



Youth in the Los Angeles County Juvenile Justice System:

Current Conditions and Possible Directions for Change

A RESEARCH REPORT FROM THE
LA County Children's Planning Council

COMMISSIONED BY
Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors

by Jacquelyn McCroskey

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*It is with great sadness that we submit this report
just after learning of the death of Chief Probation Officer Paul Higa.
His vision and leadership were palpable in the Probation Department,
leading the way for the transformational changes documented in this report,
inspiring staff throughout the department, as well as many community partners,
to feel a sense of urgency, hope, and responsibility.
The Children's Planning Council salutes the legacy of this great public servant
and we urge those left to lead this agency to take up their leadership
to carry on where he left off.
Although Paul's voice is gone, his vision for these youth who do matter must live on.*

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Introduction

The lives of young people matter. They matter to their families, to their neighbors and their communities, and they matter to society. But for those kids whose lives have taken a wrong turn, who've made poor choices... the kids we've labeled "bad," who we've written off, or with whom we've lost interest – it is these kids whose lives need to matter more. Whether we make the moral, social, or economic case, the truth is that we as adults have failed these young people and, if not given a second chance, we all stand to lose – be it lost human potential or increased social costs.

Paul Higa, who served as Chief Probation Officer for too short a time, but whose life was dedicated to these young people, made sure that the lives of youth in L.A.'s juvenile justice system mattered quite a lot. His vision of transforming the system from one of punishment and law enforcement to rehabilitation and renewed opportunities is hopeful, inspiring, and, frankly, refreshing. And although many of the changes needed have yet to be fully realized, he was a visionary moving us all in the right direction.

In March 2005, the Board of Supervisors commissioned the Children's Planning Council to look at the conditions of young people caught up in the County's juvenile justice system, including Probation, the courts, and law enforcement, as well as the schools and the many other players that impact their lives. Our task was to gain a better understanding of the population in the system, the circumstances that brought them there, recidivism rates, the availability and use of resources for these youth and their families, engagement efforts with their parents or guardians, education circumstances, and rates of incarceration of these young people compared to other parts of the country. The Children's Planning Council had an additional objective. We intended for this report to begin to highlight and promote the importance of building partnerships – particularly with families, schools, and communities.

What we learned, however, is that most of the information needed to tell a cohesive story about youth in the system is not collected in a systematic way by any of the parts of the system. What was available were data and information that tell us – at a point in time – the demographic characteristics of the youth;

the flow of the system; the numbers of kids going through the various steps in the process; the disparities by race; gender issues; and the educational and mental health supports available – or not – for this population.

Consequently, this report serves primarily as a baseline research report; a first step in getting a handle on what is happening to the over 30,000 young men and women from our neighborhoods and communities that enter the system each year. The Directions for Change and the Next Steps that we propose at the end of the report serve to move us from analysis to action, and – more importantly – serve to increase our resolve that the lives of these youth do, in fact, matter quite a lot.

In memory of Paul Higa,



Honorable Zev Yaroslavsky
Chair



Yolie Flores Aguilar
Executive Director

Data and Research on the Juvenile Justice System in Los Angeles County

Understanding the Juvenile Justice System

According to KIDS COUNT, the Annie E. Casey Foundation's state-by-state data report, California has extremely high rates of incarceration for juvenile delinquents. In fact, California consistently ranked among the worst states for juveniles residing in detention and correctional facilities between 1997 and 2002. In 2002, California was 46th among the 50 states with a rate of 392 youth in detention and correction for every 100,000 youth ages 10 to 21 in the population. Only the states of Indiana, Florida, South Dakota, and Wyoming had worse rankings on this indicator (Annie E. Casey Foundation 2002). Although data currently available at the County level do not correspond exactly to those used in the KIDS COUNT report [Note 1], the Children's Planning Council estimates a similar rate for Los Angeles County in 2003 – for every 100,000 youth, 310 were incarcerated in camps or the California Youth Authority (CYA).

Of the total of 53,830 juvenile arrests in Los Angeles County in 2003, youth were processed on delinquency charges about three times out of five (n= 31,081). Almost 20,000 of these youth spent time in the County's juvenile halls and camps [Note 2]. With numbers this large, improving L.A.'s juvenile justice system, bringing down detention rates, and finding better alternatives for prevention, diversion, and rehabilitation will clearly require sustained and creative partnerships among a very broad range of government, not-for-profit, and community-based stakeholders. One of the key lessons learned during the Children's Planning Council's first 15 years is that people make partnership commitments more readily when they understand the problems, are familiar with relevant data, and can visualize concrete directions for change – in other words, when shared visions are grounded in practical realities.

For the most part, recent efforts to improve L.A.'s juvenile justice system have focused on the roles of law enforcement and detention agencies, but creating community-based alternatives for prevention, diversion, and rehabilitation also requires an unprecedented commitment to partnering with families,

schools, and communities. Hopefully this report will jumpstart that process by providing data and research on current conditions, assets, and challenges in L.A.'s juvenile justice system.

Juvenile justice systems are perhaps even more complex than the complicated web of law enforcement, prosecution, detention, rehabilitation, and advocacy organizations that respond to adult crimes. In addition to the regular processing, decision-making, punishment, and treatment functions of adult systems, juvenile systems must pay particular attention to prevention, diversion, and alternative sentencing programs for youth, integrating youthful offenders back into their families, schools, and communities, as well as maintaining confidentiality for youth and their families. The "system" that manages all of these functions in Los Angeles County is extremely complicated because it encompasses so many different agencies and jurisdictions, crossing almost all of the political, geographic, and operational boundaries in this vast and diverse county.

The juvenile justice system in L.A. includes law enforcement officers in more than 100 police and sheriff jurisdictions who warn, caution, and arrest minors; the Juvenile Courts that oversee their legal processing; advocates from District Attorney and Public Defender offices, along with panel and pro bono attorneys from private law offices who defend and prosecute cases; the County Probation Department that detains, investigates the cases of, and supervises minors; the other County child and family services departments that interact with these youth and their families on a regular basis; and the many community and faith-based organizations whose efforts prevent, divert, treat, and rehabilitate youth and support their families. School districts also play key roles in educating these youth before, during, and after encounters with the legal system, and many of the County's 88 cities have made significant investments in crime prevention, gang diversion, youth employment, and rehabilitation programs for minors who may be "at risk" or for those who have already been arrested or convicted.

Although youth involved in the juvenile justice system touch almost all of the public agencies and not-for-profit organizations that deal with children, youth, and families in L.A. County, the juvenile justice system is not widely understood, nor is it always clear how allied agencies serving common clients can best interact with the key juvenile justice players. Realizing that it is difficult to find accurate information about the youth served by the County Probation Department, the Board of Supervisors asked the Children's Planning Council in March 2005 to review the conditions of children and youth under the care of the Department and make recommendations on improvements needed. It has taken much longer than

expected to complete this report, largely because the data collection and information management functions of juvenile probation are not centralized or well integrated. Even with help and support from the Chief Probation Officer and his staff, it has been very difficult to track the flow of youth in and out of the system, to find accurate data on youth characteristics, to assess the education and mental health status of youth, and to understand the circumstances of youth who may “cross over” from child welfare to the juvenile justice system.

In December 2005, management audits of the Probation Department by Thompson, Cobb, Bazillo, and Associates and the Child Welfare League of America (Auditor-Controller, December 6, 2005) outlined major challenges facing the Department, including problems in measuring performance, tracking client outcomes, and incorporating evidence-based practices. These long-term problems in collecting, tracking, and analyzing data have made it difficult for Probation Department staff to plan and organize services internally, to work collaboratively with other County Departments serving the same youth and families, and to work effectively with the many external stakeholder groups that share concerns about these youth and their families.

