

Date: June 26, 2006

To: Data Subcommittee, CHINS Task Force

Subj: Data Diagnostic and Recommendations

From: Sara Mogulescu, Claire Shubik, and Arnold Son

Introduction

At the request of Senator Karen Spilka, the Vera Institute of Justice (Vera)¹ conducted a diagnostic review of existing data collected and reported by the various state agencies that interface with the Children in Need of Services (CHINS) system. The purpose of this review was to support the Data Subcommittee – a working group of the statewide CHINS Task Force – in its efforts to empirically assess CHINS system performance with an eye toward identifying strengths, weaknesses, and areas for further examination. Over the course of several weeks, a team of Vera staff conducted interviews with, and reviewed documentation from, various state agencies to analyze existing CHINS data capacity. The diagnostic review involved an exploration of CHINS-related data maintained by the Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court, the Department of Social Services, the Department of Mental Health, the Executive Office of Health and Human Services, and the Department of Youth Services.² This memorandum presents a summary of Vera's findings and sets forth three recommendations regarding potential strategies for data collection going forward.

In brief, based on our review of the CHINS data maintained by the agencies we met with, existing data leaves many questions unanswered about how the CHINS system currently operates, and does not readily provide baseline information regarding statewide system performance. Consequently, prospective data collection strategies may be necessary if the Task Force chooses to conduct an empirical analysis of CHINS system performance.

This memorandum more fully details this conclusion and sets forth three potential strategies for obtaining baseline CHINS system data. To provide an analytical

¹ Vera is a not-for-profit organization based in New York City dedicated to making government practices more fair, humane, and efficient. Over the past four years, Vera has provided technical assistance to multiple jurisdictions, primarily in New York State, on the issue of status offender policy and programming. The majority of this assistance has focused on data collection and analysis as a means for empirically driving policy.

² A list of the CHINS-related data sources in each agency will be forthcoming.

framework, the first section sets out four key areas of inquiry that have been used by policymakers in New York State to empirically assess status offender system functioning. The second section summarizes the data presently collected and reported by the various CHINS stakeholder agencies in Massachusetts. The final section offers three suggestions to guide a prospective data collection process, if the Task Force decides to pursue that path.

Framework for Inquiry

For the past four years, in response to changes to New York State's status offender or Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) laws, Vera has helped more than 23 New York State counties use data to examine status offender system performance. Seeking to determine which strategies were appropriate in the wake of legislative changes, Vera worked with jurisdictions to gather baseline information to understand how youth traveled through PINS systems in New York State. PINS data inquiries in New York honed in on four primary decision-points in the status offender process: application (or intake), diversion outcomes, court process, and disposition. In Massachusetts, too, an examination of each of these system points will enable the identification of baseline CHINS system performance data.

CHINS Application. An examination of CHINS applications, or the CHINS intake population, provides insight into the types of families and youth seeking help through the CHINS system: Who are the clients the system is serving? Are they girls? Boys? Latino? White? How old are they? Where in the state do they come from? What needs are they presenting with at the point of application? In addition, data on who is filing applications (schools, parents, police) informs the types of responses the system should be prepared to offer. For example, in jurisdictions where the rate of school applications exceeds that of parental applications, the development of school-oriented and truancy-focused responses may be appropriate.

Diversion Outcomes. An analysis of diversion practices and outcomes is extremely important to understanding how CHINS youth travel through the system. Data relating to CHINS diversion can provide insight into the types of youth and families that are being referred to, and successfully served by, diversion services as compared to the types of youth and families who typically bypass diversion options and proceed to court. Similarly, diversion data can indicate differences in local patterns and practices, either due to service availability or administrative protocols.

Court Process. Much can be learned by gathering data that describes the types of CHINS cases that are the subject of CHINS petitions. Understanding the types of youth that comprise the CHINS court population may lead to an identification of programs and tools for judges that are responsive to the CHINS youth they see. Jurisdictions can often draw clues regarding the petitioned population from data describing the use of pre-adjudication (or temporary) placements or court-based mental health evaluations. Data relating to court processing times can also be probative because the longer a case remains open, the

greater exposure a youth has to potential out-of-home placement. An examination of court processing times allows stakeholders to identify and address unnecessary delays.

Disposition. By examining dispositional data, policy-makers can assess baseline costs and outcomes associated with the CHINS process. For example, dispositional analyses can offer insight into the types of cases (demographically and substantively) that result in dispositional placements versus those that tend to result in a community based disposition. Such analyses can provide the foundation for a discussion around targeted placement alternatives for CHINS.

Data Review

This section summarizes data availability and capacity at each of the four system points identified above.

CHINS Application. Information regarding CHINS applications in Massachusetts are recorded in four ways: (1) paper files held at the Clerks Office in each judicial district; (2) case-level information maintained in the Juvenile Court Record and Information System (JURIS) database in each judicial district; (3) aggregate annual extractions culled and compiled by the Administrative Office of the Juvenile Court (AOJC); and (4) by the Department of Probation.

