

New Report Shows Florida's Education and Juvenile Justice Systems Failing Black Girls

New research finds Florida Black girls are punished disproportionately, receiving two times more school suspensions, arrests, and incarceration than other girls

TALLAHASSEE, FLORIDA, UNITED STATES, March 11, 2021 /EINPresswire.com/ -- New research by the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center, *Sounding the Alarm: Criminalization of Black Girls in Florida*, finds Black girls in Florida are disproportionately punished at nearly every disciplinary point in the education and juvenile justice systems. The findings are relevant to bringing forth the overdue justice and educational reforms needed to support the wellbeing of girls and young women.

Although Black girls account for just 21% of the girl population in Florida, they are more than two times overrepresented in:

- Out-of-school suspensions for girls (49%)
- Incidents involving girls and law enforcement in schools eligible for civil citation (49%)
- Arrests of girls (45%); arrests of girls under 12 and younger (55%)
- Probation of girls (52%)
- Incarceration of girls (47%)
- Girls' transferred/charged into the adult criminal justice system (51%)

Schools remain primary gateway for juvenile justice involvement

According to DJJ data, officers arrested more than 3,000 Black girls in schools and their communities in 2019-20. The youngest Black girl arrested was just six years old. Of the 524 girls arrested who were 12 years old and younger, Black girls represented 55%. In the community, 1,292 Black girls were eligible for an alternative to arrest (e.g. civil citation) but 43% were still arrested. In addition, justice system officials placed over 850 Black girls on juvenile probation, incarcerated 101 (14 for a technical violation of probation as their most serious offense) and transferred 19 Black girls to the adult system in Florida.

"While the disparate discipline rates among girls are troubling, what's equally disturbing is the lack of awareness of how historical trauma and racial bias impact our day-to-day interactions with girls of color. Black girls do not misbehave more than their white peers, but their behaviors are responded to much more harshly," stated Vicky Basra, President/CEO of the Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center.

The report confirms that schools are a primary gateway for pushing Black girls into the juvenile justice system. Preliminary data analysis by the Policy Center showed that due to the school closure, the number of contacts with law enforcement decreased. Specifically in April–June 2020, there were only 6 contacts, in comparison to 250 contacts during the same prior period.

According to Roy Miller, president of The Children’s Campaign, “As children return back to school in larger numbers, The Children’s Campaign and child advocates throughout Florida are deeply concerned that the disproportionate arrests and discipline of Black girls will begin to soar again.”

Researchers analyzed both national and state data including statistics from the U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights, Florida Department of Education, Florida Department of Juvenile Justice, as well as the Florida Department of Health Youth Substance Abuse Survey and Youth Risk Behavior Survey.

Deep disparity among Florida counties

There are stark geographical imbalances regarding the response to Black girls. Fifteen counties -- Alachua, Brevard, Broward, Duval, Escambia, Highlands, Lee, Manatee, Marion, Orange, Palm Beach, Pinellas, Polk, St. Lucie, and Volusia -- had particularly high overrepresentation of Black girls in juvenile arrests and incarceration: Ten counties arrested more than ten Black girls under the age of 12.

Several recommendations were presented in the report to include enacting policies that ban suspensions of Pre-K to 3rd grade students; setting limits on arrests for youth under the age of 12 (with some exceptions based on severity of offense); funding for increased school mental health services; increasing utilization of juvenile civil citations; having school and community leaders examine educational and discipline disparities, engaging girls in the community response and more.

“The disproportionate trends among Black girls entering the system at young ages equips community leaders to bring about long overdue changes that will immediately change the trajectory of Black girls and their families,” stated Vanessa Patino Lydia, Ph.D., vice president of research and planning, Delores Barr Weaver Policy Center.

A copy of the [Sounding the Alarm report can be accessed here](#).

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