



Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

# JUVENILE JUSTICE WEBINAR SERIES

SESSION 2: WHAT NEXT? -  
ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES  
OF JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM  
INVOLVEMENT



February 23, 2021  
10:00 am-12:00 pm  
Virtual Event

PLEASE REGISTER AT:  
[JJS221.EVENTBRITE.COM](https://www.eventbrite.com/e/jjs221)

## Introduction

On February 23, 2021 from 10 am – 12 pm, the Criminal Justice Coordinating Council (CJCC) convened the second session of its Juvenile Justice Webinar series themed “What’s Next? – Addressing the Root Causes of Juvenile Justice System Involvement.”

The purpose of the session was to continue the discussion on CJCC’s study of the Root Causes of Juvenile Justice System Involvement (“Root Cause”), with education, social services, child welfare and community-based organization. The session offered an opportunity for participants to reflect on the applicability of the study’s findings to their experience and engage in collective dialogue about ways to leverage the findings and recommendations to lower the risk of justice system involvement for the District’s youth.

Kristy Love, Deputy Executive Director of the CJCC, began the session with opening remarks explaining the purpose of the session and emphasizing the need to identify specific actions to reduce juvenile justice system involvement. Afterward, she introduced the moderator for the session’s panel, Galit Lipa.

Ms. Lipa is a Program Director with the Public Welfare Foundation, with previous experience as a supervising attorney in the Public Defender Service of D.C., a former director of Stanford Law School’s criminal defense clinic, and teaching and supervising students at Georgetown’s Juvenile Justice Clinic.

Ms. Love reviewed the agenda, including the Q&A procedure and post-session survey, with the roughly 62 participants. Ms. Love and CJCC’s Juvenile Justice Compliance Monitor, Frank Petersen IV, conducted an introductory audience poll which showcased the participants’ interdisciplinary background. About a third of the attendees work in a variety of preventative wrap-around services, with the rest coming from other areas including: the criminal and juvenile justice sectors, child welfare, community organizing, education, mental/behavioral health, and social services.

Next, Ms. Love introduced Dr. Kaitlyn Sill, CJCC Statistician and the author of the CJCC Root Cause study.

## Overview of the Study of the Root Causes of Juvenile Justice System Involvement

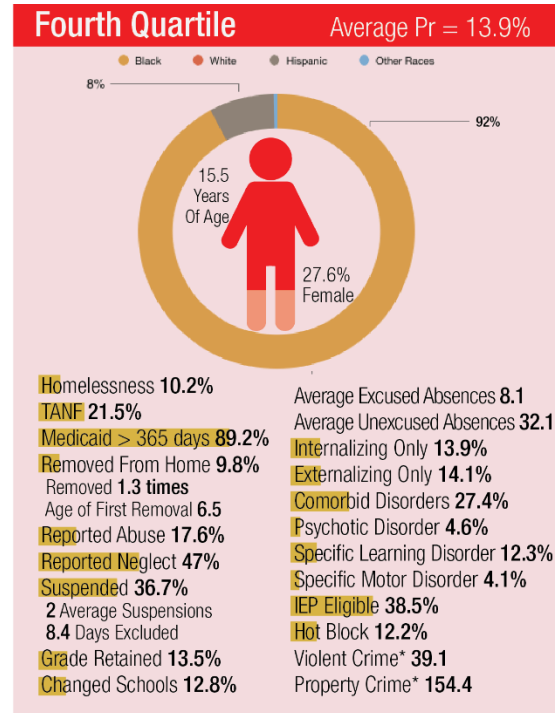
Dr. Sill explained the study was mandated by the D.C. Council via the Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act of 2016, looking into the root causes of youth crime and the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Three research questions were addressed in the report:

- 1) How do justice-involved youth differ from non-justice involved youth? (includes ACEs)
- 2) What factors affect the likelihood that youth become involved in the juvenile justice system?

