

COUNTY OF MILWAUKEE
Inter-Office Communication

Date: July 8, 2025

To: Marcelia Nicholson, Chairwoman, Milwaukee County Board of Supervisors

From: Shakita LaGrant-McClain, Director, Department of Health and Human Services

Subject: An informational report from the Director, Department of Health and Human Services, providing an update on the Wisconsin Policy Forum report, 'Youth Must Be Served' and related DHHS strategic plan updates

File Type: Information

REQUEST

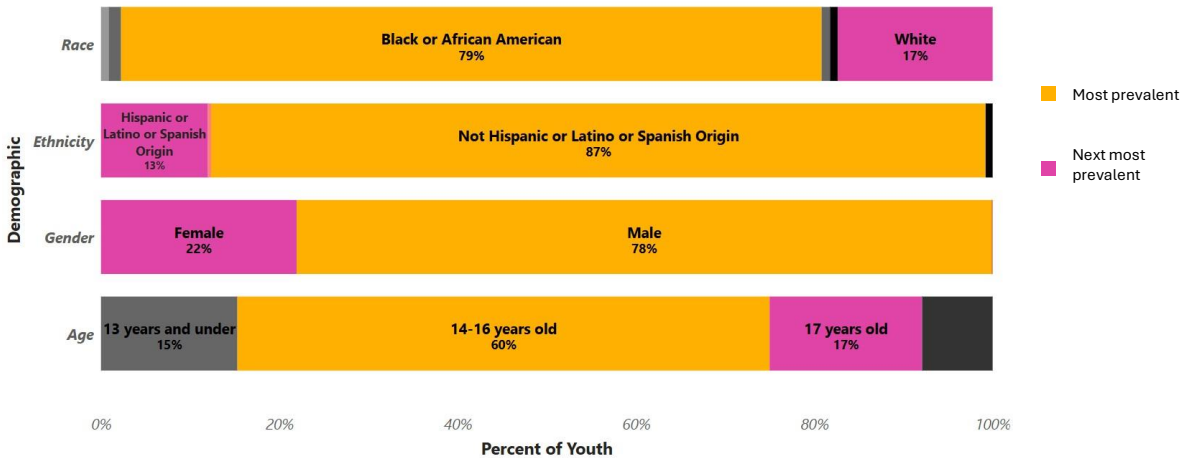
In May of 2025, the Wisconsin Policy Forum (WPF) released a report entitled, 'Youth Must Be Served, The Post-Pandemic State of Youth Justice in Milwaukee County'. This report highlights the state of the youth justice system in Milwaukee County since the Covid pandemic and provides information to justice system leaders and the broader Milwaukee County community. DHHS was a partner in providing relevant data and contextual information to help inform the report and will provide additional data and updates within this report. In addition, DHHS is providing an update on the progress of the DHHS strategic planning to support the youth justice operations within Milwaukee County.

BACKGROUND

The 'Youth Must Be Served' report highlights several key areas, to include examining the data around youth referred and served across the justice system, services and programs usage, use of secure care, including detention and correctional operations, and overall recidivism within the youth justice system. The report also included key recommendations, including examining the collective effectiveness in reducing recidivism and promoting positive outcomes for youth, as well as enhancing public safety. All of this takes resources to assess performance and outcomes, which DHHS is committed to supporting through collective efforts. Below is the breakdown in the demographics of youth served from 2022-2024.

Demographic Breakdown for Active Youth: 2022 -2024

- 2,728 total youth had at least one referral, petition, or adjudication to the youth justice system from 2022 to 2024
- The youth were most likely to identify as:
 - Black or African American (79%)
 - Not Hispanic or Latino or Spanish Origin (87%)
 - Male (78%)
 - 14-16 years old (60%)



The DHHS Strategic Plan for 2025-2027 names Community Safety as one of its four focus areas. To increase Community Safety, we are employing Growth-Focused Case Management, targeting increasing youth’s self-esteem and ability to set and achieve goals. This focus connects to another focus area of the plan: Mental Wellness. We are working on making a stronger connection between our youth behavioral health and youth justice teams to reach this goal.

