



In-Routes and “On the Outs”: Examining Dually-Involved Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color’s Pathways into Juvenile Justice and Reentry Experiences in Massachusetts

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Abstract

Youth involved with the child welfare system (CWS) are entering the juvenile justice system (JJS) at rates far higher than their peers, and Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color (BIYOC) represent a disproportionate percentage of youth with dual child welfare and juvenile justice involvement. This phenomenon is also reflected in Massachusetts. Scholarship on dual-involvement focuses on youth demographics and their experiences within the CWS and JJS. However, less attention has been paid to dually-involved youths’ experiences as they navigate exiting the JJS and reentering their communities (reentry). Furthermore, the scholarship on reentry in general is primarily quantitative, focusing more on outcomes such as recidivism, and less on the subjective reentry experiences of youth, and those of BIYOC in particular. This interdisciplinary study employs qualitative methods including thematic analysis of state agency documents and semi-structured interviews (N=7) with dually-involved youth in reentry to 1) examine the pathways that MA state agencies identify as contributing to the juvenile justice population, with a specific focus on child welfare involvement as a potential pathway; and 2) understand the subjective reentry experiences of BIYOC and their hopes and goals for the future beyond incarceration. State agency documents were collected using a set of keywords pertaining to child welfare and juvenile justice involvement and analyzed using thematic analysis to delineate pathways into JJS. Semi-structured interviews were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis. Project findings will be leveraged to inform MA reentry interventions and policies that promote BIYOC’s flourishing and contribute to positive future trajectories.

Research Questions

Research Question 1: What pathways do Massachusetts child-serving agencies identify as contributing to the juvenile justice population in Massachusetts, especially for Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color?

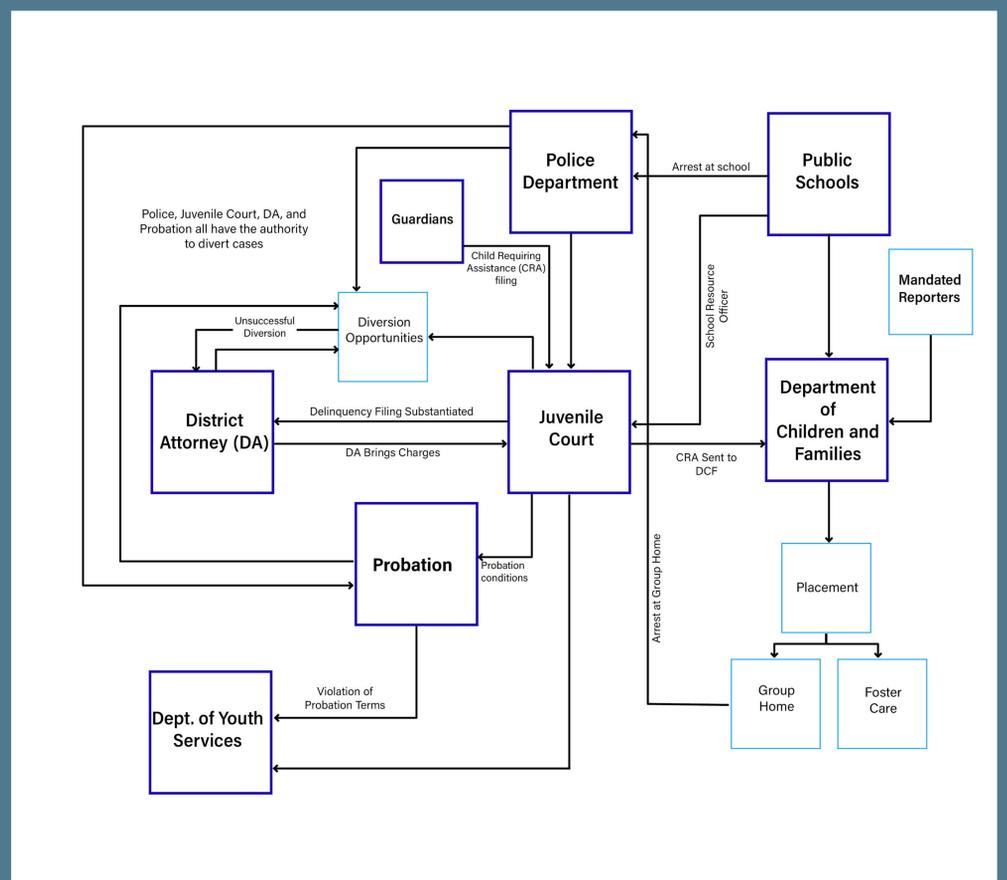
Research Question 2: How do dually-involved youth, and especially Black, Indigenous, and Youth of Color transitioning out of the juvenile justice system, experience and navigate reentry in Massachusetts?

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Results

RQ1: Pathways into the MA Juvenile Justice System



RQ2: Dually-Involved BIYOC Community Reentry Experiences

Theme 1: A Continuum of Care, and a Revolving Door

“Yeah, after I got committed? Well, I been locked up like 10 times after I been committed. Cause they can pull you in for like bracelets and stuff like that but like it’ll be like 7 to 15 – like those are the time periods of days. 1 to 7 days, 10 to 15 days, 15 to 30.. daysit’s pretty much from a 15 to 30 [days] and down, you don’t have to make a relapse prevention plan but if you get like a 1 to 3 [months]? Gotta make a relapse prevention program. I only had a 1 to 3 two times and made two relapse prevention plans.” (Youth 2)

Theme 2: Freedom, and Free Stuff

“Before DYS, I had everything I needed, but not everything I wanted.” (Youth 1)

“I feel bad for these other kids, ‘cause I found this job through DYS and they do work with this organization and it’s just for DYS kids. And if I wasn’t in there, I wouldn’t have gotten this job. So I feel bad for the other kids.” (Youth 7)

Theme 3: Get a Job and Stay Out of Trouble

“Honestly? Well the worst thing I was worried about was moreso like, ugh, like work. Work definitely, Definitely work. Because, well still kind of a little bit struggling with that kind of, you know. Just like the lack of consistency. I mean it’s easier. Like let’s say when I was locked up, I was like ‘yeah, I’m gonna get a job.’ Like you best believe I thought I was gonna get a job [laughs] but when you come out it’s definitely hard because now you’re actually living here so yeah you got something in order, like you get your things in order like while they’re still on you about it but once you start drifting away you’re on your own...” (Youth 1)

Conclusions

- Agencies have broad level understanding of pathways into JJS, but not in depth on MA specific mechanisms
- Documents in this area are scarce, especially on reentry for dually-involved youth
- There are no stakeholder perspectives or community engaged work in this area (e.g. Community Engagement Boards)
- Youth see reentry as non-linear process, threat of going back in looming
- Youth see successful reentry and “staying out of trouble” as linked to employment
- Key resources not provisioned until youth is DYS committed