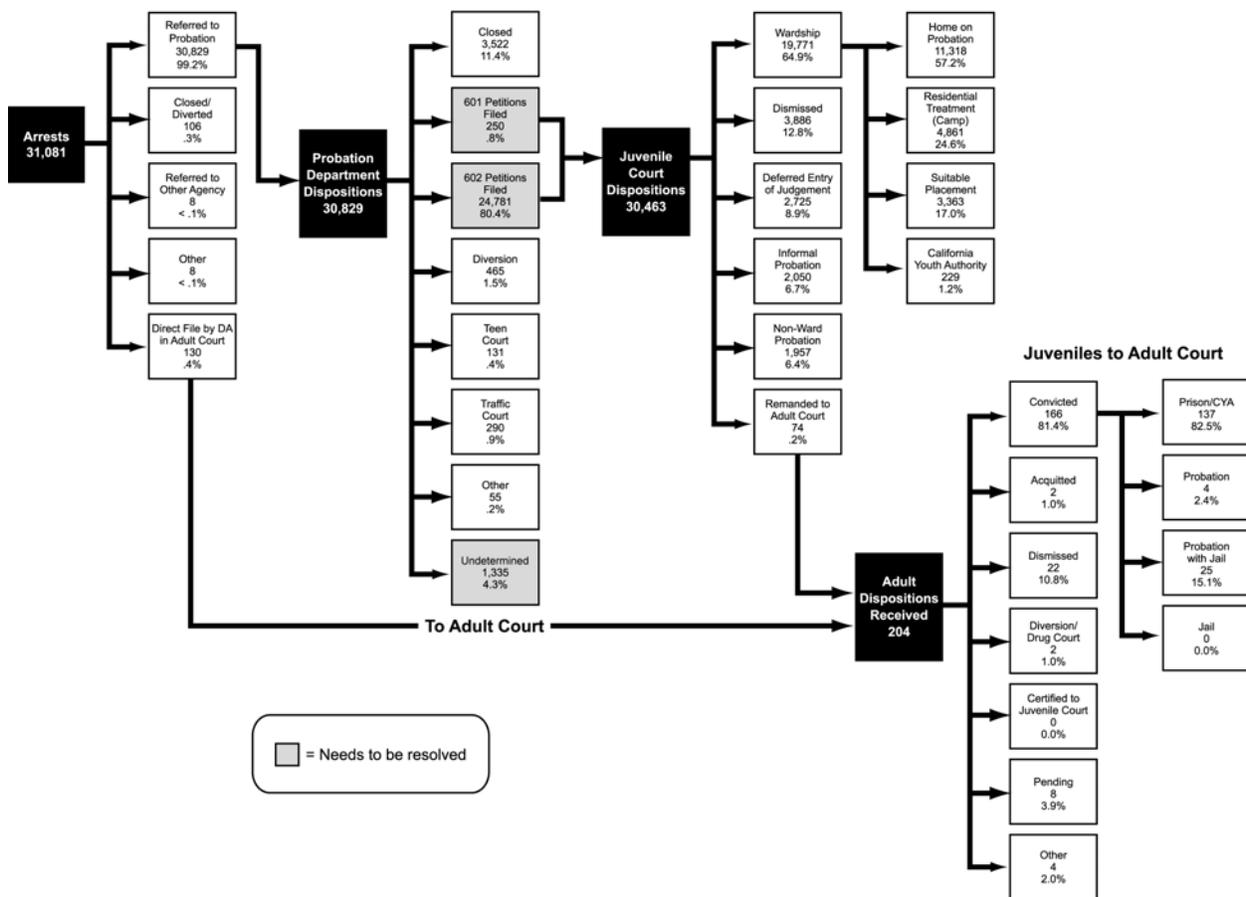
In addition to working with Probation Department staff to develop data for this report, Council staff and volunteers visited Probation facilities, met with key stakeholders, and reviewed some of the literature available in the field (see Appendix C on the methods used). This initial research report uses available data derived from the Probation Department’s automated systems or through manual counts to trace the flow of youth through L.A.’s juvenile justice system, describing patterns of youth arrests and assessing the conditions of youth cared for by the L.A. County Probation Department. Where possible, administrative data from the Probation Department has been supplemented with data from other sources. The report also suggests eight possible directions for change that were identified through data analysis, site visits, and interviews with key informants.

Processing Youth through the Juvenile Justice System

A simplified overview of how youth are processed through Los Angeles County’s juvenile justice system is shown in Chart 1, along with data for 2003, the most recent year for which full data were available. Ninety-nine percent of the 31,081 youth arrested and processed for delinquency charges in L.A. County in 2003 (n=30,829) were referred to the Probation Department. Slightly over 100 other cases were closed or diverted immediately, 130 were referred to adult court, and 16 were referred to other resources.

Chart 1.

Los Angeles County Probation Department, Juvenile Arrests Processing, Chart 2003



Youth arrests included arrests for delinquent activities, including both felony and misdemeanor charges, and arrests for status offenses such as incorrigible behaviors that are beyond parental control. In 2003, delinquency (or 602) petitions were filed on 80.4% (n=24,781) of the youth who were arrested and referred to Probation, while less than 1% (n=250) had status offense (or 601) petitions filed. Both 601 and 602 refer to sections of the California Welfare and Institutions Code that outline criteria for delinquent behaviors and status offenses. More than 11% or 3,522 cases were closed, while 465 were diverted, 131 were sent to teen court, 290 were sent to traffic court, and 55 had other dispositions. Dispositions were not available for 1,335 cases due to incomplete data.

Of the 30,463 youth with juvenile court dispositions in 2003, almost two thirds (n=19,771) were declared wards of the court and put under the supervision of the Probation Department. Cases against another 3,886 youth were dismissed, 2,050 youth were placed on informal probation, 1,957 youth were given non-ward probationary status and judgments were deferred in the cases of 2,725 youth. Of the 204 juvenile cases that were handled in adult court, four-fifths of the youth (n=166) were convicted and received criminal sentences. More than 80% (n=137) of these youth received prison or CYA sentences [Note 3], 25 were given jail as a condition of probation, and 4 were placed on probation.

In 2003, almost 60% (n=11,318) of the youth remanded to the care of the Probation Department after the juvenile court disposition remained at home while on probation. One quarter (n=4,861) served time in probation camps, 17% (n=3,363) went to suitable placement settings and about 1% (n=229) served time in state-run CYA facilities. Differences in the characteristics of youth who served time in these different kinds of settings are examined in more detail in a later section.

Youth Arrest Patterns

Table 2 shows the age groups, gender, and race/ethnicity of youth arrested in Los Angeles County compared with those arrested throughout the state of California according to the California Department of Justice. In 2003, juvenile arrests in Los Angeles accounted for about one quarter of the statewide total of 223,320. In Los Angeles, misdemeanors accounted for almost 46% of youth arrests, while felonies accounted for about 30% and status offenses accounted for about 25% [Note 4]. In L.A., arrests of males outnumbered females by three to one. Not surprisingly, older youth were more likely to be arrested and they generally faced more serious charges than younger youth. Perhaps one of the most disturbing data elements in this table is the number of children under age 12 who were arrested — 6,077, or 2.7%, of all juveniles arrested in California were younger than 12, as were 847 or 1.6% of all juveniles arrested in L.A.

Table 2. **Arrest by Race/Ethnicity, Gender and Age,
Los Angeles County and California, 2003**

	LA County				California			
	Number of Juvenile Arrests				Number of Juvenile Arrests			
	Felony	Misdemeanor	Status Offense	All Arrests	Felony	Misdemeanor	Status Offense	All Arrests
Racial/Ethnic Group								
White	1,758	4,372	1,875	8,005	16,306	44,350	9,350	70,006
Hispanic	8,855	13,385	8,457	30,697	26,335	54,790	16,954	98,079
African American	4,575	5,418	2,214	12,207	13,595	21,953	3,924	39,472
Other	783	1,384	754	2,921	4,642	9,129	1,992	15,763
Total	15,971	24,559	13,300	53,830	60,878	130,222	32,220	223,320
Gender								
Male	13,542	18,189	8,704	40,435	50,307	93,273	19,913	163,493
Female	2,429	6,370	4,596	13,395	10,571	36,949	12,307	59,827
Age Groups								
< 12 years	281	453	113	847	1,745	3,886	446	6,077
< 14 years	2,122	3,653	1,167	6,942	9,842	23,677	3,569	37,088
14-15 years	5,463	9,199	5,502	20,164	20,995	47,467	12,977	81,439
16-17 years	8,386	11,707	6,631	26,724	30,041	59,078	15,674	104,793

Source: California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center

Chart 3.

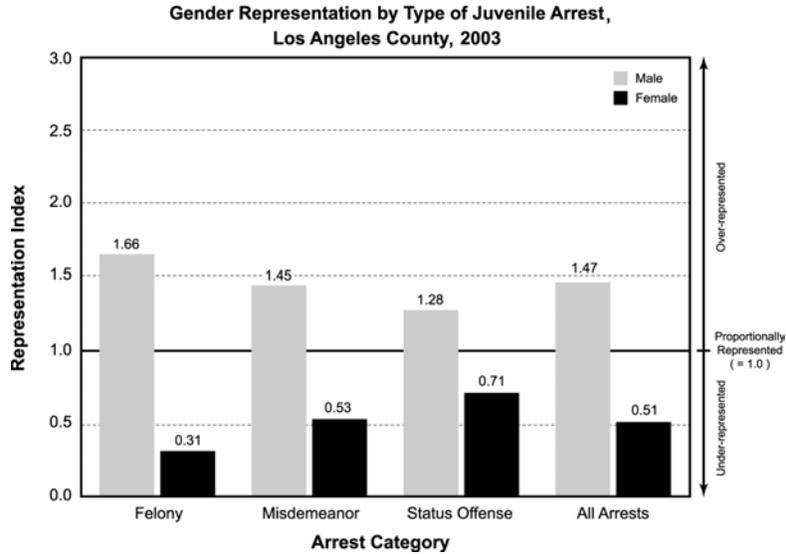
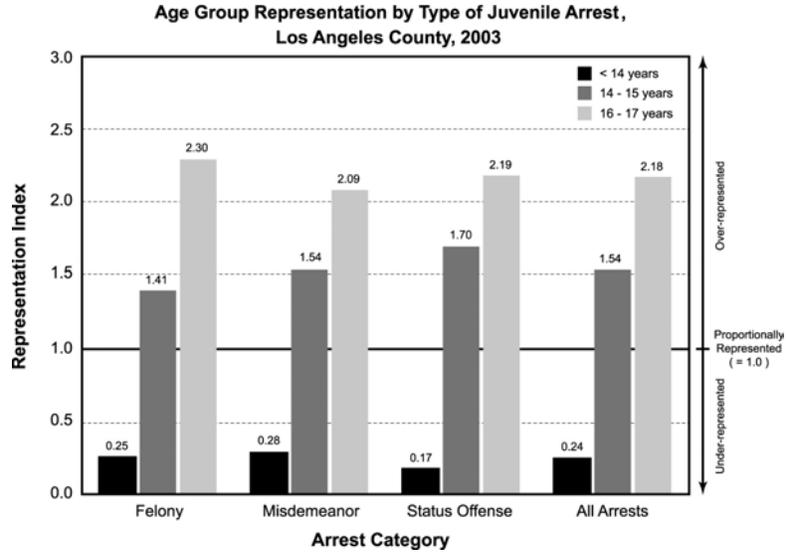


Chart 4.



