



RHODE ISLAND KIDS COUNT

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**Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Presents:
*Juvenile Justice Data in Your Backyard***

Number of Juveniles Being Held at Training School on the Decline; Continued Investment in Prevention Programs is Key to Continuing the Trend

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**Providence, RI (May 3, 2012)** – Non-profit leaders, probation officers, service providers, youth and families will learn about the current status of children who are involved with the juvenile justice system in Rhode Island at an event at AS220 today. John Neubauer, Policy Analyst for Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, will present data on youth involved in the juvenile justice system from the *2012 Rhode Island Kids Count Factbook*. A panel discussion about how to best serve adjudicated youth will follow the presentation. The presentation is being co-sponsored by Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, AS220 and the Rhode Island Department of Children, Youth and Families (DCYF).

**Youth Violence in Rhode Island**

Violence and the threat of violence can impact the well-being of youth, families, schools and communities, and can generate social and economic costs. In Rhode Island in 2011, 6% of high school students reported not going to school because they felt they would be unsafe in school or on their way to or from school. During that same time period, 19% of high school students reported being bullied at school. In Rhode Island, lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender youth (LGBT), youth with disabilities, and youth with low grades (D's and F's) are more likely than their peers to report being threatened or injured at school and to miss school because they felt unsafe.

“Research shows that youth at risk for committing violent acts often live in high poverty neighborhoods with limited economic opportunities,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of

Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. "Increasing access to effective early education, home visiting programs, and mentoring and after school programs in these neighborhoods can be effective prevention strategies."

### **Juveniles Referred to Family Court**

During 2011 in Rhode Island, 3,962 youth (4% of Rhode Island youth between the ages of 10 and 17) were referred to Family Court for 6,658 wayward and delinquent offenses, continuing a downward trend over the past four years. Of those, 27% were female and 73% were male. Some had been referred to Family Court previously. In 2011, 19% of juveniles referred to Family Court had been referred there once before and 22% had been referred at least twice before.

Of the 6,658 wayward and delinquent offenses that youth were referred to Family Court for, 24% were property crimes, 21% were for disorderly conduct, 20% were for status offenses, 10% were for simple assault, 8% were for alcohol and drug offenses, 4% were for motor vehicle offenses, 4% were for violent crimes and 3% were for weapons offenses. The number of violent offenses has been decreasing in recent years, down from 510 offenses in 2005 to 255 offenses in 2011.

### **Juveniles at the Training School**

The number of juveniles being held at the Rhode Island Training School has been declining in recent years as well. Between 2002 and 2011, the annual total number of youth in the care and custody of the Training School declined from 1,061 to 669. (The capacity of the Training School at any given time is 148 boys and 12 girls.)

Of the 669 youth held at the Training School in 2011, 385 were from Rhode Island's four core cities, cities in which more than 25% of children under age 18 are living in poverty. In 2011, 259 (39%) youth in the care or custody of the Training School were from Providence, 66 (10%) were from Pawtucket, 30 (4%) were from Central Falls and 30 (4%) were from Woonsocket.

Youth of color are more likely than White youth to have contact with juvenile justice systems in Rhode Island. Black youth made up 32% of youth adjudicated to the Training School despite making up 8% of the child population. Hispanic youth made up 36% of youth adjudicated to the Training School in 2011, while making up 21% of the state's child population.

According to John Neubauer, Policy Analyst at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, "Research shows that a range of alternatives is needed to successfully rehabilitate youth in the juvenile justice system. For youth that do not require a secure facility, alternatives to detention achieve better results."

## **Alternatives to Juvenile Detention**

Since 1992, the Juvenile Detention Alternatives Initiative (JDAI), a program of the Annie E. Casey Foundation, has been working to strengthen juvenile justice systems, make communities safer, help youth and save tax dollars. Rhode Island became a JDAI site in 2009.

“Fifty to eighty percent of youth released from juvenile correctional facilities are rearrested with two or three years, even those who were not serious offenders before being detained,” noted Neubauer. “JDAI works to improve outcomes for youth by eliminating the inappropriate use of detention.”

The initiative has shown that jurisdictions can safely reduce the reliance on secure detention and strengthen juvenile justice systems overall. Goals of JDAI include: eliminating the inappropriate or unnecessary use of secure detention, minimize re-arrest and failure-to-appear rates pending adjudication, ensure appropriate conditions of confinement, redirect public funds to sustain successful alternatives to detention and reduce racial and ethnic disparities.

“Investing in prevention efforts is the best way to keep youth out of trouble,” added Bryant. “High-quality early education and home visiting programs, career preparation, vocational and mentoring programs, and mental health and substance abuse treatment have all shown to improve behavior and lower the number of criminal offenses among youth.”

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*Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children’s policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.*