### 3) How and why do these factors affect youth?

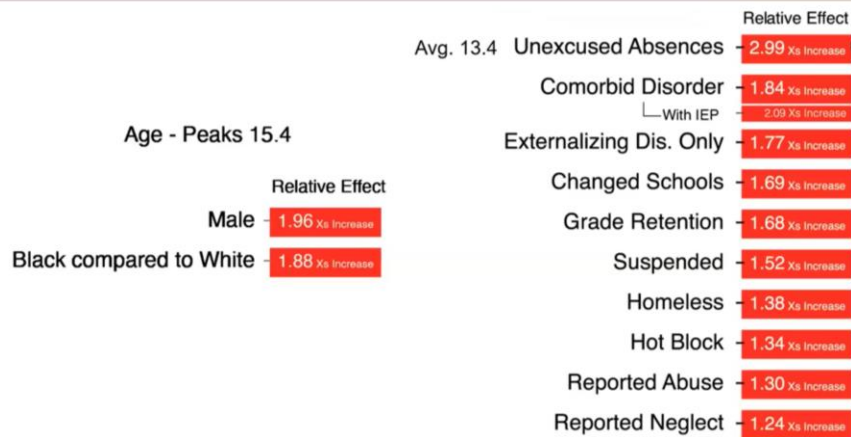
To answer the second question, data from multiple administrative agencies was used to construct a multivariate statistical model and isolate the variables, controlling for a variety of factors with respect to education and child welfare, in addition to mental and behavioral health. This also allowed for a predictive risk assessment of juvenile justice system involvement based on youth exposure to the identified variables, whether one or many.

The model broke down four quartiles of youth at risk of justice system involvement, with the average predicted probability of juvenile justice system involvement for the first quartile being .3%, the second quartile .8%, third quartile 2.1%, and the fourth quartile 13.9%. The fourth, highest risk, quartile included 83.3% of the population of justice-involved youth. Dr. Sill continued by showcasing each variable's relative effect on the probability of justice involvement, in descending order from a 2.99x to 1.24x increase in risk.



\*Reported incidents within 1/4 mile of residence

### Relative Effects on Avg. Predicted Probability



Additional explanatory factors gleaned from focus groups and a series of interviews with youth included: peer influence, future uncertainty, and the lack of exposure to alternatives.

## Juvenile Justice Panel Discussion

Upon conclusion of the summary of the study, Ms. Lipa then introduced the panelists:

- Milo Alonzo Howard, Director of the Student Support Office of Equity, DC Public Schools (DCPS)
- Dan Davis, Chief Student Advocate, DC State Board of Education (SBOE)
- Penelope Griffith, Executive Director, Collaborative Solutions for Communities
- Hilary Cairns, Deputy Administrator, Youth Services Division, Department of Human Services (DHS)
- Asante Laing, Administrator, Office of Youth Empowerment, DC Child and Family Services Agency (CFSA)
- Patrina Anderson, Division Director, Specialty Services, Court Assessment and Co-located Services, Department of Behavioral Health (DBH)

Ms. Lipa framed the conversation by presenting the panel with discussion questions about their experiences with youth at high risk of becoming justice-involved, what actions can be taken to prevent the involvement, and what barriers exist. Ms. Lipa began by acknowledging that there are many situational and contextual factors that occur in cases of juvenile justice involvement that cannot be changed by the young people themselves. The first question for the panel was how the findings of the study meshed with experiences of panel members in the field.

### Does the Study Reflect Field Experience?

Milo Howard (DCPS) responded first, agreeing with and praising the report for its accurate reflection of his past experiences. He specifically noted several factors that consistently appeared in the student support division: truancy, multiple grade retentions, disciplinary issues increasing in severity, and neighborhood concerns, which would start around middle school. The issue of peer influence was similarly commonplace, continuing through high school, during which the risk of youth becoming justice-involved evolves and escalates. Mr. Howard also brought up how these factors appear consistently, but especially in the cases of students who are re-integrating from juvenile justice experiences outside of D.C. He also cited instability in the home as another concern for youth.

Dan Davis (SBOE) continued the conversation by identifying two sets of students for whom he has particular concern: students with disabilities and students who have changed schools. Mr. Davis broadened the notion of engagement with these youth by assessing not only the school system, but also acknowledging how the students experience repeated difficulties engaging with other systems to access services and interventions. He went on to describe the challenge of providing an equality of services to students with disabilities, in addition to complications around the system of school choice in D.C. Mr. Davis clarified that while school choice can allow for

flexibility and opportunity for families, it can also increase instability and lead to other difficulties for students.