Charts 3 and 4 use proportional representation to show the over- or under-representation by gender and age group of youth arrested in L.A. in proportion to their numbers in the general population. Using this method of analysis, a value of 1.0 means that the number of youth arrested was proportionate to their number in the overall population. A value less than 1.0 means that the group was under-represented in relationship to the overall population, and a value greater than 1.0 means that the group was over-

represented in relationship to the overall population. Thus, the closer the value on the chart is to 1.0, the more proportional the representation, while greater differences show greater disparities. For example, a value of 2.0 means a group is represented at twice their overall population rate, and a value of 3.0 means a group is represented at three times their overall population rate [Note 5].

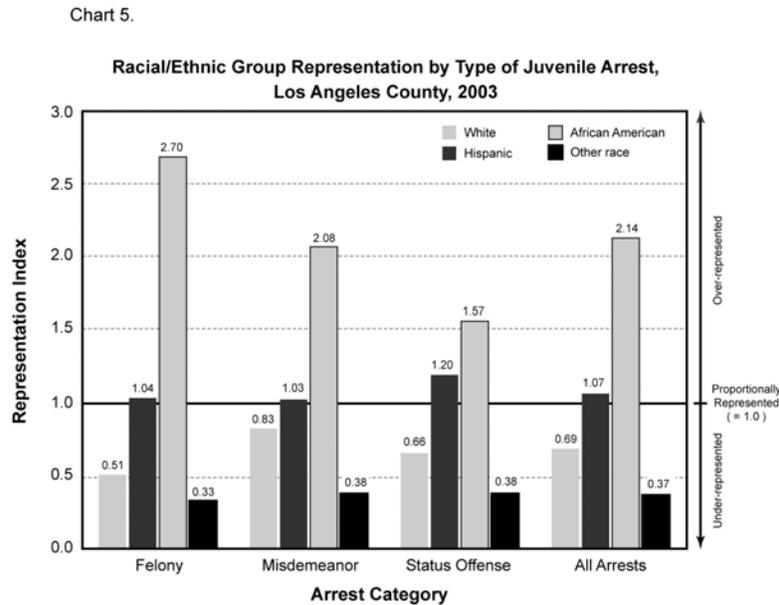


Chart 5 shows a significant over-representation of African American youth for all categories of youth arrests in L.A. On average, African American youth in Los Angeles were twice as likely to be arrested as youth from other groups, and they were 2.7 times more likely to be arrested on felony charges. Latinos were generally represented at or just above their proportion in the population as a whole. By and large, youth who are White, Asian, or American Indian were under-represented in terms of youth arrests.

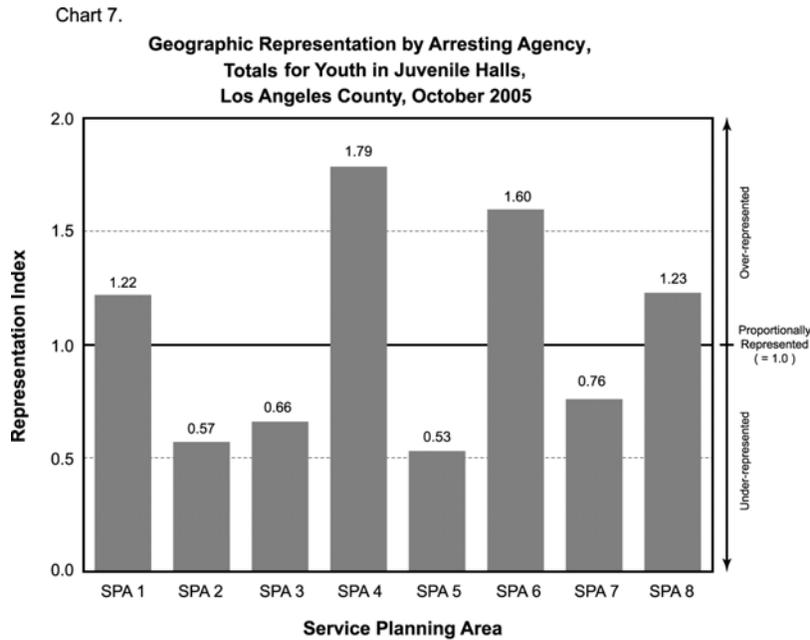
Table 6. **Juvenile Arrest Data by Racial/Ethnic Group, Los Angeles County, 2003**

Racial/Ethnic Group	Total Juvenile Arrests	Juvenile Felony Arrests	Juvenile Arrests for Violent Felonies*	% of Arrests for Felony Offenses	% of Arrests for Violent Offenses
African American	12,207	4,575	1,928	37.5%	15.8%
American Indian	14	3	1	21.4%	7.1%
Asian	995	206	52	20.7%	5.2%
Asian Indian	2	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Cambodian	51	14	3	27.5%	5.9%
Chinese	206	50	14	24.3%	6.8%
Filipino	257	77	16	30.0%	6.2%
Japanese	25	9	1	36.0%	4.0%
Korean	106	7	2	6.6%	1.9%
Laotian	1	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Vietnamese	38	16	6	42.1%	15.8%
Other Asian	309	33	10	10.7%	3.2%
Hispanic	30,697	8,855	2,157	28.8%	7.0%
Pacific Islander	139	38	16	27.3%	11.5%
Guamanian	5	1	0	20.0%	0.0%
Hawaiian	9	0	0	0.0%	0.0%
Samoan	36	2	1	5.6%	2.8%
Unspecified Pacific Islander	89	35	15	39.3%	16.9%
White	8,005	1,758	421	22.0%	5.3%
Other	1,773	536	172	30.2%	9.7%
Total	53,830	15,971	4,747	29.7%	8.8%

* Violent felonies include homicide, forcible rape, robbery, assault, and kidnapping.

Source: California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center

Table 6 illustrates another way of looking at juvenile arrest data for 2003. Here data from the California Department of Justice shows the breakdown of overall arrests, felony, and violent felony arrests for different racial and ethnic sub-groups. Looking at a total of 53,830 arrests, felony crimes accounted for almost one third of the total, or 29.7% (n=15,971) of juvenile arrests in L.A. County. About one third of these arrests (n=4,747) were for violent felonies. Initial analyses of the sub-group data suggest that among Asian sub-groups, Filipino and Cambodian youth were more likely to be arrested than other Asian youth. And, though under-represented in terms of overall youth arrests, more than 40% of the Vietnamese youth arrested were charged with felony offenses, the highest proportion among all racial and ethnic sub-groups.



Note: It was not possible to determine the SPA location for ten arresting agencies.
 As such, data for the 396 juveniles arrested by these agencies are not included in this chart.

These data from 2003 do not show arrest patterns on a geographic basis within the County, but Chart 7 shows Probation Department data from October 2005 summarizing the arresting agency locations where youth then residing in the County's juvenile halls were arrested. Youth in Service Planning Areas (SPA) 4 and 6 were most likely to be arrested and detained in juvenile halls, with SPA 4 youth 1.8 times more likely, and SPA 6 youth 1.6 times more likely to be arrested and detained than youth in other geographic areas. Youth in SPAs 1 and 8 also faced somewhat greater likelihood of arrest and detention (about 1.2 times), while youth in SPAs 2, 3, and 5 were significantly under-represented.

Conditions of Youth Under the Care of the Los Angeles County Probation Department

Both the rapid movement of juveniles through the system and problems in extracting data make it difficult to get a complete picture of the characteristics of delinquent youth and their conditions while in the care of the Probation Department. At the request of the Children's Planning Council, Probation Department staff provided point-in-time data for three representative days in October 2005, and one in

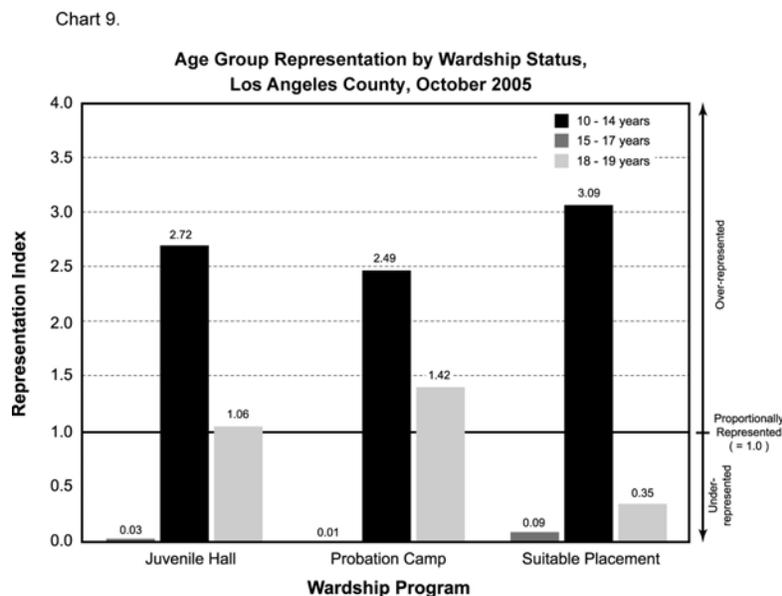
February 2006. The data include youth detained in the County's three juvenile halls and 19 probation camps [Note 6], those living in court-ordered suitable placement settings, as well as those at home on probation.