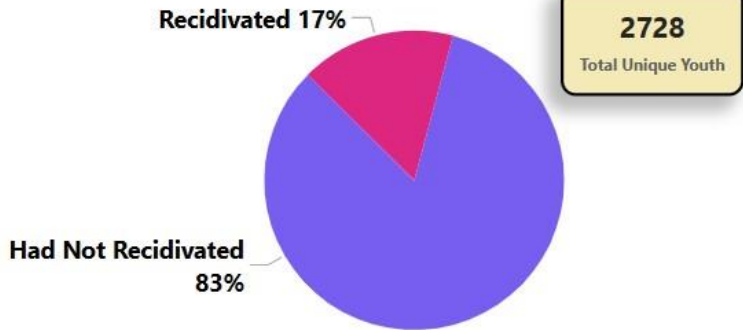
We are measuring our success in the Strategic Plan through examining community-level outcomes and program-level outcomes. For our Community Safety focus area, we’re measuring reduction in recidivism at the community level. At the program level, we’re measuring indicators that show an increase in self-esteem and achieving goals, including: % participants who set goals; % participants who achieve their goals; % participants connected to community resources; and % participants who increase pro-social behavior.

We recognize that many system and community partners want to know about recidivism, although we also want to highlight that recidivism is not the best way to measure success for a youth. Recidivism does not capture the full picture of a youth and positive outcomes that can be achieved, is not consistently defined across the system and its stakeholders, and is influenced by external factors, such as neighborhood crimes rates, youth’s mental health, and socioeconomic status. Focusing solely on recidivism can also reinforce biases within a system and discourages innovation within the youth justice system. The below chart shows the youth justice recidivism data for youth who were active within the youth justice system from 2022 through 2024:

Recidivism for Active Youth: 2022-2024

- 17% of 2,728 total youth from 2022 to 2024 recidivated
 - After their initial program enrollment (Probation), they received a new referral that resulted in either:
 - A new petition
 - A new deferred prosecution agreement (DPA)

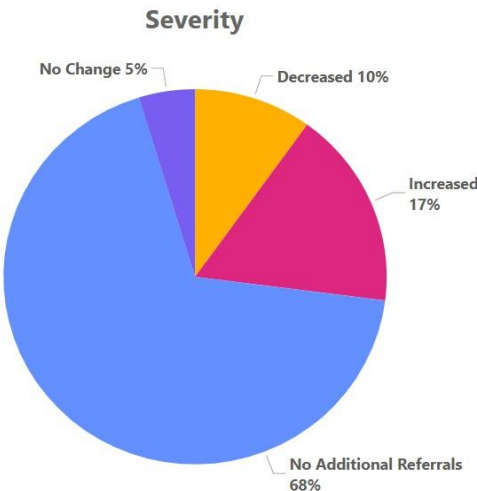
Recidivism Rate



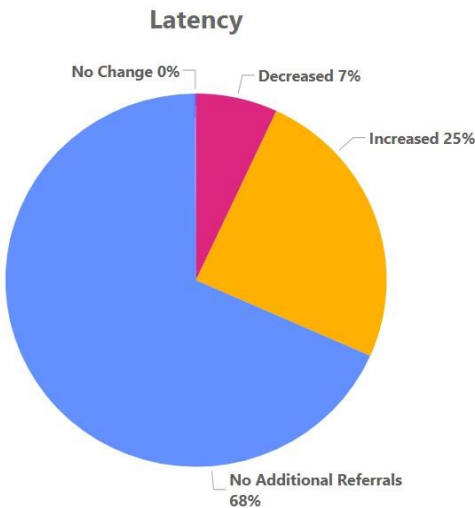
Another way to measure success for a youth is to look at desistance, which is the process by which a youth grow out of engaging in offending behaviors and criminal activity. We measure desistance at three points, examining whether the severity of the crime increased or decreased at each point: referrals to Youth Justice, petitions to the court, and adjudications.

Changes between Subsequent Referrals

83% of active youth showed positive development in severity desistance between referrals.