Penelope Griffith assessed the study from a community-based perspective and found it aligned with her past experiences. Ms. Griffith saw continuity between what the study had found and what her organization (Collaborative Solutions for Communities) had been awarded grant funding to address. Homelessness stood out as a particular concern, which led to questions of identity and belonging, particularly for youth. Ms. Griffith underlined the need for analysis of policy efforts intended to alleviate poverty, which is interlinked with homelessness.

Following Ms. Griffith's comments, Ms. Lipa opened up an audience poll to gauge audience perspectives on policy recommendations, which included: early childhood intervention, year-round youth involvement (employment or leadership opportunities), preventative wrap-around services (preceding involvement in the system), and trauma-informed conflict resolution. Approximately one third of participants felt that preventative wrap-around services were the highest priority, along with agreement that multiple initiatives were needed to truly address the problems at hand.

Ms. Lipa raised a new question regarding past initiatives and future action points for stakeholder agencies.

### Past Initiatives and Future Actions

Asante Laing described several CFSA programs that seek to prevent youth entry into the juvenile system: the Office of Youth Empowerment's Youth Council, comprised of young people working on policy and collaborating with the CFSA ombudsman; tutoring programs; 'Making Money Grow,' a 2:1 matched money savings program; paid internship opportunities; incentives for people in school; the Office of Well-Being, which had been recently integrated into CFSA and connects young people with proper service agencies or medical services; and exposure opportunities for increased engagement, such as virtual seminars and the Life Set program, which is a mentorship and goal-setting program. One challenge in the past has been identifying resources for youth. Ms. Laing expressed a desire to see more collaboration between CFSA and DYRS, especially on a program targeting high-risk youth.

CFSA identifies youth who can benefit from the services by applying a targeted approach; once a young person hits age 14, they are entitled to Office of Youth Empowerment services and programs. This is accompanied by family-first initiatives which try to deter young people from entering the justice system. Ms. Laing identified the need to provide a continuum of support for the young people as well as their families, especially with an eye toward proactively involving high-risk young people in programs.

Ms. Griffith agreed, returning the conversation back to what she described as "the core and crux of the matter" – family stability and strength. Similarly, she challenged participants to consider why youth might still be struggling if there are services provided.

Hilary Cairns next described the core mission of the Department of Human Services' Youth Services Division as keeping young people out of the juvenile justice system. Ms. Cairns stated that even the "front door" of the justice system (i.e., engaging with the Office of the Attorney General or police) can lead to trauma or normalization of such involvement. Ms. Cairns detailed some services offered by the Youth Services Division, which include a parenting program where parents can collaborate to learn from and bond with one another; and a functional family therapy program that seeks to keep young people away from the juvenile justice system and engaged in school instead. Ms. Cairns reflected that the Youth Services Division generally bases their case management model on wrap-around services, attempting to identify a variety of services that a young person or their family might require, and linking them with the appropriate agencies (whether external providers, community-based providers, or other agencies). She identified leadership opportunities for youth as an area of growth, especially considering the study's inclusion of peer influence as an explanatory factor. Ms. Cairns concluded by returning to the notion of preventative, rather than reactive, efforts in reducing juvenile justice involvement, and appealed to participants to limit diverted youths' interaction with the justice system, such as by eliminating police transport for diverted youth.

Ms. Lipa asked how there could be a reduction in the normalization of trauma. Ms. Cairns posited that the distribution of resources, particularly funding, should reflect that not every young person will respond to various therapies or other methods, and that a truly individualized approach is necessary. Ms. Lipa followed up on earlier themes in the conversation by asking the panel how processes such as early childhood interventions might be continued throughout a young person's life, again with attention to the family unit and parenting.