Table 8. **Probation Caseload Characteristics Snapshot**
(as of October 21-26, 2005)

Category	Juvenile Hall	Camp	Suitable Placement	Total Youth Population (Ages 10-19)
Caseload Counts				
Race/Ethnicity				
African American	597	782	411	173,365
Asian	20	19	6	165,780
Hispanic	994	1,305	734	870,878
White	104	85	114	347,147
Other	29	50	40	9,690
Unknown	-	1	-	-
Total	1,744	2,242	1,305	1,566,860
Age Group (at entry)				
10 - 14 years	30	11	63	819,744
15 - 17 years	1,362	1,602	1,155	449,265
18 - 19 years	352	606	87	297,851
Unknown	-	23	-	-
Gender				
Male	1,471	2,016	1,045	800,542
Female	273	226	260	766,318
Percent of Population				
Race/Ethnicity				
African American	34.2%	34.9%	31.5%	11.1%
Asian	1.1%	0.8%	0.5%	10.6%
Hispanic	57.0%	58.2%	56.2%	55.6%
White	6.0%	3.8%	8.7%	22.2%
Other	1.7%	2.2%	3.1%	0.6%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
Age Group (at entry)				
10 - 14 years	1.7%	0.5%	4.8%	52.3%
15 - 17 years	78.1%	71.5%	88.5%	28.7%
18 - 19 years	20.2%	27.0%	6.7%	19.0%
Unknown	0.0%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Gender				
Male	84.3%	89.9%	80.1%	51.1%
Female	15.7%	10.1%	19.9%	48.9%

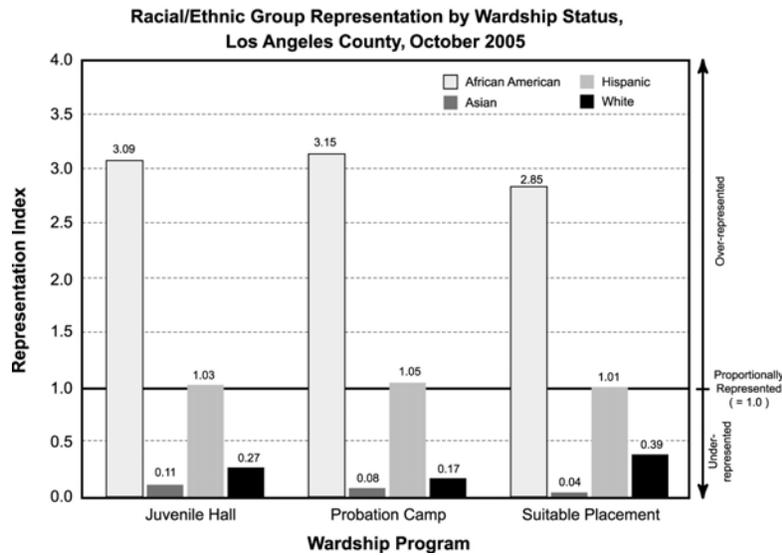
Sources: Population estimates - LA County CAO, SIB, Urban Research 2004
Wardship data - LA County Probation Department

Table 8 shows age, gender, race/ethnicity, and placement status for the 5,291 detained youth under the care of the Probation Department during the week of October 21-26, 2005. Forty-two percent of these youth (n=2,242) lived in probation camps, 33% (n=1,744) lived in juvenile halls, and 25% (n=1,305) were in suitable placements. Although the ages of these youth ranged from 10 to 19, youth between the ages of 15 and 17 accounted for more than three quarters of all youth in the system. Chart 9 shows that the 15-17 year old age group predominated in all three settings, although both older and younger youth were also present.



The significant over-representation of African-American youth in all three settings is clearly demonstrated in Chart 10. While over-represented everywhere, African-American youth were even more likely to be in detention settings than to be in suitable placement. Compared with the population as a whole, African-American youth were 3.15 times more likely to be in camps, 3.09 times more likely to be in halls, and 2.85 times more likely to be in suitable placement.

Chart 10.



As might be expected, males outnumbered females by about four to one, with males accounting for 89% of youth in camps, 84% in halls, and 80% in suitable placement. While females accounted for only about 14% of delinquent youth overall, they undoubtedly have special needs and circumstances. The complex issues of pregnancy and child-rearing among delinquent girls have been raised many times, especially given the likelihood that these girls will begin having children as teenagers. Based on findings from a special survey in March 2005, Deputy Probation Officers (DPO) reported that they supervised 96 pregnant girls as well as 214 girls who were already parents. DPOs also reported that the ages of their children ranged from birth to age six, with about 50% less than a year old and only one child over five years old. More than one-third of these mothers were from SPA 6 and almost 25% were from SPA 3. Since the survey captured data for female minors in community-based supervision only, little information is available regarding pregnant and parenting mothers in juvenile halls and camps. Even so, there is clearly a special need to be concerned about these girls and their children, as well as the fathers and other family members caring for these vulnerable young children in their mothers' absence.

Table 11. **Youth in Suitable Placement Caseload Snapshot**
(as of October 21, 2005)

Category	Number of Juveniles	Percent
Type of Placement		
Group home	1,305	88.8%
Foster care (relative/non-relative)	126	8.6%
Home with parents	26	1.8%
State hospital	10	0.7%
Transitional Housing Placement Program	3	0.2%
Total	1,470	100.0%
Rate Classification Level (RCL) for Juveniles in Group Home Placement		
14	32	2.5%
12	949	72.7%
11	83	6.4%
10	121	9.3%
9	50	3.8%
6	6	0.5%
5	46	3.5%
4	18	1.4%
Total	1,305	100.0%
County of Placement (Group Homes Only)		
Los Angeles County	981	75.2%
San Bernardino County	128	9.8%
Riverside County	120	9.2%
Orange County	41	3.1%
Lyon County	12	0.9%
Kern County	10	0.8%
Calaveras County	6	0.5%
Tulare County	4	0.3%
Ventura County	2	0.2%
Sacramento County	1	0.1%

Source: LA County Probation Department, Suitable Placement Program

Table 11 shows data for youth in suitable placement. Almost 90% of the 1,470 delinquent youth not sent to probation camps were put in suitable placement settings. One hundred and twenty-six youth were placed in foster homes (including both relative and non-relative care), 26 were placed at home with their parents, 10 were in state hospitals, and 3 were in the Transitional Housing Placement Program, an alternative to group home placement for high schools seniors who are emancipating. Over 75% of the

youth in group homes were placed in settings with a Rate Classification Level (RCL) of 12 or higher, indicating a need for specialized intensive treatment services. About 25% were placed in settings outside of L.A. County, with the largest numbers placed in San Bernardino (n=128) and Riverside Counties (n=120).

Table 12. **Youth in Probation Camps Caseload Snapshot**
(as of October 24, 2005)

Category	Number of Juveniles (in Camps)	Percent
Type of Offense		
Felony	1,006	44.9%
- Assault with a deadly weapon	114	5.1%
- Burglary	144	6.4%
- Robbery	182	8.1%
- Motor vehicle theft	130	5.8%
- Vandalism	94	4.2%
Misdemeanor	901	40.2%
- Failure to obey order of Juvenile Court	62	2.8%
- Juvenile violation of probation	626	27.9%
Both (Felony and Misdemeanor)	335	14.9%
- In possession of a concealable firearm	105	4.7%
Total	2,242	100.0%
Time Spent in Camp		
< 3 months (90 days or less)	1,296	57.8%
3 to 6 months (91-182 days)	685	30.6%
6 to 9 months (183-273 days)	190	8.5%
9 to 12 months (274-365 days)	21	0.9%
More than 12 months (over 365 days)	27	1.2%
Unknown	23	1.0%

Source: LA County Probation Department, Ward Inmate Tracking System (WITS)

Probation camps accounted for the largest proportion of youth in detention facilities. Data in Table 12 show that approximately 60% of the youth in camps were there due to a felony offense (n=1,341). The most common felony offenses were robbery, assault, burglary, and motor vehicle theft. Of the remaining 901 youth in camps, three of every four (n=688) were there for violating probation or failing to obey court orders. Data highlighting serious or violent offenses by probation camp youth could not be extracted from

Probation information systems without a manual count of individual records. Almost 60% of youth had been in camp less than three months (n=1,296), while almost 12% had been there longer than six months at the time of this extract.