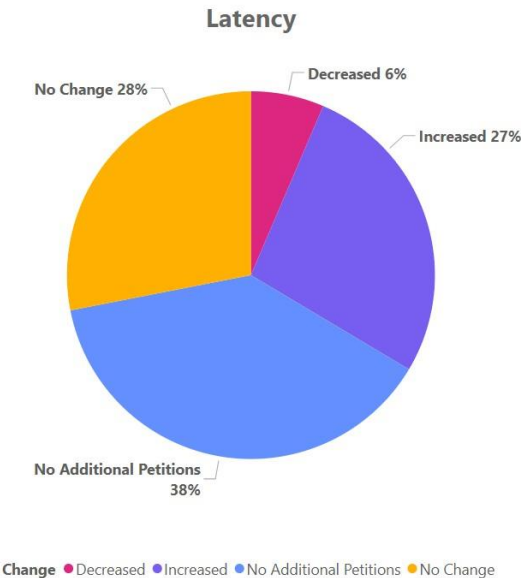
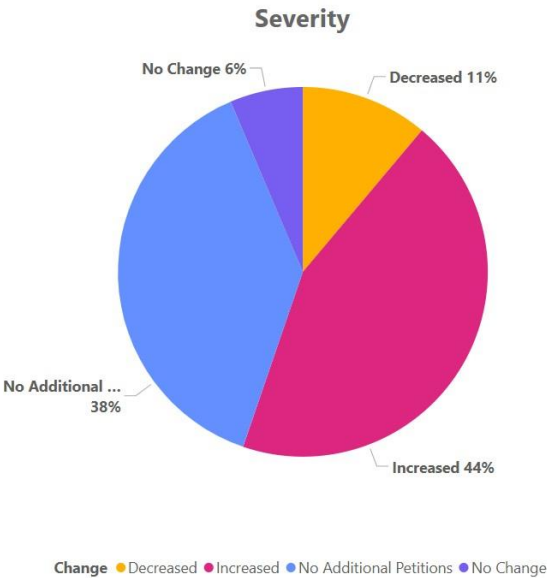
75% of active youth showed positive development in latency desistance between referrals.



Changes between Subsequent Petitions

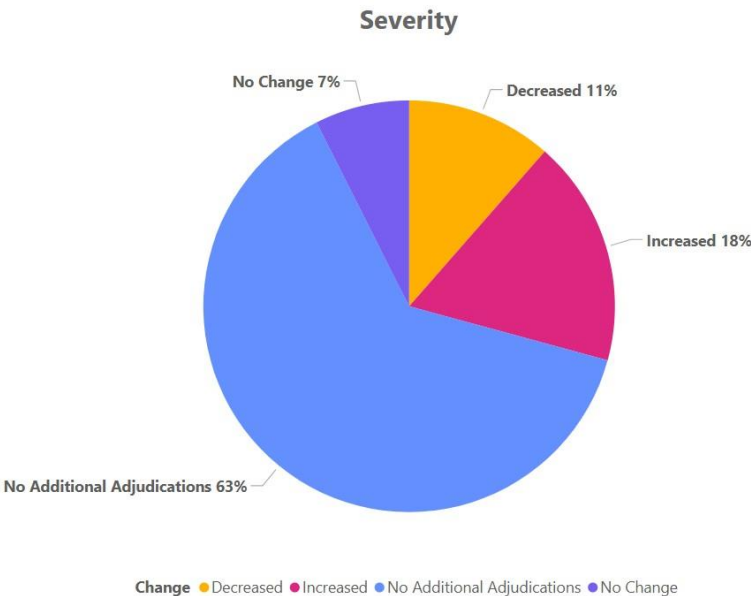
55% of active youth showed positive development in severity desistance between petitions.

94% of active youth showed positive development in latency desistance between petitions.



Changes between Subsequent Adjudications*

81% of youth active in the justice system showed positive development in severity desistance between adjudications.



* We are continuing to refine our process to calculate latency desistance at adjudication and will be able to share this finding in the near future.

We are currently implementing tracking mechanisms for program level indicators and look

forward to sharing outcomes as we progress. We are confident that as we pour into youth to support their positive development, not just through the youth justice system, but through our whole Children's System of Care, we will make a positive impact for the youth, families and communities across Milwaukee County.

ALIGNMENT TO STRATEGIC PLAN

DHHS continues to work toward building out the ecosystem of services, programs and support for justice involved youth and their families and is committed to working with youth to identify and meet their individual needs. This includes providing more targeted preventive and diversion services and initiatives. All these initiatives are occurring in the Milwaukee community and are focused not only on the youth but also their families and communities across Milwaukee County. This programming meets the youth where they are in unique ways that are individualized to their needs. DHHS is also committed to seeking out additional funding and other resources to support this work and engaging others across the county for a collective impact.

FISCAL EFFECT

This report is informational and there is no fiscal effect.

TERMS

N/A

VIRTUAL MEETING INVITES

Shakita LaGrant-McClain, DHHS Director
Kelly Pethke, CYFS Administrator

PREPARED BY:

Emily Kenney, DHHS Strategic Initiatives & Transformation Director
Kelly Pethke, CYFS Administrator

APPROVED BY:


Shakita LaGrant-McClain, DHHS Director

ATTACHMENTS:

Wisconsin Policy Forum, 'Youth Must Be Served' report

cc: County Executive David Crowley
Hon. Karl Ashley, Chief Judge
Mary Jo Meyers, Chief of Staff, County Executive's Office