Patrina Anderson responded that the Department of Behavioral Health (DBH) maintains several programs that focus on early childhood, such as the Health Futures program. The program works with child development centers looking at behavioral concerns, seeking to address such concerns not just in the centers but also in their homes. Similarly, DBH uses clinicians and teachers in schools to help youth. Ms. Anderson echoed Ms. Griffith's earlier comments that poverty is a root cause and agreed with the need to engage not just young people but their families as well. In response to Ms. Lipa's question, Ms. Anderson replied that DBH provides a continuum of services, from infancy through toddler age, and adulthood. Ms. Anderson also recognized future room for growth in cooperation with other agencies, especially in information-sharing and co-location for rapid assessment and linkage to appropriate services. DBH has several programs that were cited: partnership with Children's Hospital for mental health identification in a pediatric setting; peer specialist programming for youth to provide support to other youth; high fidelity wrap-around mental and behavioral health services; two specialty courts: a juvenile diversion program, and the HOPE court catered to youth involved in, or at risk of, sex trafficking; and a weekly virtual Wellness Day in addition to a family engagement parent support group.

Ms. Griffith listed other services her organization provides, including a Black parenting program and the ACT WorkKeys Curriculum to build career-relevant skills for youth. She noted concern for

people 18 and older, in addition to youth who had already experienced juvenile justice involvement. Ms. Griffith also emphasized, using the anecdote of a soccer program, the need for year-round programming, suggesting making the soccer program available the whole year. Mr. Petersen noted that sports programs foster a stable identity for youth and a community, which can be a fundamentally positive experience.

## Improvements for The System

Ms. Lipa asked the panel for their recommendations on how the system can evolve and improve, with an eye toward the future. Mr. Howard replied that it was necessary to consider addressing the root causes of further penetration into the justice system (in addition to the root causes of initial system involvement) and to avoid bureaucratic silos in the process. Panelists agreed on a need for creativity, for example incorporating more vocational training in schools and training youth for more than just retail and service jobs, but also technical and green jobs, which could include partnerships with local universities. Moreover, Mr. Howard brought forward the need for students to be involved in programs after school, in what he sees as the “challenging” 2 - 8 pm window which he saw as prime time for youth to engage in activity that could lead them to the juvenile justice system. Mr. Howard noted that bureaucracy was a hurdle preventing cross-agency collaboration but could be addressed with a Memorandum of Understanding or Agreement.

Ms. Anderson agreed with Mr. Howard’s sentiment, especially relating to the situations experienced by youth who are considered for psychiatric residential treatment, feeling that if DBH could partner with OSSE or DCPS before they refer youth treatment, it would be especially helpful for the long-term experiences of youth. Similarly, increased communication among the agencies about individual youths, even with the limitations posed by FERPA or HIPAA, could lead to better results. Ms. Anderson specifically cited the Jacks-Fogle case, where the District paid a settlement related to the death of four children who were slain by their mother, Banita Jacks, in their home. Ms. Cairns echoed the need for data-sharing improvements.

Mr. Howard noted the Department of Parks and Recreation (DPR) lacks year-round recreational programs that could keep youth engaged, like the Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) system in Maryland or Virginia. Mr. Petersen agreed and added that many career opportunities can arise from sports, not just for athletes, but referees, media personnel, coaches, medical personnel, statisticians and the like, which could lead to expanded employment paths for older youth.

Ms. Laing also brought up the need for flexibility and creativity in funding. In one instance, funding addressing obesity was utilized for therapy through engaging youth in physical activity, such as riding a stationary bike, during a therapy session. This would also provide an opportunity to move away from cookie-cutter therapy sessions. Ms. Laing also noted that some services for youth are underutilized. Ms. Griffith noted that youth don’t typically access resources without adult involvement, suggesting the need for better outreach and information-sharing to engage

youth and lead to ground-level proactive engagement, citing the need for “letting kids drive the process.”

Mr. Petersen presented an audience question about the proportion of justice-involved youth whose parents and other family members have also been involved in the justice system at some point.

Ms. Griffith answered first, noting that a significant number of parents are involved in the justice system at some point, usually the father but increasingly the mother. Ms. Griffith noticed the tension between mothers and their children when the mother is justice-involved, adding the need for forgiveness and reconciliation between parent and child, and the need for building career skills preceding a return to the community. Ms. Anderson noted many families seen in the courts are single-parent female, with an issue of poverty or the male being justice-involved.

