



## Administrative Office of the Courts

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### Administrative Office of the Courts: Progress Update on Implementing Senate Bill 200

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Report for Juvenile Justice Oversight Council  
Submitted by Laurie K. Dudgeon, AOC Director  
July 28, 2020

The Administrative Office of the Courts provides essential, constitutionally mandated services to the public. Because court operations must continue during the COVID-19 pandemic, we have taken numerous steps to minimize risk and protect the health and safety of court personnel and the public. This report will provide an update on the following:

- Response to COVID-19
- Family, Accountability, Intervention, and Response Team Outcomes
- Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities

#### **Response to COVID-19**

Throughout the pandemic, the Department of Family & Juvenile Services has successfully used virtual platforms for diversion programming, screenings, assessments, telehealth services and ongoing case monitoring, which links youth to resources necessary for their success.

As of May 31, our court designated workers were actively managing 3,282 diverted youth complaints. CDW staff are providing remote diversion programming, online educational tools, youth care packages, self-care projects and youth development activities.

Since February, there has been a significant decrease (68%) in the number of complaints resulting in detention. At the end of May, 78 juveniles were in residential Youth Development Centers statewide and 34 youth were residing in Department of Juvenile Justice group homes. CDW staff are to be commended for helping to keep young people out of detention during the pandemic and for connecting youth and their families with much-needed services for housing, unemployment benefits, food and clothing.

#### **FAIR Team Outcomes**

As the public health crisis unfolded across the commonwealth, court designated specialists swiftly began facilitating FAIR Team meetings through virtual platforms to ensure youth and families continued to receive needed services and supports. FAIR Teams continue to be effective in reducing the number of young people entering the formal court system. From Jan. 1-June 30, 2020, FAIR Teams reviewed 921 new cases. Of the 934 cases that were closed during that timeframe, 74% of the cases were resolved outside of court while 26% were referred to court for formal processing.

## **Addressing Racial and Ethnic Disparities**

**Virtual Dialogue: Understanding the Current Racial Tensions.** The recent deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor at the hands of police and Ahmaud Arbery by armed white men have reignited protests and calls for racial justice in the United States and across the world.

Recognizing how these events have affected court employees, the AOC offered a virtual session titled “Understanding the Current Racial Tension” on June 10. Participants were given space to openly discuss strong feelings and talk about their anxieties while gaining a better understanding of themselves and others. The AOC offered a follow-up session June 24 to reevaluate the needs of staff two weeks later.

Steven D. Kniffley Jr., PsyD, MPA, ABPP, HSP, presented on racial stress and trauma during both virtual sessions. He is the associate director for the Center for Behavioral Health at Spalding University and assistant professor in Spalding’s School of Professional Psychology.

**RED & COVID-19 Training.** As the pandemic continues to spike in several states, researchers are looking at why COVID-19 causes such disparate outcomes, from people with no symptoms to those who die from the coronavirus. The startling and disproportionate death rate among Black Americans has revealed persistent inequities.

Pastor Edward L. Palmer Sr. conducted a virtual training May 13 for employees from the Departments of Family & Juvenile Services, Pretrial Services and Specialty Courts. Pastor Palmer discussed the correlation between race and COVID-19 and employees gained awareness of the racial and ethnic disparities found in the health-care system. Pastor Palmer is a certified diversity trainer who works to eliminate racial and ethnic disparities within the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.

**Equity Committee.** The Department of Family & Juvenile Services’ Equity Committee met July 8 to examine the department’s strategic plan. Committee members spent the day reviewing subcommittee recommendations, which outlined individual goals and measurable indicators of success for the next three years.

The Equity Committee also continued to evaluate the Court Designated Worker Program’s policies and procedures for any racial or ethnic impropriety and reviewed a draft of the statewide assessment survey, which will be released to staff in August 2020.

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The AOC will continue to adjust and adapt policies and procedures to ensure the safety of court employees, young people and families throughout the duration of the pandemic.

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