Of these sources, the most readily accessible aggregate CHINS application data is maintained by the AOJC. The AOJC generates an annual report that includes information on the total number of CHINS applications, the gender breakdown of CHINS applications, and the number of CHINS applications by judicial district. For example, in 2005, the AOJC's annual report indicated that girls comprised 48 percent of CHINS applications. Further, the report provided that the most CHINS applications were filed in Suffolk (1657) and the least in Berkshire (230). While these aggregate reports are exceptionally helpful, they do not include information on CHINS youths' age, race, and ethnicity at application.

A host of additional information is contained in paper files held at the Clerks Office in each judicial district. Paper copies of applications, stored on site, include the assigned docket number, the subject child's identifying information such as name and address, the child's date of birth, the parent's identifying information, the petitioner's identifying information, and the allegation against the subject child. The lack of an electronic collection mechanism, however, precludes easy compilation of these factors either by judicial district or statewide.

Some individual-level case information regarding CHINS applications is maintained in the Juvenile Court Record and Information System (JURIS). Much about JURIS remains unknown at the time of this writing. It is our understanding that JURIS may not keep automated records detailing the specific demographics of juvenile subjects. Further inquiry is needed to identify the types of aggregate inquiries that could be easily conducted through JURIS.

CHINS Diversion Outcomes. Based on the information we were able to review, there is no dedicated capacity in Massachusetts to capture and track CHINS diversion outcomes statewide.³

Court Process. Regarding the CHINS court process, data is available to track and analyze the total number of CHINS petitions statewide, the use of pre-adjudication placement for CHINS youth, the number of referrals for mental health evaluations, and the length of the CHINS court process.

The AOJC's aggregate annual report includes the total number of CHINS petitions, the gender breakdown of petitioned youth, and the number of petitions by judicial district. Like with applications, however, the reports do not include other aggregate figures such as race, ethnicity, age, petitioner, or allegation.

At present, the Department of Social Services (DSS) tracks information on all pre-adjudicated CHINS placements (these are also referred to as “temporary” placements). Agency representatives expressed some concern that in cases in which a youth has both a pre-adjudication placement order and a post-adjudication placement order, the former may be difficult to isolate and identify.

Data on petitioned CHINS youth who receive evaluations from the juvenile court clinic are available from the Department of Mental Health (DMH). DMH maintain records detailing both the number and percent of all petitioned CHINS who have DMH screenings. The agency also holds data on gender, race, language, custody, case type, evaluation type and service provider, the judge, the juvenile court, and contacts. Despite the detailed records, only about 4-11 percent of all petitioned CHINS youth are referred to DMH for evaluation and only a portion of those referred do not receive services from the Department of Mental Health.

Regarding court processing practice and time frames, JURIS contains extensive case management information on a case-level basis, including first hearing date, disposition date, and the date the case becomes inactive (for cases that involve post-dispositional hearings). Currently, this information only exists as case-level data and there is no automated capacity to aggregate.

Disposition. DSS maintains information on youth ordered into its custody or referred for court-ordered services at disposition. Thus, DSS can extract information on gender, race, and ethnicity for all CHINS youth ordered to placement or services. Moreover, DSS collects data regarding CHINS placement type, the nature of a dispositional service referral, removal reason, length of stay, and docket numbers for all CHINS youth ordered

³ Using aggregate CHINS application and petition data – drawn from the AOJC – it is possible to infer the number of CHINS cases successfully diverted from court (*i.e.*, the total number of applications minus the total petitions provide a proxy for the number of CHINS youth successfully diverted). Without additional information regarding youth demographics, geography, or the service landscape, however, such a proxy is not particularly probative.

into its care. Allegation and petition fields are not recorded consistently for the CHINS population.

A 2005 DSS data extract on CHINS placements is illustrative. In 2005, DSS counted 3,843 CHINS home removal episodes. Out of these, 2,078, or 54 percent, were for girls. When compared to the AOJC's report that girls comprised 48 percent of total applications in 2005, this figure may indicate that girls are not responding as well as boys to diversion and other pre-adjudication interventions.

Although DSS is a potentially robust source of CHINS dispositional data, officials expressed concern that field offices are not uniformly indicating when a court ordered referral for services or placement stems from a CHINS petition. Consequently, there is a possibility that the CHINS dispositional data available at DSS understates the actual totals in the field.

It remains unclear from our diagnostic review the extent to which other dispositional outcomes are used and whether information regarding alternative dispositional outcomes is maintained.

Additional Data Sources. In the course of this diagnostic review we also investigated data relating to CHINS collected by the Executive Office of Health and Human Services (EOHHS) and the Department of Youth Services (DYS). The data collected at these agencies may have value for tangential studies related to the possibility of Medicaid reimbursement for CHINS services (in the case of EOHHS) or the overlap of status offenses and delinquency (in the case of DYS). The data housed at these agencies, however, are not germane for constructing a basic overview CHINS system functioning.

Moving Ahead: Three Recommendations

Like many states, status offender data in Massachusetts is maintained by various stakeholder agencies and data collection practices are neither comprehensive nor uniform statewide. Our experience in New York State was much the same. Despite the fact that data was held across numerous agencies, jurisdictions seeking comprehensive insight into PINS system performance in New York could not rely solely on existing data sources. Building on our assessment of the available data relating to CHINS in Massachusetts, and our experience supporting data collection and analysis in New York, the following discussion offers three recommendations regarding possible next steps for the data subcommittee if it opts to pursue an empirical analysis of CHINS system.

