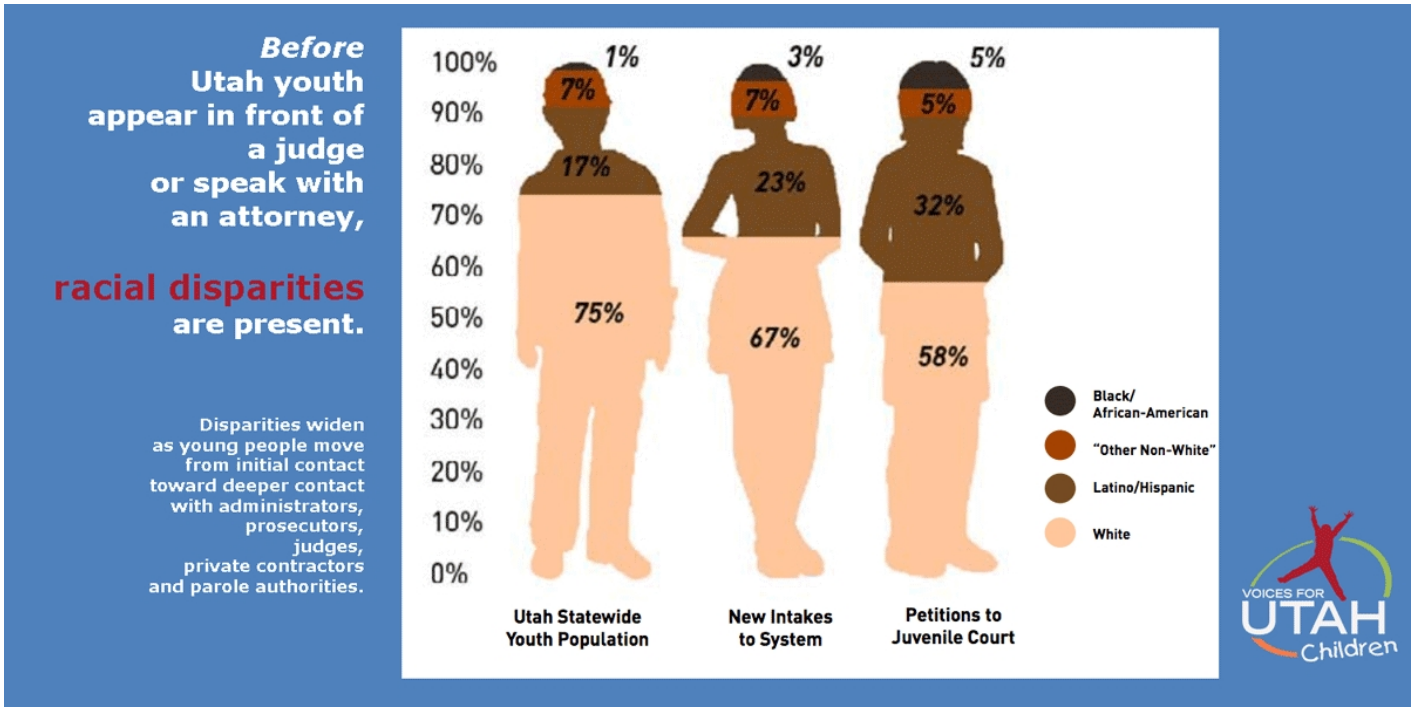
Let's end racial disparities in Utah's juvenile justice system.

Published: Wednesday, 15 February 2017 08:28
Written by: Sara Gunderson



Like most juvenile justice systems across the country, Utah's juvenile justice system could do more to produce the outcomes that we all want for our kids and communities. Our system should be restructured to more effectively ensure that as many kids as possible can stay in their homes and in their schools, instead of being detained in environments that don't lead to justice or positive change.

Voices for Utah Children, in partnership with multiple community stakeholders - including the the ACLU of Utah, YWCA of Utah, Racially Just Utah and Ogden Branch NAACP – has released a new report detailing serious racial disparities in Utah's Juvenile Justice System.

Using data collected and compiled by an official Juvenile Justice Working Group, and assisted by the Pew Charitable Trust, the report reveals stark racial disparities including the following:

- Black/African-American youth make up 1% of Utah's youth population, but

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they represent 12% of all kids placed with the Utah Division of Child and Family Services through the juvenile justice system.
- In one judicial district, Latino/Hispanic youth make up 24% of the youth population - but 52% of all “secure care” dispositions resulting in out-of-home detention for these youth.
- In another district, Native American youth make up 9% of the overall youth population, yet 41% of “secure care” disposition are imposed on Native American youth.

The report offers five recommendations to reduce racial disparities in Utah's juvenile justice system:

1. Pass, and implement with fidelity, legislation based on the robust recommendations of the Juvenile Justice Working Group.
2. Adopt a comprehensive, youth-centric vision for Utah’s Juvenile Justice system.
3. End unnecessary referrals of youth from schools into the juvenile justice system.
4. End the practice of tracking youth in undisclosed, non-transparent law enforcement databases.
5. Empower and invigorate Utah’s Disproportionate Minority Contact Subcommittee to reduce racial disparities in the juvenile justice system.

Read the full report:

Racial Disparities in Utah’s Juvenile Justice System

Take Action Today!

Ask your legislator to support H.B. 239, Juvenile Justice Amendments, sponsored by Rep. Lowry Snow and Sen. Todd Weiler. This bill would offer some common-sense reforms to Utah's juvenile justice system including:

- Keeping kids out of court for low-level status offenses like truancy.

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- Bringing much-needed structure to the sentencing process in the juvenile justice system.
- Ensuring that kids don't spend time in detention just because they can't pay restitutions and fines.
- Creating specific performance requirements for community placement programs.

Overall, this bill will bring much-needed structure to juvenile sentencing, and require important training for system workers. Young people, who might in the past have been inappropriately sent into juvenile court, will now have access to community-based and school-based interventions that offer more opportunities for positive change.

It is time to begin systemic reform to address these issues.
Use this simple form to tell your legislator to support H.B. 239
Juvenile Justice Amendments

For 30 years now, Voices for Utah Children has called on our state, federal and local leaders to put children's needs first. But the work is not done. The children of 30 years ago now have children of their own. Too many of these children are growing up in poverty, without access to healthcare or quality educational opportunities.

How can you be involved?

Make a tax-deductible donation to Voices for Utah Children—or join our Network with a monthly donation of $20 or more. Network membership includes complimentary admission to Network events with food, socializing, and opportunity to meet child advocacy experts. And don't forget to join our listserv to stay informed!

We look forward to the future of Voices for Utah Children and we hope you will be a part of our next 30 years.

Special thanks to American Express, our "Making a Difference All Year Long"

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