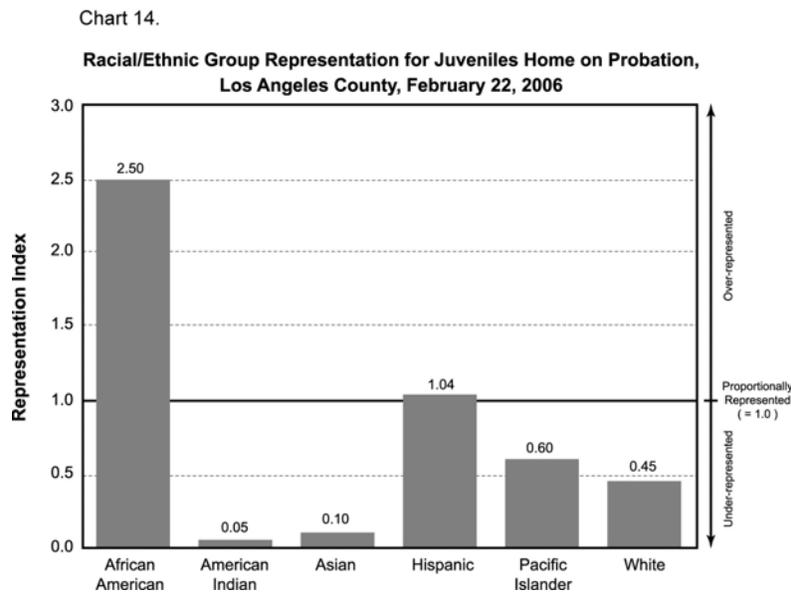
Youth in juvenile halls were the only group for which data on primary languages spoken were available. Available data suggests that just 2.5% of the 1,744 youth in detention spoke a primary language other than English. This seems like a small number when considering the language diversity of youth and families in L.A. County, and raises some questions about the accuracy of the data and attention paid to this data element.

Table 13. **Youth Home on Probation
Caseload Snapshot
(as of February 22, 2006)**

Category	Number of Juveniles	Percent
Race/Ethnicity		
African American	5,882	27.7%
American Indian	2	0.01%
Asian	220	1.0%
Hispanic	12,253	57.7%
Pacific Islander	38	0.2%
White	2,107	9.9%
Other	683	3.4%
Unknown	47	0.2%
Total	21,232	100.0%
Age Group (at time of offense)		
10 - 14 years	10,891	51.3%
15 - 17 years	10,289	48.5%
18+	12	0.1%
Unknown	40	0.2%
Gender		
Male	16,773	79.0%
Female	4,459	21.0%

Source: LA County Probation Department, Juvenile Caseload Management System

Youth home on probation (HOP) represented the bulk of the Probation Department’s caseload, with 21,232 under its care as of February 22, 2006. Table 13 shows that a little more than half of these youth were age 14 or younger at the time of their arrest (n=10,891). Females accounted for 21% of the population compared to 79% for males. Chart 14 illustrates that African Americans were again over-represented, but at lower proportions than those in detention. The reverse was true for White youth, who had a higher proportion of youth at home on probation rather than in detention.



Education, Cross-Over Issues, and Mental Health Status

The Children’s Planning Council also sought data from other sources on three issues of special concern – educational status, the increasing number of “dual jurisdiction” or cross-over youth who have had substantiated cases of abuse and neglect as well as delinquency charges, and the mental health needs of youth cared for by the Probation Department. Although these data are far from complete, they highlight the special needs of many of these youth and suggest important directions for change.

Educational Status. A special analysis completed by the Los Angeles County Office of Education (LACOE) at the request of the Education Coordinating Council in November 2005 sheds light on the

educational conditions of Probation youth [Note 7]. LACOE provides programs and services to students, parents, educators, and the school districts within L.A. County. The Juvenile Court and Community Schools (JCCS) unit within LACOE provides individualized teaching and support to delinquent and abandoned youth in juvenile halls, camps, and residential programs. With its partners in the Probation Department and other County agencies, JCCS focuses on moving youth toward literacy and academic achievement. All schools are fully accredited by the Western Association of Schools and Colleges. Credits earned in JCCS are accepted at all high schools, colleges, and universities. Academic goals are achieved by:

- Immediate and follow-up assessment of student academic and special education needs;
- Designing and implementing Individual Education Plans for students with special needs and Individual Learning Plans for regular education students;
- Small classes with a maximum 17-to-1 student-to-teacher ratio;
- Intensive reading instruction supported by after-school tutoring;
- Integrating the latest computer technology and software into the curriculum.

LACOE's Division of Alternative Education (DAE) was created to reach students who fall through the cracks in the public education system, those who are "at-risk" academically, and those who have specialized interests and talents. DAE's overall goal is to provide programs with alternative education settings so that students will succeed and achieve. DAE is also concerned about students who are "at-risk" of academic failure. To help reach those students, DAE has program goals to ensure that students will:

- Set and attain individualized behavior, academic, and career goals,
- Attend school consistently,
- Reinvest in school and learning, and
- Successfully transition to the home school district or to institutions of higher learning.

DAE operates the following alternative education programs:

- The Community Day Schools serve students referred by the districts due to expulsion, those referred by the Probation Department, and/or those assigned because of poor attendance or other at-risk behaviors.

- The California School Age Families Education Program serves male and female students who are pregnant or parenting teenagers.
- The Community School programs include both school facilities and independent study strategies.

This statistical analysis focused on probation students enrolled in either the JCCS or DAE programs, based on data from November 2005 and on a “snapshot” of LACOE’s enrollment on different days during December 2005 (this comparison helped to show the amount of movement occurring at different times). Information on diplomas issued was as of August 31, 2005.

Students whose records were included in this analysis came mostly from school districts throughout the County, with the highest proportion from the Los Angeles Unified School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Compton Unified School District. In addition, a small number of students (n=16) had previously been enrolled in out-of-County school districts.

Juvenile Halls. LACOE data show that 2,047 students were enrolled in juvenile hall schools as of November 2005. Of these, 79% (n=1,617) were classified as regular education students and 21% (n=430) were classified as special education students. As of August 2005, LACOE had issued 787 high school diplomas in regular education and 138 high school diplomas in special education. In regard to ethnicity, the highest percentages of students were Latino, African-American, and White. The primary language spoken was English, followed by Spanish.

LACOE also offered an Independent Study Strategy for Probation and other pupils in both regular education and special education. Probationers accounted for 28% (n=246) of the total of 852 regular education students in the Independent Study program, and they accounted for 18% (n=33) of the total of 33 special education students in the Independent Study program.

Star Advantage Tests, which are administered as youth enter juvenile halls, showed that regular education students in juvenile halls in November 2005 had an average grade level reading ability of 4.9 (just below fifth grade level). The average Star Advantage Test math score for regular education students was 5.7. For special education students, the average reading score was 3.8 and the average math score was 6.0.

According to LACOE data, the attendance rate for regular and special education students in juvenile halls during the second semester of 2004-05 was 86%. Since attendance is taken once a day rather than on a period by period basis, this figure undoubtedly underestimates the amount of instruction time missed by youth who had excused absences for illness or for appointments scheduled during the school day. Nor does it account for time missed by youth who were sent back to their units due to medical problems or behavior problems such as a “lockdown.”

The Probation Department’s reading improvement program, Operation Read, makes volunteers available to tutor some of these youth outside of school hours, but the service is available only to youth whose reading scores put them at or below the fourth grade reading level.

Probation Camps. LACOE data show that 2,064 students were enrolled in Probation camps in November 2005. Eighty percent of these students were classified as regular education (n=1,650), while 20% (n=414) were classified as special education. Star Advantage Test scores showed that regular education students in camps had an average grade level reading ability of 5.3 and an average math score of 5.5. Special education students had an average reading score of 4.0 and an average math score of 4.4. The attendance rate for both regular and special education students in camps during the second semester of 2004-05 was 93%. In some camps, Operation Read volunteers were available to help youth who were behind two grade levels in reading.

Community Day Schools. LACOE data from November 2005 show that 676 probation youth were enrolled in Community Day Schools. Eighty-seven percent (n=585) of these students were classified as regular education students and 13% (n=91) were classified as special education students. Star Advantage Test scores showed that regular education students had an average grade level reading ability of 7.0, and an average math grade level ability of 9.0. In special education, the average reading score was 4.1, and the average math score was 4.6. The attendance rate during the second semester of 2004-05 for both regular and special education students was 80%. In some Community Day Schools, additional help with reading for students who lagged at least two grade levels in reading was available from Operation Read.

Cal Safe. Another program offered by LACOE was the Cal Safe program for pregnant teens, teen moms, dads, and their children. Probationers accounted for less than 1% of all students enrolled in this program as of November 2005, with 12 regular education students and two special education students.

High School Exit Examination Results. Another way to assess the educational status of probation youth is by looking at California High School Exit Examination results for graduates from LACOE juvenile hall and Community Day School programs. Table 15 shows 2003-04 exam results in English Language Arts and Math for graduates statewide, for L.A. County, and for selected L.A. school districts, schools, and programs. Results for 492 LACOE students in juvenile halls and the community day school program show that 26% passed the English Language Arts exam. The average English score for these students was 330, with a score of 350 required to pass the exam. In comparison, 70% of all students in the County who took the test passed the exam. Results for 516 juvenile hall and Community Day School students who took the Math exam show that 35% passed the exam, with an average score of 325. In comparison, 70% of all students in the County who took the test passed.

Table 15. **California High School Exit Examination Results
2003-04 School Year**

Category	English Language Arts Portion			Math Portion		
	Number of Students Completing the Test	Percent of Students who Passed	Average Scaled Score*	Number of Students Completing the Test	Percent of Students who Passed	Average Scaled Score*
California	444,869	75%	376	447,110	74%	377
Los Angeles County	118,120	70%	372	118,339	68%	371
Los Angeles Unified School District	43,449	62%	363	43,845	58%	361
Compton Unified School District	1,465	51%	350	1,467	41%	347
Inglewood Unified School District	960	59%	357	972	46%	351
Los Angeles County Office of Education	1,236	45%	347	1,266	35%	342
Juvenile Hall/Community Day School	492	26%	330	516	16%	325
Special Education (LACOE)	81	27%	328	80	17%	326

* The State passing scaled score is 350 or higher.