(1) Analyze existing data sources and build on current capacity. As described above, a helpful first step might be to obtain and review the aggregate reports generated by the AOJC and DSS. Such reports will provide, in short order, the total number of CHINS applications, petitions, and dispositional orders of placement and services. Over the longer term, the utility of these reports might be enhanced by expanding the types of fields that are collected. For example, the inclusion of fields for race, ethnicity, age,

petitioner, and allegation will allow for a better understanding of the how different types of CHINS youth travel through, and have their needs met, by the CHINS system.

(2) Conduct a statewide CHINS data survey. Given the lack of accessible, comprehensive CHINS data capacity, another approach – and one employed by localities in New York State – might be to prospectively collect data on CHINS system performance. To that end, the data subcommittee might distribute a CHINS system survey to each judicial district statewide and designate an individual or agency to compile the requested fields from various stakeholder sources for a specific period of time (e.g., one month, six months, one year). The results could then be aggregated and analyzed by the subcommittee to identify baseline information regarding CHINS system performance.

We have attached a draft survey to illustrate the types of fields that might be useful to collect in a prospective exercise of this kind (See Appendix 1). This model was based on surveys that were distributed and compiled in New York State, and proved to be an easy-to-use format for comprehensive data collection and system analysis. To illustrate the types of information one could glean from a survey such as this one, we have also attached some graphical depictions that resulted from analysis of various data fields. (See Appendix 2.)

(3) Survey a smaller sample of judicial districts. Because a statewide data collection survey may be too time- and resource-intensive, another option is to distribute the data survey to three or four discrete localities around the state. By selecting a mix of geographically and demographically diverse jurisdictions, the subcommittee might be able to extrapolate conclusions about CHINS system function that are relevant to the statewide planning process.

Conclusion

The value of empirical analyses to inform system planning is significant. In Massachusetts, like in most other states, comprehensive data describing CHINS system process and performance is not readily available. Our review of existing CHINS data demonstrates that while some helpful CHINS data is housed in DSS and AOJC, prospective collection methods would have to be employed to gather a complete empirical system assessment. We have attached tools to guide a prospective data collection approach, if you decide as a group to take it on. In the end, our experience in New York State has shown that this type of analyses is invaluable, not only to support informed planning, but also to prompt establishment of new collaborative partnerships and to generate buy-in for change.

Appendix 1

Massachusetts CHINS SURVEY by Judicial District

Judicial District: _____

Main Contact: _____

Agency: _____ **Title:** _____ **Phone #:** _____

This survey is a means by which to collect data pertinent to the CHINS system in Massachusetts for the purposes of a system-wide evaluation. It is divided into the four sections that correspond to the four major discretion points within the CHINS process. Section 1 asks for data related to the universe of CHINS applications, Section 2 asks for information regarding the population of successfully diverted CHINS, Section 3 collects data about the court process for CHINS, and Section 4 asks for data regarding court dispositional outcomes.

This survey is geared towards a prospective data collection effort. Therefore, you will need to identify an appropriate time period for collection (e.g., one month, six months, one year).

SAMPLE

SECTION 1: CHINS Applications Data

Break down your judicial district's CHINS applications by **allegation, petitioner, age at the time of application, gender, race, and ethnicity**.

	CHINS Intakes
Time Period	XX/XX/200X- XX/XX/200X
<i>Total CHINS Applications</i>	
Allegations (note: may include multiple allegations per case):	
Truancy	
Runaway	
Stubborn: Parents	
Stubborn: School	
Other	
Petitioner:	
Parent	
School	
Police	
Other	
Age at Intake:	
11 and under	
12-13	
14-15	
16-17	
Gender:	
Male	
Female	
Race:	
Asian	
Black	
Native American	
White	
Other	
Ethnicity:	
Hispanic	
Non-Hispanic	

For each **gender** and **allegation** category, break down your judicial district's CHINS **applications** in for time period studied by **age at the time of application**.

	Age at CHINS Application For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X				
	11 and Under	12-13	14-15	16-17	Total
Total CHINS Applications					
Allegations:					
Truant					
Runaway					
Stubborn: Parents					
Stubborn: School					
Other					
Gender:					
Male					
Female					

1A. For each **allegation** category, break down your judicial district's CHINS **applications** by **gender**.

	Gender For applications from XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X		
	Male	Female	Total
Total CHINS Applications			
Allegations:			
Truant			
Runaway			
Stubborn: Parents			
Stubborn: School			
Other			

1B. For each **allegation** category, break down your judicial district's CHINS **applications** in **2007** by **month of application**.

	Month of Intake											
	For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X											
	Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun	Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
Total CHINS Applications												
Allegations:												
Truant												
Runaway												
Stubborn: Parents												
Stubborn: School												
Other												

SECTION 2: Diversion Data

Break down your successfully diverted CHINS intakes by **allegation, petitioner, age at the time of application, gender, race, ethnicity, and services provided**.

