



Circuit Court of St. Louis County
105 South Central Avenue
Clayton, Missouri 63105

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

**ST. LOUIS COUNTY FAMILY COURT MAKING PROGRESS IN REDUCING
RACIAL DISPARITIES IN JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM**

CLAYTON, MO – May 18, 2018 – A report released today by the St. Louis County Family Court shows that progress continues to be made in addressing racial disparities within the juvenile justice system.

The report looked at how thousands of cases involving black youth in 2017 were handled at each step in the legal process. Those steps included: informal referrals to court for alleged misdemeanors that did not result in filed charges; secure detention before adjudication; adjudication; formal disposition for cases that resulted in commitment to the Missouri Department of Youth Services; and certification as adults for serious felonies. The report is required to be made twice a year under the terms of an agreement reached between the Family Court and the U.S. Department of Justice in 2016.

The report found that the Court has made significant progress in reducing disparities in the rates at which black and white juveniles are held in secure detention, and the rate at which petitions were filed against them.

In 2017, the court reduced the rate at which black juveniles were detained relative to white juveniles by 21 percent from the prior year. Between 2016 and 2017, the report showed a 19 percent reduction in the rate at which black juveniles had petitions filed against them relative to white juveniles. Additionally the report found that legal factors – and **not** race – were the basis for pre-adjudication detention and adjudication decision-making.

“Everyone at the family court is fully committed to treating all juveniles in a fair and equitable manner and eliminating disparities,” said Family Court Administrator Ben Burkemper.

The disproportionate representation of black youth at every point in the juvenile justice system stems from the fact that more black youth than white youth are being referred to court by police and school districts throughout the County.

The report found that black youth aged 10-17 accounted for 69 percent of all court referrals in 2017, although they only make up 31 percent of the population in St. Louis County. Not only were black youth more likely to be referred to court than whites, they also were more likely to be held in secure detention and charged with crimes.

“We recognize that this is a community challenge that requires a community response – upstream of the Courthouse,” Burkemper said. “That is why we are focusing a lot of effort on strengthening these partnerships to deal with problems at the source, before kids are sent to us. The good news is that we all share the same goal: helping kids succeed in school, remain in their communities and stay on track.”

For the last nine months, the Family Court has been working closely with a network of partners in law enforcement, school districts, and community service agencies to find alternatives that will keep youth out of the system in the first place. Earlier this week, the Family Court received a “What’s Right with the Region” award from FOCUS St. Louis for promoting racial equity through its ongoing collaboration aimed at finding community-based alternatives to juvenile detention.

A complete copy of the report can be found here: <http://stlcourtscourts.com/SecondBi-AnnualReportonDMCFinal.pdf>

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