Source: California Department of Education, DataQuest, 2003-04 School Year

Cross-Over Issues. Under California law, youth may not be simultaneously under the jurisdiction of the dependency system – in L.A., the Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) – and the delinquency system. The issues raised when youth are known to both systems are complex, raising legal, jurisdictional, treatment planning, and case management issues all across the country (Siegal & Lord, 2004). When dependent youth known to DCFS are arrested for juvenile crimes, a special adjudication hearing process (known as 241.1) is convened so that DCFS, Probation, Department of Mental Health (DMH), and other key players can jointly assess youth behaviors, characteristics, and needs and the team can make joint recommendations for the case. The options for youth known to both systems include dismissal of charges, informal probation (non-ward probation status or deferred judgment) with primary custody by DCFS, or further processing in the delinquency court.

The number of “cross-over” cases, also known as “dual jurisdiction” cases or “300/600” youth (based on the different sections of California’s Welfare and Institutions Code), appears to be on the increase in L.A. County, but reliable data on trends over time are not available. In a study that is still underway, however, Denise Herz and Joseph Ryan (2005) extracted and analyzed data on all of the 241.1 cases in L.A. County between April and December 2004. During that time period there was an average of 63 referrals per month on individual youth (not counting multiple referrals for the same youth). Herz and Ryan generously agreed to share some of this data with the Children’s Planning Council for the purpose of this report.

Their study includes data on 575 individual youth who had 241.1 hearings during nine months in 2004. Initial findings show that the average length of time these youth had been in the DCFS system was 7.38 years. Virtually all had been in out-of-home placement at least once during that time, with the majority living in out-of-home placement at the time of this arrest. Most of these youth were not attending school regularly – 24% were not enrolled in school and 45% were truant or had patterns of irregular attendance. Approximately one-third of their offenses were related to the youth’s placement settings, largely group homes. Almost three-quarters of the youth (68%) had previous contact with law enforcement and the juvenile justice system.

Most of the youth in this study (56%) were given informal probation while continuing in the care of DCFS. Only about a quarter of these youth (27%) were sent directly to the delinquency system, and another 7% had charges dismissed. Preliminary data suggest that several factors were associated with

receiving a 602 charge – these included prior offenses, poor school attendance, having a substance abuse problem, being detained in a detention facility following arrest, and showing multiple behavior risk factors such as AWOL, aggression, uncontrollable behaviors, etc.

In terms of underlying problems, 83% of these youth had mental health or substance abuse problems, or both. Only 17% were assessed as showing neither problem, while 28% had mental health problems, 17% had substance abuse problems, and 38% had co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders. Of those with mental health and/or substance abuse problems, 77% had received mental health treatment, while only 8% had received substance abuse treatment. Of the 268 youth assessed as showing mental health problems, 58% were depressed, 36% had conduct disorders, 33% were bipolar, and 19% had Attention Deficit Disorders.

Mental Health Status. Since 2001, Probation has partnered with the Department of Mental Health (DMH) to assure that every youth coming into L.A. County juvenile halls receives a screening for mental health problems. DMH worked with researchers at UCLA to identify an appropriate screening instrument to provide reasonable information on mental health and behavior issues for every youth at entry into the juvenile justice system. Based on data from several comparative studies, they selected the second version of the Massachusetts Youth Screening Instrument (MAYSI-2) [Note 8].

DMH staff reported that approximately 30% of all youth screened using the MAYSI-2 had prior mental health treatment from DMH as reflected in the Department's integrated management information system. Youth whose MAYSI-2 scores indicate possible disturbances then receive a full assessment by DMH staff; DMH staff reported that approximately 60% of the youth who had full assessments had used DMH services prior to entry into the juvenile hall. In 2004-05, DMH screened approximately 15,000 newly admitted youth in juvenile halls. Of these, about 30% were identified as requiring a full assessment and the opening of a mental health services case.

According to Chief Probation Officer Paul Higa (KPCC interview, March 9, 2006), 30% is a relatively low figure since national norms would suggest that about two-thirds of incarcerated youth have serious mental health and/or substance abuse problems. Many other Probation Department staff at the juvenile halls and camps visited by the Children's Planning Council also suggested that the MAYSI-2 appears to miss some youth with serious behavioral and mental health problems.

Questions about the mental health needs, and possible interactions between substance abuse and mental health problems, of youth in the juvenile justice system raised questions and concerns at many levels [Note 9]. For example, medical staff at the Barry J. Nidorf Juvenile Hall reported that about 100 of 600 youth required psychotropic medication on a daily basis. Of those, about 50% refused to take their medication, leading to problems with hoarding and trading prescription drugs, and erratic individual behaviors that could trigger consequences for the entire group in a unit or classroom.

DMH and Probation staff are continuing to work on improving mental health services available to incarcerated youth, suggesting for example that every youth should be re-screened when they move from juvenile halls to camps. At present, only Challenger Camp offers a specialized program for youth who require psychotropic medications, but several such units may be needed to handle the mental health and behavior problems of youth involved with the juvenile justice system. One of the key issues that will require special attention is how to assure that special populations – including females as well as gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) youth – receive the services they need. Their needs may be overlooked because their numbers are small, but experience has shown that lack of attention to the plight of girls and GLBT youth who get involved with the juvenile justice system is extremely short-sighted.

Possible Directions for Change

To its credit, the Los Angeles County Probation Department has come a long way since 2000 when the Department of Justice (DOJ) began investigating confinement practices in L.A. juvenile halls and looking at the health, mental health, and educational services provided to youth confined in the halls. The initial DOJ investigation laid out 66 areas of concern that required immediate attention, many of which have since been corrected. The settlement agreement negotiated in 2004 outlines about 50 additional recommendations that will require monitoring through 2007 (Graham 2005). As Chief Probation Officer Higa noted recently (KPCC, 3/9/06), continuing areas of special concern in the juvenile halls include reduction of youth violence, staff responses to violence (such as the use of pepper spray), and improvement in the mental health services available to youth.

The Probation Department's record of substantial progress in several of the key areas identified by DOJ and other recent audits should increase the possibilities for improvement in other areas. Clearly the Department's top priorities include continuing attention to juvenile halls, along with proactive attention to redesigning the camp system. Probation staff are also working on a comprehensive plan for redesigning the probation camps that is firmly grounded in best practices including focus on increasing protective factors and decreasing risks. (Higa, 2006).

Paul Higa's vision included a fundamental shift in the way the Department does business, moving away from focusing only on detention and rehabilitation of probation youth, and toward a more holistic approach to working with youth in the context of their families, schools, and communities. Such changes need to be firmly grounded in the evidence-based practices that have been shown to work in other jurisdictions including immediate assessment of risks and resilience [Note 10], motivational interviewing, individualized case planning, application of social learning models for lower risk youth, and cognitive restructuring for higher risk youth. All of these changes require intensive training for new and continuing staff.

Even with the improvements described above, however, all is not well for the youth served by the County's juvenile justice system. At least eight important areas requiring the attention of the Department and its community partners were identified during this study through interviews, focus groups, and data analysis. In many of these areas, guidance is available from lessons learned in other jurisdictions (See

Gardner 2002; AdvoCasey, 2004; Casey Connects 2006). One example to highlight is the MacArthur Foundation's Models for Change initiative, which identified five key principles that might be helpful in guiding L.A.'s improvement efforts (MacArthur 2005, p. 3):

- **Fairness** – as reflected in impartial and unbiased decision making, measured by reduced racial disparities and access to qualified counsel;
- **Recognition of Juvenile-Adult Differences** – as demonstrated by the appropriate retention of youth in the juvenile justice system, measured by reduced transfer to adult criminal court;
- **Successful Engagement** – as reflected by young people leaving the system more capable and productive than when they enter it, measured by increased participation in education, rehabilitation, and treatment services;
- **Community Safety** – as demonstrated by youth who do not re-offend, measured by rates of recidivism;
- **Diversion** – as reflected by an increased proportion of juvenile offenders handled as informally and as close to home as possible, measured by reduced reliance on incarceration as well as increased use of community-based alternatives sanctions.

The possible directions for change that emerged from this study are defined under eight headings:

1. **Data Limitations.**

Higa and his lead staff clearly recognized that “we have not done the record keeping we needed to” (KPCC, 3/9/06), and the Department is working on a new automated system that should be available in 2007. Without more centralized, integrated data collection and analysis systems, even the best efforts of the Probation Department and its partners will continue to be too little, too late. Tracking and monitoring are essential prerequisites for effective planning, outcome-based methods of judging progress over time, and continuous quality improvement. Systematic, concerted attention to continuous gathering and tracking of data on changing conditions should also be an essential element of effective planning with community-based partners.

2. Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services.

The adequacy and availability of mental health services for youth involved with the juvenile justice system has raised serious concerns among Probation staff and others. Re-screening for youth entering the camps should be a high priority, along with a systematic plan for assuring mental health services for youth throughout the camp system. More systematic assessment of alcohol and drug problems is clearly needed, as are substance abuse treatment options for youth both in juvenile halls and in camps. A range of treatment options will be needed to assure that youth with co-occurring mental health and substance abuse disorders can get the help and support they need to turn their lives around. Unfortunately, Federal guidelines limit the resources available to fund treatment at the County level by removing Medi-Cal eligibility when juveniles are incarcerated.

