

March 2017

We are writing to express our support for uniform data collection in Ohio's juvenile courts. Each year approximately 92,000 children are involved with juvenile courts across the state. Although piecemeal data is collected on these youth, this data is not uniform and does not allow for a comprehensive picture of youth who are involved in the juvenile courts across the state.

Youth who come into contact with the juvenile court system often are some of Ohio's most vulnerable youth and have complex needs, including histories of violence, trauma, and other system involvement, such as child welfare, special education, or behavioral health. Fortunately, in recent years, research and investment in effective programming has provided juvenile stakeholders guidance on which programs are effective in getting young people on the right track to lead productive, positive lives. Investing in effective interventions for youth not only creates better and more cost-efficient short-term outcomes, like decreasing reoffending, but can save taxpayer money in the long-term by reducing adult court involvement, increasing the likelihood of school completion and employment, and reducing reliance on social programs.

Data collection can help stakeholders in the juvenile justice field and other fields (i.e. behavioral health, education, and local officials) by identifying trends, effectively directing resources where they are most needed at both the state and local level, aiding collaboration, and making Ohio competitive for grants. Also, the most effective juvenile justice programs, such as the national Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative and Ohio's own Targeted and Competitive RECLAIM programs, rely heavily on data to produce the best outcomes possible for children, their families, and communities. Ohio currently collects some data on youth in the juvenile courts, including youth in programs funded in the Department of Youth Services and through annual court reports required by law that vary significantly from county-to-county; however, the only uniform, statewide data available is for youth who are adjudicated delinquent of felonies, which is an extremely small portion of the juvenile court population. Ohio is one of the few states in the country that does not have statewide, uniform data available on the youth who touch Ohio's juvenile court systems.

In order to support Ohio youth, we respectfully request that the Ohio Supreme Court prioritize the uniform collection of statewide data on youth in Ohio's juvenile courts. This priority should be supported by providing \$1 million in funding in either new funding or focused funding from the Supreme Court's Ohio Courts Technology Initiative to help survey the courts of their abilities and barriers to data collection, assist with overcoming barriers (including training and technical assistance, hardware, and software), and creating a uniform report across counties. In doing so, the Supreme Court should look to Ohio counties that are leading the way on data collection locally. This initiative will help improve outcomes for youth, families, and communities, keep Ohio competitive, ensure our state is directing resources efficiently, and maximize taxpayer dollars.

Sincerely,

Advocates for Ohio's Future  
CDF-Ohio  
Children's Law Center, Inc.  
Juvenile Justice Coalition  
Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity  
Mental Health & Addiction Advocacy Coalition  
National Association of Social Workers – Ohio Chapter  
National Juvenile Justice Network  
National Youth Advocate Program, Inc.  
Office of the Ohio Public Defender  
Ohio Association of Child Caring Agencies  
Ohio Coalition for the Education of Children with Disabilities  
Ohio Council of Behavioral Health & Family Services Providers

Ohio Justice and Policy Center

Ohio Organizing Collaborative

Ohio PTA

Racial Justice NOW!

The Justice for Children Project

The Society of St. Vincent de Paul, Diocesan Council of Columbus

Voices for Ohio's Children