		CHINS Intake Outcomes For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X		
	Total # of CHINS Intakes	Opened for Diversion Services/ Closed as Adjusted — No Court Involvement	Opened for Diversion Services/ Diversion Terminated – Referred for Petition	Opened for Diversion Services/ Diversion Terminated – Matter not Pursued
Total				
Allegations:				
Truant				
Runaway				
Stubborn: Parent				
Stubborn: School				
Other				
Age at Intake:				
11 - under				
12-13				
14-15				
16-17				
Gender:				
Male				
Female				
Race:				
Asian				
Black				
Native American				
White				
Other				
Ethnicity:				
Hispanic				
Non- Hispanic				
Petitioner:				
Parent				
School				
Police				
Other				

SECTION 3: Court Process Data

Break down your petitioned CHINS population by **allegation, petitioner, age at the time of application, gender, race, ethnicity, and average case processing time**.

	Petitioned CHINS Population
Total For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X	
Allegations (note: may include multiple allegations per case):	
Truancy	
Runaway	
Stubborn: Parents	
Stubborn: School	
Other	
Petitioner:	
Parent	
School	
Police	
Other	
Age at Intake:	
11 and under	
12-13	
14-15	
16-17	
Gender:	
Male	
Female	
Race:	
Asian	
Black	
Native American	
White	
Other	
Ethnicity:	
Hispanic	
Non-Hispanic	
Average Court Processing Time, in Days	
Pre-adjudication Placements	
Referrals for Mental Health Evaluation	

3A. For each of the **demographic** categories, break down your judicial district's petitioned CHINS population for the time period studied by **average court processing time**.

Petitioned CHINS Population	Average Court Processing Time, in Days For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X
Allegations:	
Truancy	
Runaway	
Stubborn: Parents	
Stubborn: School	
Other	
Petitioner:	
Parent	
School	
Police	
Other	

3B. Track your judicial district's **pre-adjudication** or **temporary placements** by each of the following **demographic** categories.

Petitioned CHINS For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X	Pre-adjudication Placements For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X
Allegations:	
Truancy	
Runaway	
Stubborn: Parents	
Stubborn: School	
Other	
Petitioner:	
Parent	
School	
Police	
Other	
Age at Intake:	
11 and under	
12-13	
14-15	
16-17	
Gender:	
Male	
Female	
Race:	
Asian	
Black	
Native American	
White	
Other	
Ethnicity:	
Hispanic	
Non-Hispanic	

SECTION 4: Disposition Data

Break down your petitioned CHINS population by **demographics** and **dispositional outcomes**.

		CHINS Dispositional Outcomes For Time Period XX/XX/200X -- XX/XX/200X				
	Petitioned CHINS Population	Dismissal	DSS Placement	Court-ordered Services	DMH Placement	Other
Total						
Allegations:						
Truant						
Runaway						
Stubborn: Parent						
Stubborn: School						
Other						
Age at Intake:						
11 - under						
12-13						
14-15						
16-17						
Gender:						
Male						
Female						
Race:						
Asian						
Black						
Native American						
White						
Other						
Ethnicity:						
Hispanic						
Non- Hispanic						
Petitioner:						
Parent						
School						
Other						
Average Length of Stay for Program/Services	N/A	N/A				

Please attach any available reports that have been completed in reference to the CHINS population in your judicial district.