Creating a more effective community-based continuum of mental health and substance abuse services for adolescents is an even larger challenge, but it should be abundantly clear that services for the most at-risk adolescents are inadequate in many communities throughout the County. When cries for help are not heard or not attended to, it cannot be surprising that some youth will fail in school, make bad choices, and get into trouble with the law. Both prevention and aftercare treatment services for youth and families are sorely needed. Fortunately, some new resources will be available under the Transition Age Youth (TAY) section of the County's Mental Health Services Act (Prop. 163) plan.

3. Education.

The educational challenges faced by the youth themselves, as well as the interagency problems faced by the Probation Department, LACOE, and the many other local school districts to which these youth return raise serious concerns that cannot be solved by any one entity alone. Progress will require the coordinated efforts of all of these organizations along with a very large number of community partners. Recognizing the importance of education for the future of these youth, the Probation Department developed its successful Operation Read program which brings volunteer reading tutors into juvenile halls to help many youth with limited reading skills. Probation has also worked hard to put Deputy Probation Officers on school campuses and in developing school safety collaboratives through its School-Based Supervision Program. LACOE and the Probation

Department have made a shared commitment to reintegrating high-need youth into comprehensive high schools on their release from detention facilities.

Two key educational challenges were identified during this study: 1) the percentage of special education students in juvenile halls and camps, and 2) the need for timely transfer of records between local school districts and LACOE when youth enter and leave detention facilities. On a national basis, about 10% of the general school population is eligible for special education services. LACOE data for November 2005 show that the percentage of special education probation students in halls and camps was more than double – 21% of students in juvenile halls and 22% of students in probation camps. While larger percentages of special education students may help to explain why overall school achievement rates for students in juvenile hall and camps are so low, they raise many other complex and challenging questions about how to improve educational outcomes for this diverse population. Since no data were available on learning disabilities, this is another area that requires further study.

LACOE staff reported difficulties getting transcripts and other educational information on students entering the juvenile halls and camps in a timely manner from their local schools. Once youth are released from detention, there is a special need for communication and information sharing between the Probation Department, LACOE, and the other school districts so that youth can return to school with as little disruption as possible. Partnerships are needed to ensure timely return to comprehensive community-based schools, to address the reluctance of some school districts to accept youth returning from detention, and to provide the supports necessary so that these youth can transition successfully at home and in school.

Several of those interviewed for this study also reported difficulties finding appropriate community-based tutoring and special services for probation youth, and inadequate information for youth and their families on planning for college and other vocational options.

4. Cross-Over Youth.

Concerns expressed by the Courts, advocates, and Department representatives, as well as data from the Herz and Ryan study, continue to highlight the enhanced interdepartmental collaboration needed to respond effectively to the needs of cross-over youth. In 2005, Judge Nash, the DCFS

Director, and Chief Probation Officer began a study process to develop better models to deal with dual jurisdiction issues. Consultants from the Child Welfare League of America are guiding this process, and recommendations are expected later in 2006. Interdepartmental groups are now addressing four arenas: 1) court and legal processes, 2) service delivery models, 3) funding models, and 4) information system models.

Other questions that arose in this study include: How can DCFS and Probation work with more effectively with community partners to improve the range of options available for these youth? How can the County assure that youth do not remain in suitable placement settings too long if there are other less intensive, more community-based options available? For example, when can youth be considered for guardianship or relative care under a legal order?

5. Inadequate Support for Families.

Help for parents in understanding the juvenile justice system and participating effectively in legal processes is urgently needed according to Probation staff and others who were interviewed for this study. Local sources of information and support for parents do not exist in many communities, but this kind of support, combined with transportation when youth are in detention and adequate bilingual staff or translation services, could help increase parent involvement, easing the transition back home for youth and parents. Increased attention to the languages spoken by the youth and their families could help Probation staff develop better relationships with youth and families and be more successful in transition, aftercare and community outreach activities. Gaps in comprehensive family-centered programs and wraparound services remain especially acute in some of the communities where juveniles are most likely to be arrested. As Dr. Joseph Rivera, Principal of the Central Juvenile Hall School said, "If parents knew the system, how to help their child, we'd probably have a lot more success."

6. Transition Services for Youth.

Services for youth leaving the juvenile halls and camps are limited and not necessarily available in all of the communities where they are most needed. Services for pregnant and parenting teens and their children are extremely important, including mentoring for young men who are about to become parents. Necessary relationships between the Probation Department and the Regional

Centers that could provide support for special needs youth who get involved in the juvenile justice system have not been developed. The challenge of finding jobs for youth when they leave probation facilities is extremely complicated, especially since the records of youth with serious and violent felonies can't be sealed, but creative community partnerships should be designed to build on the achievements of Homeboy Industries in Los Angeles and related programs in other jurisdictions.

7. Staffing, Workforce, and Facilities.

Keeping up with changing demographics and workforce requirements presents significant challenges for the Probation Department. Current requirements call for primary staffing of juvenile halls by Detention Services Officers (DSO), a staff position which requires an Associate of Arts (AA) degree or 60 units of post-secondary education. This represents a change from decades ago when both halls and camps were staffed by Deputy Probation Officers (DPO), where the minimum qualification was a Bachelor of Arts (BA) degree. Camps continue to be staffed by DPOs, who also handle caseloads of youth at home on probation or in suitable placement settings. Both halls and camps supplement staffing at night by including an additional level of staff, Group Supervisor Nights (GSN), a position that requires only a high school diploma.

No longer requiring a BA degree for juvenile hall staff means that staff may not be as prepared as they should be for the many challenges associated with caring for mixed groups of youth who may be aggressive, violent, traumatized, and in need of special medical and mental health care. In January 2006, the Board of Supervisors approved hiring an additional 237 staff, and the Department is working to hire and train these new workers. In addition, the Department should be looking ahead to workforce preparation and succession planning for the next generation of DSO, GSN, and DPOs. The Probation Department should also coordinate its efforts with planning in other departments to assure that the DCFS social workers, DMH mental health staff, and DPOs of the future are able to work more collaboratively together.

Staffing issues in the camps are a particular concern, since even adherence to state-mandated ratios may limit positive engagement with youth. As observed by the Children's Planning Council during its site visits, when the ratio of adults to youth is inadequate, staff tend to revert to guard behavior, patrolling the perimeter or overseeing dormitories via video monitors, rather than

interacting directly with youth. Although the youth in probation camps include some who have committed serious offenses, these youth were sentenced to serve time in camps because rehabilitation was thought to be both possible and desirable. Failure to provide opportunities for positive interactions could mean that youth won't get the help or encouragement they need to redirect their lives.

The reform efforts of the Probation Department are also severely limited by aging and out-dated facilities. Most of the juvenile halls and camps are more than 50 years old, designed for another time, another philosophy, and other program goals.

8. Disproportionate Representation of African American Youth.

The L.A. County Probation Department is not alone in trying to solve the problem of disproportionate representation of minority youth. Consider this statement from the Annie E. Casey Foundation:

“At every stage of the juvenile justice process, minority youth receive tougher treatment than white youth: They’re more likely than white youth to be arrested, more likely to be formally charged in juvenile court once arrested, more likely to be held in secure detention pending court and more likely to be committed to youth corrections facilities. Minority youth are many times more likely than white youth to be tried as adults, and they make up 75% of all youth sentenced to adult prisons.” (AdvoCasey, 2003, p. 15)

Los Angeles could make better use of the lessons learned in other jurisdictions. For example, Pima County Arizona is blending work on developing community-based detention alternatives with neighborhood-based efforts to reduce disproportionate minority confinements. Pima officials and community partners are conducting focus groups with teens and parents in high-impact neighborhoods, mapping local options and alternatives for youth (Casey Connects 2006). Closer to home, a group in the City of Los Angeles is working with the Los Angeles Unified School District and Healthy Cities to map “hot spots” around school campuses where fights and problems are most likely to occur. For example, this work has already led planners to move a school bus stop into a better lit and patrolled area where students reported that they felt more comfortable waiting. This effort is based, in part, on international studies that use regular feedback from students to better monitor and address the multiple causes of violence on and

around school campuses (Astor, Rosemond, Pitner, Marachi & Benbenishty, 2006; Astor, Benbenishty, Marachi, & Meyer, in press).

Next Steps

Understanding the conditions and circumstances of the over 30,000 young people each year who come in contact with the Juvenile Justice system in Los Angeles, and those under the care of the Probation Department, requires that we have adequate data and that we also listen to the stories of these youth and of their families and their communities. This report begins to tell the story for these youth, but does so only with the limited data available. As such, the story is incomplete. We have much more to learn, and for that, we stress the data limitations noted above. In addition, however, we propose a follow-up report that begins to capture the voices of communities – the parents, the youth, and the leaders of community-based organizations (CBO) that serve these youth and their families.

The follow-up report proposed would include the elements requested by the Board in their first motion that were not captured in this report, and would add the following:

- The perspective of youth in the system;
- The perspective of their families;
- The perspective of the front-line workers that work at the halls, camps, community schools, and CBOs working with these youth;
- Existing community-based resources (mapped and geo-coded) for kids coming out of the halls, camps, or jail;
- Best practices and innovative approaches to rehabilitation and new opportunities for these young people;
- What does and doesn't work.

