

Data show minority juveniles arrested more often

By MICHAEL VIRTANEN | Associated Press Writer

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ALBANY, N.Y. - With data showing black and Hispanic juveniles in [New York](#) arrested, detained and confined to custody far more often than whites, state officials are looking for ways to reduce that disproportion.

Data show minority children statewide are arrested almost twice as often as whites, are six times likelier to be detained awaiting trial and are five times likelier to be confined to custody afterward, according to New York's Division of Criminal Justice Services

The disparity is larger in New York City, where the state Office of Children and Family Services said 6,984 black and 3,966 Hispanic youths were arrested in 2006, compared with 966 white juveniles.

"We need to build capacity to help these kids in other ways," said Jacquelyn Greene, the division's director of juvenile justice policy, outside a symposium Thursday on the issue.

At the symposium, Barry Krisberg of the National Council on Crime and Delinquency said subtle, unrecognized bias is part of the problem. Laura John Ridolfi of the W. Haywood Burns Institute said approaches in other cities have worked after collecting information and discussing problems in the community. That has produced answers like phone calling Hispanic juveniles, with bilingual callers, shortly before a court appearance to make sure they show up, instead of later getting arrested on bench warrants.

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Civil rights advocates called earlier for more detailed collection and public disclosure of data from every public agency in New York, including police and courts, on juvenile arrests and processing with information on race, gender, geography and offense.

"Our white client base is almost none," said Tamara Steckler, attorney with the Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Practice in New York City. She said family court was once meant to divert youths from the criminal justice system, calling it now "a social experiment that has failed miserably."

The most common charges on which minority juveniles are arrested are misdemeanors like shoplifting, graffiti, school fights and trespassing, where police have discretion not to make arrests, said Mishi Faruqui, director of the Youth Justice Program for the Children's Defense Fund-NY. "It's very much about police practices," she said.

Greene said an important factor with confinement is whether juveniles have a safe home to return to. With arrests, another is previous criminal history. One approach for judges is providing standard tools with objective criteria, she said.

"I'm sure there's no formal policy by police in New York City that says detain minority youths," Greene said. The city police department has policies to make arrests for all felonies and more serious misdemeanors, she said, though acknowledging there might be personal instances where biases play into decisions.