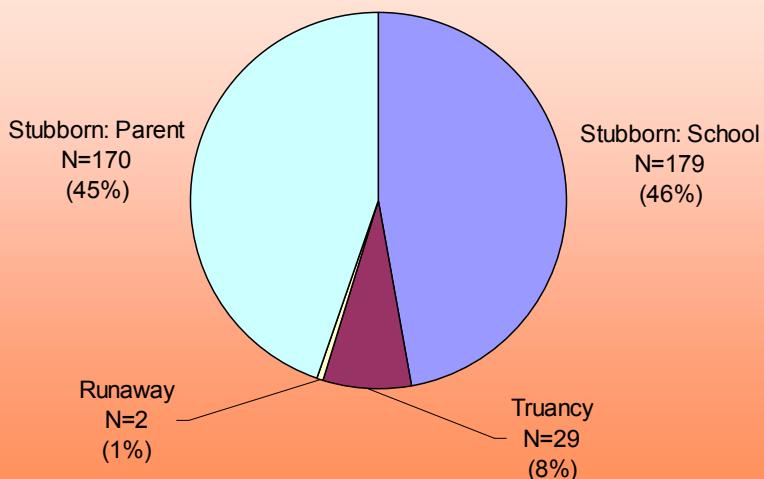
SAMPLE

Appendix 2

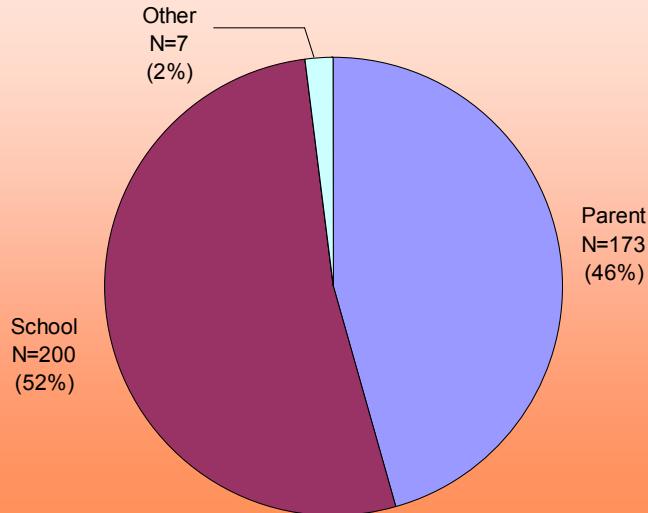
DO NOT DISTRIBUTE. STATISTICS REPRESENTED BY GRAPHS ARE FICTIONAL.

Judicial District X CHINS Assessment:
--/--/200_ to --/--/200_

**CHINS Applications:
by Allegation**

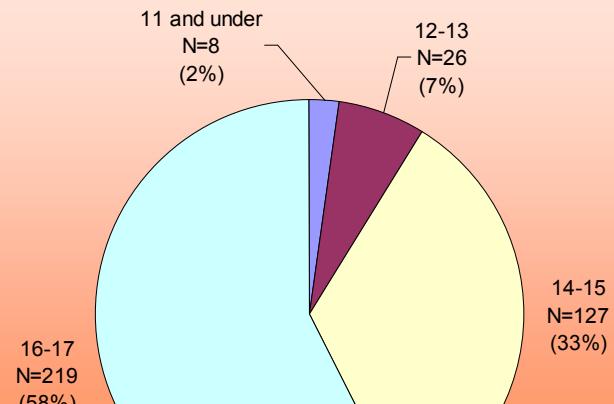


**CHINS Applications:
by Petitioner**

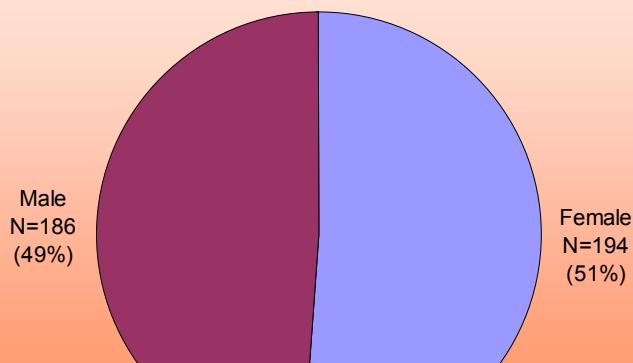


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CHINS Applications: by Age at Intake

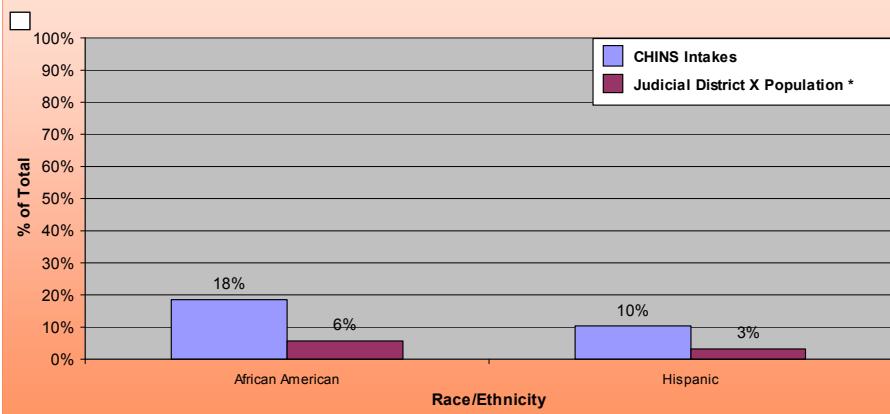


CHINS Applications: by Gender



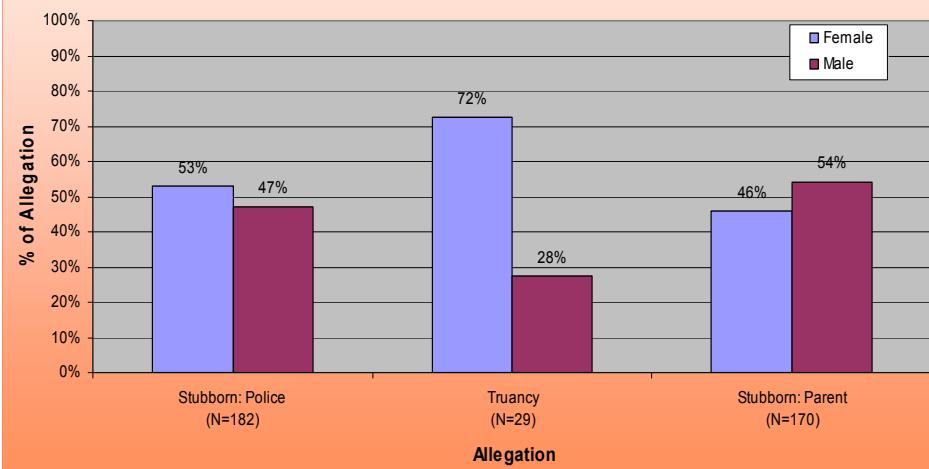
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CHINS Applications: by Race and Ethnicity



