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# **An Examination of Ethnic Disparities in Arizona's Juvenile Justice System**

## **Final Technical Report**

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## Executive Summary

Research on disproportionate minority contact in the juvenile justice system has generally concluded that Black youth are subject to disparate treatment such that they typically are more likely than White youth to face more formal and more punitive treatment at the various decision points in the juvenile court process. Research on disparate treatment for Latino youth in the juvenile justice system has been relatively rare, and the results of those studies have provided inconsistent evidence on the nature of disparities between Latino and White youth. This study sought to address such gaps in the research with a comprehensive assessment of juvenile justice case processing for a two-year period in the state of Arizona. Using a data set particularly well-suited for this examination, we believe the results of this study contribute meaningfully to the literature on ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system.

Using data from the state of Arizona that included 75,316 referrals to the juvenile justice system over the two-year period from January 1, 2013 to December 31, 2014, we applied five research questions to data on eight distinct decision points. We controlled for key legal factors such as the referral offense, the number of prior referrals, and whether the youth was involved in dependency court in addition to juvenile court. The level of detail in the data allowed us to investigate whether disparity varied depending on the type of referral offense and the county in which the youth was referred.

Does disparity affecting Latino youth exist statewide in Arizona? If we look at rates of referral to juvenile court, we find that White youth are actually more likely to be referred to juvenile court than Latino youth. This is in contrast to the patterns of referral rates for Black and Native American youth—both groups are more likely than White youth to be referred to juvenile court, with Black youth referred more than twice as often as White youth. Once they are referred to juvenile court, however, there are a number of ways that Latino youth experience their processing in the juvenile justice system disproportionately more punitive than White youth. Latino youth are underrepresented in diversions from formal court processing, and overrepresented in direct filings to adult court, in pre-adjudicatory secure detention, in petitions filed for formal juvenile court processing, and in commitments to correctional facilities at disposition.

Does observed disparity affecting Latino youth remain when we control for other factors that might impact juvenile justice decision making? Based on multivariate analyses that controlled for the influence of age, gender, number of priors, most serious current offense, and dependency status, we find that the disparities identified above remain even after taking into account these other factors. Across the state, if they were referred to juvenile court, Latino youth were less likely than White youth to receive an opportunity to avoid formal court processing and more likely to experience more punitive treatment at the various decision points.

Does disparity affecting Latino youth vary by county? We did find a pattern of results that was generally consistent across the different counties. This pattern is that Latino youth are less likely than White youth to be referred to juvenile court and to be diverted from formal court processing, but more likely to be securely detained prior to adjudication, have a petition filed for formal court processing, and be committed to a correctional facility after disposition. We did find















































































































































































