

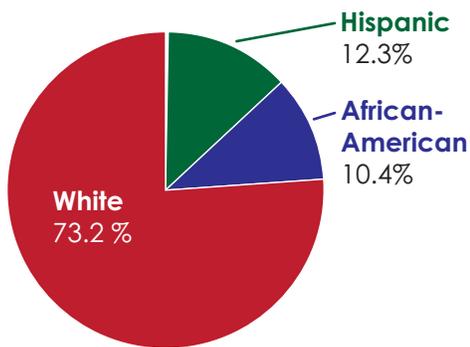


## FACT SHEET

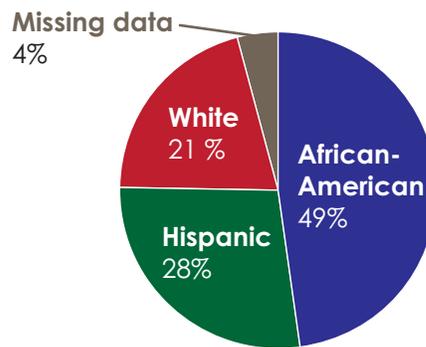
# Race and juvenile justice

Behavior is not the only factor that can push a kid into the juvenile justice system. Poor children are more likely to enter the system. So are children with special education needs. Through very specific research we know that race and ethnicity alone also play a huge role.

Connecticut Population by Race



Admission to Juvenile Detention by Race



The reasons commonly cited for this racial imbalance are disproved by the research.

### “Minority kids are committing more of the crimes”

When we look at national data where youth anonymously report their own behavior, results are similar for young people, regardless of race or ethnicity. But minority youth are more likely to be punished – and when punished, are more likely to be punished more severely.

### “It’s not race, it’s poverty”

Looking at economic data associated with zip codes, Connecticut studies grouped young people by neighborhood. When they took poverty by neighborhood into account, the differences between outcomes by race and ethnicity were reduced – but they did not disappear. So poverty does not explain all racial disparity.

### “Kids who live in cities are more apt to get caught”

Often people argue that minority youth are over-represented in the system because they are more likely to live in cities, where more police are commonly present and more arrests occur. But a review of Connecticut’s data showed that the rate of disproportionality was actually worse in the suburbs and rural communities than it was in the cities.

## **What's happening in Connecticut?**

The state has done three major studies pinpointing where in the complex juvenile justice system kids are receiving unequal treatment. For example, the studies showed police were more likely take minority children to detention than they were to take white youths accused of similar offenses – even after they controlled for factors like poverty, type of crime and where the child lived. Connecticut recently changed its law to require a court order to bring a child to detention in hopes that judicial involvement will lead to more fair treatment.

Local groups are starting to mine data in their own towns, particularly around school-based arrests. This is a major feeder of the juvenile justice system. Seeing what role race plays in how discipline is applied in individual school districts will increase accountability.

## **What's missing?**

Racial discrimination has historically been seen as an issue that inspires activism in a few highly committed whites and in minorities themselves. We've seen that change in juvenile justice only happens when the majority of Connecticut's population endorses it. There are good reasons for them to do so:

1. Racial inequality in the juvenile justice system offends basic American values.
2. It harms entire communities.
3. It decreases respect for the rule of law and discourages some people from cooperating with law enforcement.
4. It destroys the future of otherwise promising young people.
5. It diverts law enforcement resources from where they are most needed.
6. Taxpayers are burdened with a high and unnecessary expense.

## **What can I do?**

Tell legislators you care

Tell local town and school leaders that you care

Get engaged locally and push for school police referral data

Educate your neighbors

See the website ([ctjja.org/forum](http://ctjja.org/forum)) for more information about how to get involved.