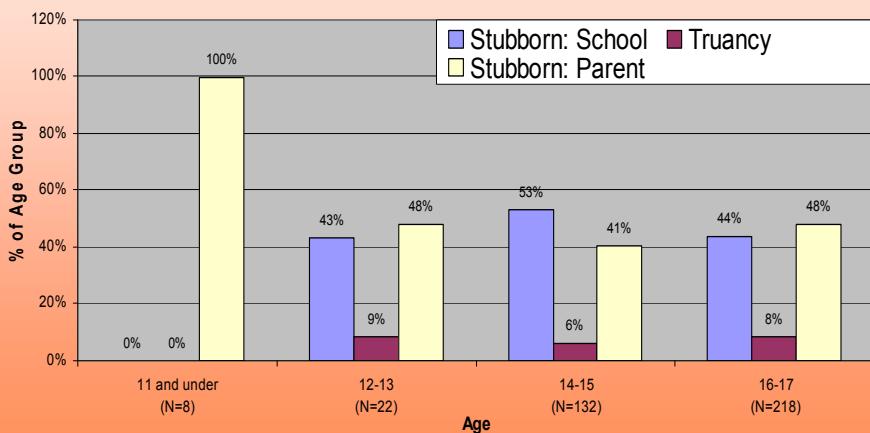
* 2000 Census Data

CHINS Applications: Allegation by Gender

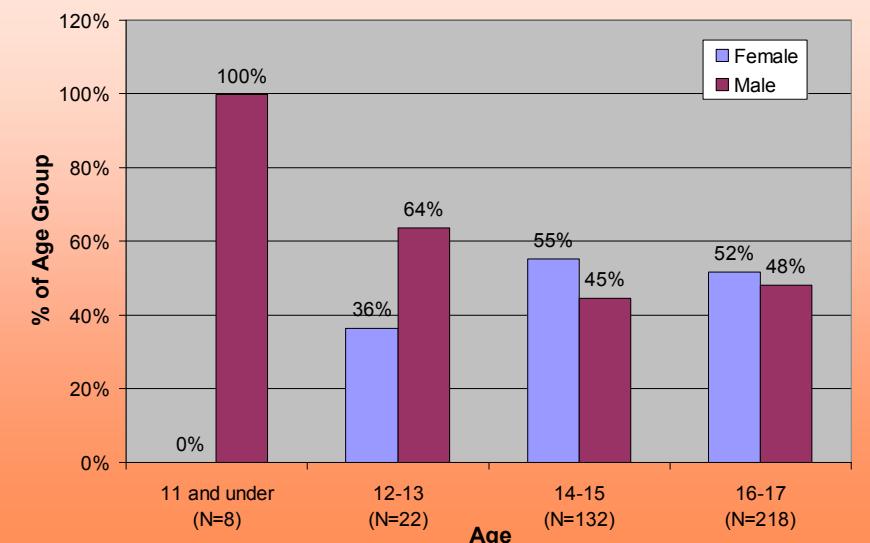


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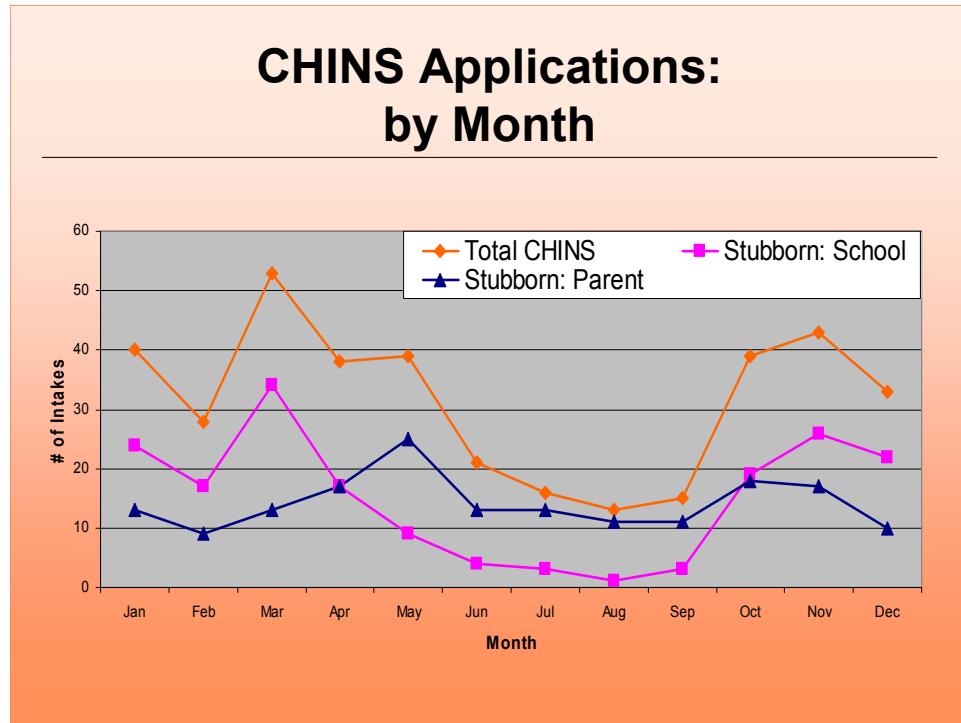
CHINS Applications: Age by Allegation



CHINS Applications: Age by Gender



DO NOT DISTRIBUTE. STATISTICS REPRESENTED BY GRAPHS ARE FICTIONAL.



