

BRIEFING ON "THE ROOT CAUSES OF JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM INVOLVEMENT" STUDY

The Council of the District of Columbia mandated CJCC submit a report to the Mayor and Council on the root causes of youth crime. The Comprehensive Youth Justice Amendment Act of 2016 (CYJAA) specified that the report should examine factors "such as housing instability, child abuse, family instability, substance abuse, mental illness, family criminal involvement, and other factors deemed relevant by the CJCC." The full study can be found at this link: [A Study of the Root Causes of Juvenile Justice Involvement](#)

KEY QUESTIONS

1. How do justice-involved youth differ from non-justice involved youth?
2. What factors affect the likelihood that youth become involved in the juvenile justice system?
3. How and why do these factors impact youth behavior?

KEY TAKEAWAYS

CJCC found that **males** and **Black youth** are more likely to become involved in the District of Columbia's juvenile justice system. Additionally, the analysis found that **homelessness, childhood maltreatment, and adverse educational experiences** such as **suspension, grade retention, enrollment instability, and unexcused absences** increase the likelihood that a youth becomes involved in the juvenile justice system. Youth with **externalizing mental health disorder diagnoses** and **internalizing-externalizing diagnoses** are also more likely to become juvenile justice system involved.

Finally, the analysis confirms that **community environment impacts youth**. **Living on one of the blocks with the highest number of gun violence incidences ("hot blocks")** is statistically associated with a greater likelihood of justice system involvement.

Interviews and focus groups also identified **peer influence, future uncertainty, and a lack of future expectations** as having an important effect on whether youth engage in delinquent behavior.

