



Dear Colleagues,

The Administration for Children and Families' (ACF) Children's Bureau (CB), and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP) remain committed to addressing the complex needs of young people who navigate both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Our collective focus aims to support youth through multiple systems, fostering opportunities for their long-term stability and well-being.

We encourage investment in prevention to assist families in crisis and diminish the likelihood of youth entering either system. Experience shows that young people flourish with the support of caring adults in their community and minimal system involvement. Accordingly, the CB and OJJDP commend child welfare and juvenile justice agencies for their collaborative efforts, emphasizing the importance of integrating the perspectives of young people and families with lived experience. These efforts contribute to the reduction of racial and ethnic disparities, the stabilization of families through community-based crisis support, and the participation in initiatives aimed at benefiting justice-involved youth within various jurisdictions. Data from the National Report on Court Improvement Program Projects and Initiatives FY 2023 indicates that 14 jurisdictions are actively working on projects addressing the needs of crossover youth, highlighting a growing recognition of the importance of these efforts.

## **Background on Dually Involved Youth**

Significant data, including a National Institute of Justice report, "OJJDP Dual System Youth Design Study: Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Pursuing a National Estimate of Dual System Youth" indicates that over half of the youth in juvenile justice system have prior engagements with child welfare services.<sup>1</sup> This population, affecting millions of young people nationwide, tends to have longer histories in child welfare, more out-of-home-placements, and higher recidivism than youth who experience either system alone.<sup>2</sup> Highlighting the need for strengths-based interventions that prioritize the well-being and success of these young individuals.

---

<sup>1</sup> Denise C. Herz and Carly B. Dierkhising, "[OJJDP Dual System Youth Design Study: Summary of Findings and Recommendations for Pursuing a National Estimate of Dual System Youth](#)," Final report to the National Institute of Justice, grant number 2015-CV-BX-0001, March 2019, NCJ 252717, 19. P. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Barbara Tatem Kelley and Paul A. Haskins, "Dual System Youth: At the Intersection of Child Maltreatment and Delinquency," NIJ Journal 283, October 2021, <https://nij.ojp.gov/topics/articles/dual-system-youth-intersection-child-maltreatment-and-delinquency>.



Concerns are particularly acute regarding the disproportionate and adverse outcomes for African American<sup>3</sup>, Native American, girls<sup>4</sup> and LGBTQI<sup>5</sup> youth. It is essential to champion interventions incorporating cultural considerations into safety, healing, and growth strategies led by communities to address these disparities effectively.

Research underscores the optimal outcomes for children who remain within family or community settings instead of congregate care<sup>6</sup>. Achieving this requires proactive intervention and investment in strategies that favor family settings, ensuring family engagement in their children’s positive development even under challenging circumstances.

## **Our Shared Vision and Values**

Guided by our core values, we strive for equity fairness, and the well-being of all youth involved in our systems. Every young person deserves recognition of their inherent dignity and potential. Our commitment is to foster empathy, understanding, and respect, ensuring that our approaches are healing-centered, culturally affirming, and informed by individuals with lived experience. These efforts are tailored to address the unique needs of each youth.<sup>7</sup>

The complexity of the challenges faced by dually involved youth necessitates a collaborative and innovative approach from all partners. By breaking down barriers between child welfare and juvenile justice and engaging with communities, families, and young people, we can foster a coordinated response. Our focus includes investing in accessible community-based services, leveraging aligned policies, and blending funding streams to provide stabilizing services that maintain youths in their homes.

## **Conclusion**

We invite all child welfare and juvenile justice professionals to align with us in this critical mission. Our collective efforts can foster a more equitable and effective

---

<sup>3</sup> Dierkhising, C. B., Herz, D., Hirsch, R. A., and Abbott, S. 2019. System backgrounds, psychosocial characteristics, and service access among dually involved youth: A Los Angeles case study. *Youth Violence and Juvenile Justice* 17(3): 309–329

<sup>4</sup> Halemba, G. J., and Siegel, G. C. 2011. *Doorways to Delinquency: Multisystem Involvement of Delinquent Youth in King County (Seattle)*. Pittsburgh, PA: National Center for Juvenile Justice

<sup>5</sup> Irvine, A., and Canfield, A. 2016. The overrepresentation of lesbian, gay, bisexual, questioning, gender nonconforming, and transgender youth within the child welfare to juvenile justice crossover population. *Journal of Gender, Social Policy and the Law* 24(2): Article 2

<sup>6</sup> Cutuli, J. J., Goerge, R. M., Coulton, C., Schretzman, M., Crampton, D., Charvat, B., Lalich, B. N., Raithel, J. A., Gacitua, C., and Lee, E. L. 2016. From foster care to juvenile justice: Exploring characteristics of youth in three cities. *Children and Youth Services Review* 67: 84–94

<sup>7</sup> Exploring Federal Supports for Transition-Age Youth: A report out to the Federal Children’s Bureau (2023), Washington, DC.



approach, reduce disparities, and support the success of our youth. We recognize the significant progress made through trauma-informed, healing-centered care and integrated services models. By centering our work on young people and families with lived experience, supporting initiatives that address disparities, and support family stabilization efforts, we contribute to a brighter future for our youth.

In partnership and with shared resolve,

Rebecca Jones Gaston  
Commissioner  
Administration for Children and Families

Liz Ryan  
Administrator  
Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency and Prevention