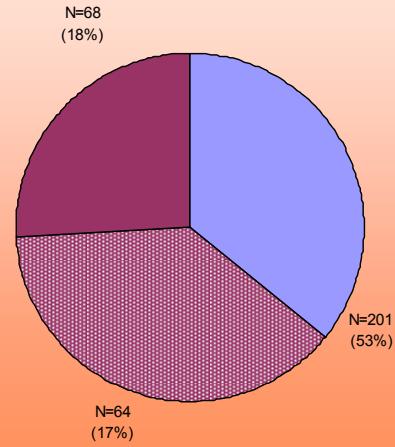
DO NOT DISTRIBUTE. STATISTICS REPRESENTED BY GRAPHS ARE FICTIONAL.

Decision Point #2

Diversion

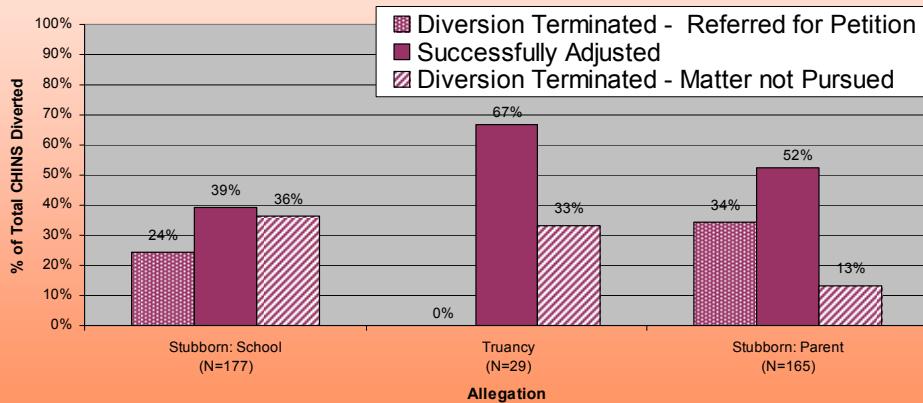
CHINS Diversion Outcomes

- Diversion Terminated - Referred for Petition
- Successfully Adjusted
- Diversion Terminated - Matter not Pursued

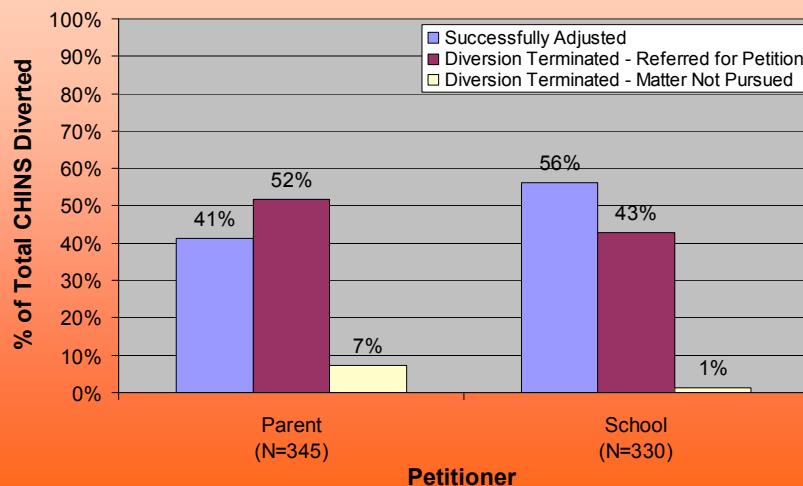


DO NOT DISTRIBUTE. STATISTICS REPRESENTED BY GRAPHS ARE FICTIONAL.

