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## **Study finds many Mass. youth in child welfare system enter juvenile justice system**

BOSTON – Too many children in the Massachusetts juvenile justice system were previously involved with our child welfare system, according to a report released today by Citizens for Juvenile Justice (CfJJ). CfJJ notes that smarter interventions and investments can help support these children and prevent their entry into the justice system.

Youth currently or previously involved with the Department of Children and Families (DCF) make up over 70% of the Department of Youth Services (DYS) committed caseload, according to *Missed Opportunities: Preventing Youth in the Child Welfare System from Entering the Juvenile Justice System*. CfJJ released the findings today in collaboration with Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center (MassBudget), the Kids Count organization for Massachusetts. CfJJ and MassBudget are also hosting an event today with the Massachusetts Bar Association, featuring Health & Human Services Undersecretary Alice Moore and other experts, to discuss the findings.

The report finds that youth who crossed into the juvenile justice system had much higher number of placements than most children in DCF care. While the median number of lifetime placements for children in DCF care is three, most youth in the study had far more. Among the youth CfJJ studied, 39% of girls had more than six placements, and 15% had 11 or more. Among boys, 27% had six or more, and 10% had 11 or more. One boy had experienced 37 different placements while under DCF supervision.

While attention is now focused on ensuring safety when children first encounter the child welfare system, the report shows that it is also critical to ensure that the system supports healthy development throughout childhood and adolescence.

“Children experience placement changes as a traumatic loss and a rejection,” said CfJJ Executive Director Naoka Carey. “On top of the emotional upheaval, this instability makes it difficult to do many of the things we associate with a normal childhood, such as finishing a school year or playing on a sports team. Children in care need the kind of security and opportunity to form bonds that any children need.”

MassBudget released a companion report outlining the funding for services that help kids and families in the child welfare system. That report finds that funding for some of these services has recently increased, but even with increases, funding may not be sufficient to meet the needs of these vulnerable children.

Jeff Bernstein, Senior Policy Analyst at MassBudget and author of their report, notes that measures that help stabilize children and their families are critical. "If we provide more supports for kinship care, where a relative or close family friend becomes a foster parent, and better supports for birth families and foster families, these could help more of our kids thrive."

Carey noted that investing in stable placements improves safety and also saves the state money in the long run. "Juvenile justice system involvement is enormously expensive, both in dollars and in pain to the family and community. A child involved in the juvenile justice system is more likely to be arrested as an adult and less likely to complete high school," she said.

DCF and DYS provided data for the study. "The crossover of kids from the child welfare to juvenile justice system is a national problem," said Judge Gail Garinger, the former Child Advocate and a member of an advisory group for the report. "Massachusetts is not alone in this. I find it very encouraging that these state agencies worked closely with CfJJ on this report and are eager to find ways to protect young people from unnecessary involvement in the delinquency system."

Other key findings of the report:

- **Boys and minorities are at higher risk of crossing over.**

Compared to the overall DCF population, multi-system youth were disproportionately boys (82% v. 50% of the DCF population) and black or Latino (60% v. 39%).

- **Youth became involved with the child welfare system at young ages.**

Within the group studied, 57% of boys and 59% of girls had their first DCF intake between birth and 5 years old.

- **They had a high number of placements and home removals.**

This was especially true for girls: 58% of dual-status youth had experienced at least one home removal, including 77% of girls and 53% of boys.

For a full copy of the report, please visit  
<http://www.cfjj.org/missedopportunities.php>