### Collaboration and Utilization of Resources

Ms. Lipa asked the panel how they could collaborate with justice-system agencies to support parents and families. Ms. Laing added CFSA does work on the family prevention side, especially with teen moms and strengthening families. Ms. Anderson added that criteria for families to receive resources should include more than solely those who are system-involved, to allow for preventative action. Mr. Davis sought to break down the silos through cooperation between agencies and community-based organizations, in addition to collaborating with the parents of returning youth.

Ms. Lipa asked what resources are required to overcome barriers in addressing youth problems. Mr. Davis responded that historically, there has been a negative relationship between families and the actual school building, which did not serve one generation correctly and now feeds a continuing negative perception of such spaces. Ms. Cairns challenged the participants to reconsider the need for police in schools to avoid criminalizing adolescent behavior and enact structural changes to reduce the likelihood of youth interacting with police. Ms. Anderson continued with a suggestion for sports and arts programs with no charge or a scaled charge for families.

Ms. Lipa asked the panel what singular effort all agencies could agree on immediately to produce change. Ms. Cairns and Ms. Laing suggested more exposure and enrichment opportunities for youth, such as college visits and exposing youth to a range of career and employment opportunities. Ms. Griffith recommended that we no longer charge youth as adults and that we decriminalize adolescent behavior. Involvement in the juvenile justice system is traumatic and can be the start of a cycle that ultimately leads youth to the adult criminal justice system. Mr. Howard suggested enrichment and exposure opportunities for kids, especially to get them to explore the history of their neighborhoods. He also suggested addressing underlying issues that create the problems, such as the presence of guns in communities.



Mr. Davis emphasized the need to show youth that they are loved and wanted at home.

## Closing

Ms. Lipa and Ms. Love gave closing remarks, thanking Dr. Sill for her work and the panelists for insights with respect to the need for more collaboration among agencies, accessibility to existing services, flexibility and creativity in programming, and focus on family stabilization.

## Criminal Justice Coordinating Council

JUVENILE JUSTICE WEBINAR SERIES SESSION TWO: WHAT'S NEXT? -  
ADDRESSING THE ROOT CAUSES OF JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM  
INVOLVEMENT

### KEY ACTION ITEMS

**Increase Awareness of Youth Services.** CJCC will catalog all programming provided by youth-serving agencies in the District that focus on vulnerable youth and families, including eligibility requirements and availability. This information will be made available to youth-serving agencies, organizations, and the public and will be updated periodically as programs change. In addition, it is recommended that agencies utilize social media outlets to enhance community outreach efforts to ensure youth and families are aware and can be connected to these resources.

**Enhance Collaboration among Youth-Serving Agencies.** CJCC will invite additional youth-serving agencies to participate in the **Juvenile Justice Committee (JJC)** and related subgroups. The **JJC**, which is comprised of representatives from the District's juvenile justice and other youth-serving agencies, works to improve interagency collaboration, create space for information sharing, support data-driven decision-making, and support the successful reintegration of system-involved youth. Given their role with supporting vulnerable youth, representatives from the following will be invited to participate in the **JJC**: **DCPS School Mental Health**, and **SBOE**.

**Increase Youth Exposure.** The Root Cause Report identified a lack of exposure to alternatives as a contributing factor to youth justice system involvement. Youth-serving agencies, including **CFSA**, **DCPS**, and **DHS**, can collaborate on efforts to connect vulnerable youth and families to a range of professional, cultural, travel, and wellness experiences. **CFSA** and **DHS** have expressed particular interest in this type of initiative.

**Expand Youth Employment Opportunities.** **DOES** should consider providing a year-round youth employment program. Youth will have the opportunity to earn money and engage in safe and productive activities outside of school hours.

**Expand Youth Sports Programs.** **DPR** should consider providing year-round sports programs at minimal or no cost, which will also provide opportunities for youth to engage in safe and productive activities outside of school hours for extended periods throughout the calendar year. Currently, **DPR's** sports leagues extend for several months at a time; for example, the Youth Basketball Leagues are from January through March, and baseball extends from April to June. **DPR** could expand the availability of these programs to more individuals, as well as diversifying the offerings to attract a greater number of youth.

**Amplify The Youth Voice!** Provide opportunities for youth to inform decisions regarding solutions to improve their well-being. Learn from the resiliency of youth who have risk factors but have been able to thrive and avoid the justice system.

