



Questions on racial disparity in how youth are treated

1. The state has done three extensive studies on race and the juvenile justice system. All showed that kids of color are more likely to enter the system and are treated more harshly there than whites are. But people often react doubtfully when told there is racial imbalance in the system. Why do you think that is?

Feelings about race and ethnicity are ingrained and often unconscious. It's easier to deny racism than to try to fix it. The trouble is: We can't fix it if we don't talk about it.

Remember Commissioner Arnone talking about how every authority says, "I just did my job," yet the results are so unbalanced.

Recall that the studies show you can't explain away disparity by saying that problems like poverty or differences in behavior are responsible for the gap between the way white and minority kids are treated. (See the Race and Juvenile Justice fact sheet for more information.)

73 percent of the children in Connecticut are white, but the overwhelming majority of incarcerated kids are African-American and Hispanic.

2. We also know that kids who come from low-income communities or have special education needs are likelier to get in trouble with the law. How should we be dealing with these kids?

If we know that certain groups — minority kids, kids with learning problems and poor kids — are more likely to enter the system we need to look at what makes them vulnerable for involvement and work to address those issues.

Would anti-poverty programs be a better investment? What about more academic support in public schools?

3. Brandon talked about police not caring about crimes against members of his community. We know that when people perceive law enforcement as unfair they are less likely to cooperate with police and the courts. Do you see this happening in your neighborhood?

Racial disparity in the system could actually increase crime as people see law enforcement as "the enemy."

4. Are you surprised to find that race matters so much in Connecticut?

Every state in the country does have racial disparity in its juvenile justice system. Ours is, however, quite bad. Why do you think it persists in a state that's progressive in many ways?

5. It's about \$350,000 a year to incarcerate a child in a juvenile facility. When we lock up a kid because of his or her color, society pays in more ways than one. Do you think this issue will get more attention now that state budgets are so tight?