Appendixes

Notes

1. Estimates are based on data from the Probation Department and population estimates from the California Department of Finance, which include youth in probation camps and CYA, but do not include youth in juvenile halls.
2. A total of 53,830 juvenile arrests were reported by law enforcement agencies in 2003. Of these, 31,081 were processed as delinquency charges and referred to the Probation Department. The flow chart (Chart 1) focuses on cases where youth arrests were also processed as delinquency cases.
3. The number of L.A. County youth serving time in CYA facilities has decreased substantially in the last few years, from about 1,700 in 2000 to about 560 in 2006. According to Paul Higa, the County decided to work toward keeping as many youth as possible closer to home in order to improve their chances of successful rehabilitation and re-entry into families and schools (KPCC interview, March 9, 2006).
4. As described by the Department of Justice (DOJ) Juvenile Justice Report (2003), differences between the number of referrals to probation from different sources and the number of arrests reported by law enforcement agencies as ‘referred to juvenile court and probation’ via the Monthly Arrest and Citation Register are due, in part, to “the different programs and definitions used by law enforcement agencies and probation departments for submitting data to the DOJ. However, there are two primary reasons for the difference: 1) Probation departments report caseload information while law enforcement agencies report information on individual arrests; and 2) the JCPSS counts only those juveniles who have a final disposition reported to the DOJ. Many probation departments divert juveniles out of the system into other ‘community based’ programs. As a result, many juveniles who are diverted after being referred by law enforcement agencies are not reported on JCPSS.” California Department of Justice: Juvenile Justice in California, 2003, page 102.
5. This method is based on the minority over-representation index as provided in California Department of Justice: Juvenile Justice in California, 2003, page 103.

6. Los Angeles County maintains three juvenile halls: Central, Barry J. Nidorf, and Los Padrinos. It maintains 19 camps: Afflerbaugh, Gonzalez, Holton, Jarvis, Kilpatrick, McNair, Mendenhall, Miller, Munz, Onizuka, Paige, Resnik, Rockey, Routh, Scobee, Scott, Scudder, Smith and Dorothy Kirby.

7. Material in this section was provided by LACOE based on analyses completed for the Education Coordinating Council. Gary Levin and Frank Plaistowe (2005). Statistical presentation on youth on probation in LACOE, 2005-2006. Data on California High School Exist exams for 2003-04 is from the California State Department of Education Dataquest.

8. The MAYSI-2 is a 52 item, true-false, paper and pencil method for screening youth ages 12-17 (www.umassmed.edu/nysap/maysi2/what.cfm). It is administered using the computerized version which reads the questions to the youth, so screening is not dependent on the literacy levels of youth. Requiring less than ten minutes to complete, and validated through an interview with a mental health professional, it alerts staff to mental health and potential behavior problems around the following issues: alcohol/drug use, angry-irritable, depressed-anxious, somatic complaints, suicide ideation, thought disturbance, and traumatic experiences. DHM and UCLA used data from three sources to determine the reliability and validity of the MAYSI-2 for use in L.A. County: 1) an L.A. pilot study in 2000; 2) the 2003 Caring For Our Youth study at UCLA; and 3) a 2002 Cook County study by Teplin, Abram, McClelland, Duncan and Mericle. For more information see the website of the University of Massachusetts Law and Psychiatry Program (National Youth Screening Assistance Project) (www.umassmed.edu/nysap).

9. For more information on mental health and juvenile justice, see the website of the National Mental Health Association, Justice for Juveniles Program (www.nmha.org), and the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice (www.ncmhjj.com).

10. The Los Angeles Risk and Resiliency Check-up (LARRC) includes standardized juvenile offender assessment forms and training materials based on experiences in other jurisdictions.

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Data sources for this study were as follows: Juvenile arrest data were obtained from the California Department of Justice, Criminal Justice Statistics Center. Arrest data are as reported to DOJ by law enforcement agencies for 2003, for juveniles ages 10-17. Group representation is calculated using 2003 population estimates from the California Department of Finance. California High school Exit Exam data is from the State Department of Education Dataquest.

Probation caseload data for this report were obtained from several data systems managed by the Los Angeles County Probation Department, and were prepared by Davida Davies of the Quality Enhancement Office (QEO):

Camp data: extracted from Ward Inmate Tracking System (WITS), as of October 24, 2005 (one day snapshot).

Juvenile Hall data: extracted from Probation Detention System (PDS), as of October 26, 2005 (one day snapshot).

Suitable Placement data: from David Leone, Director of Placement, as of October 21, 2005 (one week ending count).

Home on Probation data: extracted from Juvenile Caseload Management System (JCMS), as of February 22, 2006 (one day snapshot).

Juvenile Arrests Fallout chart data: extracted from Juvenile Caseload Management System for 2003 (annual caseload).

Group representation for probation youth was calculated using 2004 population estimates from the Los Angeles County Chief Administrative Office, Service Integration Branch, Urban Research Unit.

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Glossary

601 Ward: sometimes called “pre-delinquents,” but more properly, “status offenders” because their offenses are linked to their status as minors and if committed by adults are not considered illegal.

601(a) WIC: minors who persistently or habitually refuse to obey the reasonable and proper orders of parents; minors beyond the control of parents; curfew violators.

601(b) WIC: habitual truants or those who refuse to obey the reasonable and proper orders of school authorities.

602 Ward: a statutory provision of the Welfare and Institutions Code. It states that any person that violates the law while under 18 years of age is within the jurisdiction of the juvenile court, which may adjudge such person to be a Ward of the Court.

California Youth Authority (CYA): the State agency which has jurisdiction over and maintains institutions as correctional schools for the reception of wards of the juvenile court and other persons committed from superior courts.

Disposition: an action taken by the probation officer or juvenile court as a result of a referral.

Diversion: any delivery or referral of a minor, by the probation department, to a public or private agency with which the city or county has an agreement to provide diversion services. Diversion services must meet the following criteria:

- a) The probation department must have referred the minor and continued to be responsible and maintained responsibility for that minor’s progress.
- b) Placement and monitoring of a minor must have a beginning and ending date.

Felony: the most serious offenses, punishable by imprisonment in a state prison. Felony offenses are homicide (includes non-vehicular manslaughter), forcible rape, robbery, assault, burglary, theft, motor

vehicle theft, and drug violations (includes narcotics, marijuana, dangerous drugs, and other drug violations).

Home on Probation (HOP): one of the dispositions available to the court. A minor ordered HOP is usually released to the parent or guardian, to be supervised by a Deputy Probation Officer (DPO) in the community. DPOs are assigned to designated communities to work with minors, families, schools and other relevant resources to evaluate the minor's progress and monitor compliance with court orders. DPOs focus on providing case management services (assessment, orientation, contacts, service referrals, violations, court reports, etc.) to enforce compliance with expectations and court orders.

Informal Probation: supervision of a minor, in lieu of declaring a minor a ward of the court, for a period not to exceed six months. The supervision is based on a contractual agreement between a court and a minor's parents or guardian. The period of supervision may be extended.

Juvenile Halls: provide secure housing for both pre-adjudicated and post-disposition wards of the juvenile court. Additional accommodations are made for minors detained at juvenile halls pending trial in adult court.

Misdemeanor: crimes punishable by imprisonment in a county jail for up to one year and/or fine. Examples of misdemeanor offenses are assault and battery, petty theft, vandalism, disturbing the peace, alcohol-related offenses (includes drunk and liquor laws), and drug violations (includes marijuana and other drugs).

Probation Camps: provide intensive intervention in a residential setting over an average stay of twenty weeks. Upon commitment by the court, a minor receives health, educational, and family assessments that allow treatment tailored to meet individual needs. The goal of the program is to reunify the minor and family, to reintegrate the minor into the community, and to assist the minor in achieving a productive, crime free life.

RCL Level: rate classification level, used to denote the level of specialized care required for residential youth; higher numbers denote more intensive services.

Status Offense: an act that is only illegal because of the age of the offender. Status offenses include curfew violations, truancy, running away, and incorrigibility.

Suitable Placement: when sentencing a youth in juvenile court, a judicial officer may determine that the minor's family environment and/or emotional/psychiatric problems contributed to the minor's delinquent behavior and order that the minor be Suitably Placed. Most Suitable Placement minors are removed from their homes and placed in a safe environment (group home, psychiatric hospital, etc.) pending resolution of the minor's issues. Deputy Probation Officers work with the minor and the family to identify needed services and prepare case plans to assist them with accessing the services. Through monitoring the minor's progress, the DPO is able to determine what long term living arrangement would be in the best interest of the minor and develop/implement a plan (permanency plan) to return the minor to a safe and stable environment (reunification with family, emancipation, placement in a relative/non-relative home or long term foster care).

Teen Court: offers an alternative sanction in the form of a diversion program for first time juvenile offenders in lieu of delinquency proceedings. The court consists of a volunteer judicial officer, a court coordinator (either a DPO or a Reserve DPO) and a jury composed of six peers. Probation collaborates with the court, other law enforcement agencies, schools, attorneys, and community-based organizations in this program.

Traffic Court: a disposition indicating the case was transferred to the traffic court for processing.

Ward of the Court: a minor that has been placed under the jurisdiction/protection of the Juvenile court. In Delinquency Court, juvenile delinquency actions involve violations of criminal laws by a minor. If criminal allegations against a minor are substantiated, the minor is declared a Ward of the Court. The minor is then usually placed on probation, with terms and conditions designed to hold the minor accountable for his or her behavior. The court must balance the interests of public safety and protection, the importance of victim restitution and the best interests of the minor when deciding what conditions of probation to impose, and where to place the minor, if removal from the home is necessary.

** Definitions were derived from the Probation Department website and/or Department of Justice report.*

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