decisive responses to such disparities.
- Increased public awareness regarding the nature and extent of DMC at various state and national conferences and workshops and through technical assistance to current and potential GCC grantees that provide services to youth.



What Can Communities Do?

1. Foster collaborative efforts to raise awareness of DMC in the juvenile justice system.
2. Promote advisory boards that work to reduce (consistent with public safety) the disproportionate percentage of minority youth referred to and served in the juvenile justice system.
3. Encourage citizens to volunteer as mentors and role models for minority youth.
4. Provide resources that encourage and ensure the academic success of minority youth.
5. Develop and implement evidence-based delinquency prevention and intervention programs that are culturally competent and address the needs of both the community and youth.
6. Promote and support community-based diversion programs in order to reduce the number of youth committed to detention and correctional facilities.
7. Provide educational resources for youth who have been suspended or expelled from school.
8. Foster positive relationships between families and local law enforcement officials, juvenile justice practitioners, educators and other entities serving youth.

Resources:

The North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission DMC Homepage <http://www.ncgccd.org/planning/dmc/dmc04.cfm>

DMC Reduction Initiatives in North Carolina (Publication) <http://www.ncgccd.org/PDFs/SystemStats/winter06.pdf>

The North Carolina Governor's Crime Commission – Juvenile Justice Planning Committee Homepage <http://www.ncgccd.org/planning/juvenilejus/jj2006.cfm>

Federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention

DMC Homepage <http://www.ojjdp.ncjrs.gov/DMC/>

Access information about DMC and learn about legislation that mandates states to make efforts to reduce DMC, various tools and resources, and individual state and local efforts to reduce DMC.

Disproportionate Minority Contact Technical Assistance Manual (2nd Edition)

http://www.ncjrs.gov/html/ojjdp/dmc_ta_manual/index.html

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¹ Data from North Carolina Department of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

² Information from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction