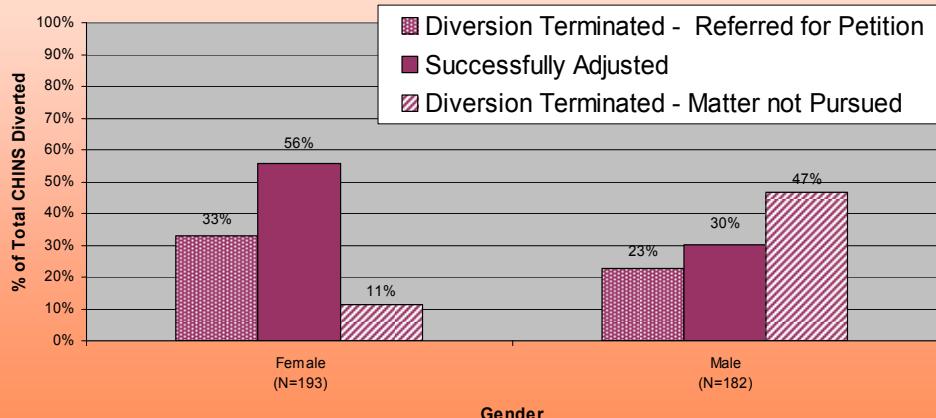
CHINS Diversion Outcomes, by Allegation



CHINS Diversion Outcomes, by Petitioner



CHINS Diversion Outcomes, by Gender



CHINS Diversion Outcomes

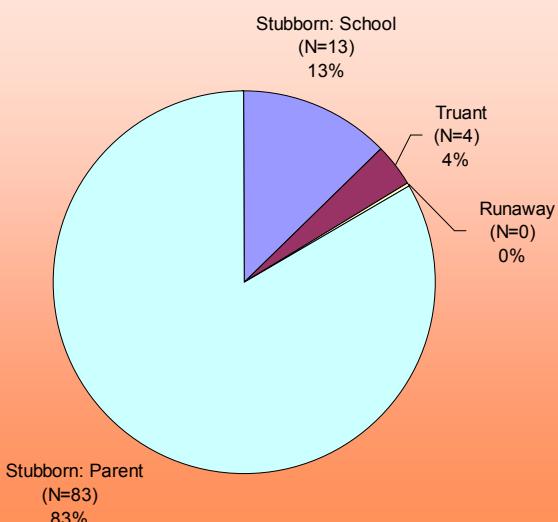
Continue analysis of CHINS diversion outcomes by **age at intake, race, and ethnicity**.

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Decision Point #3

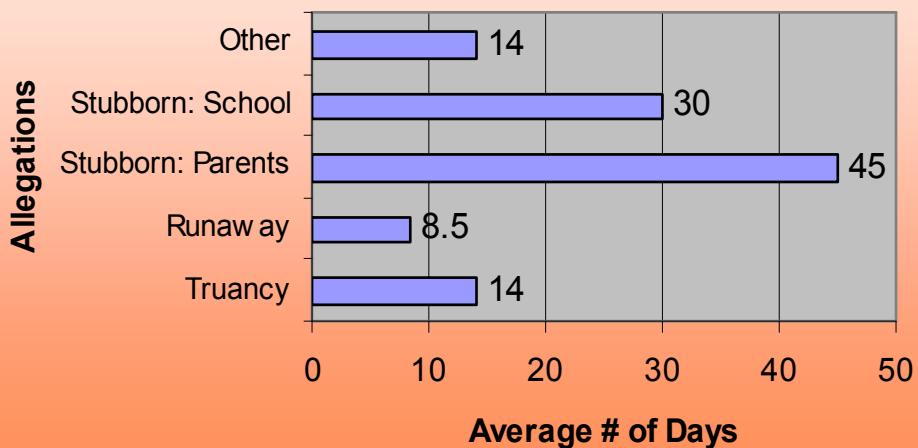
Court Process

Petitioned CHINS Population, by Allegation

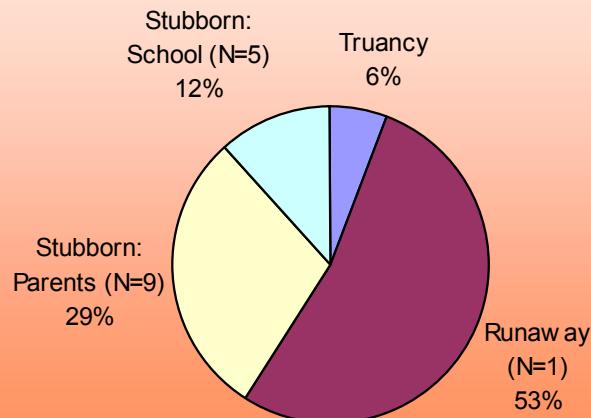


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Petitioned CHINS Population: Average Court Processing Time

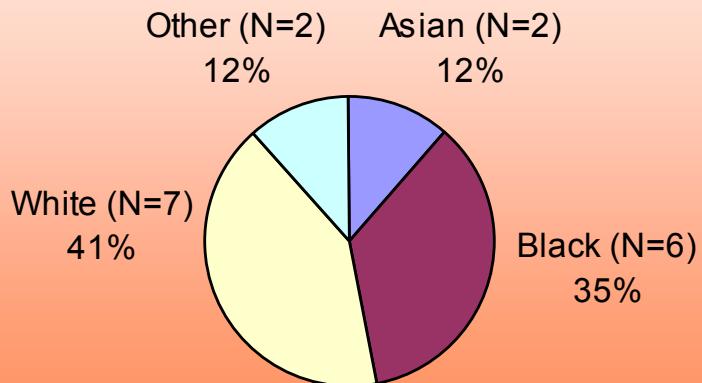


Petitioned CHINS Population: Pre-adjudication Placements



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Pre-adjudication Placements by Race



Petitioned CHINS Population

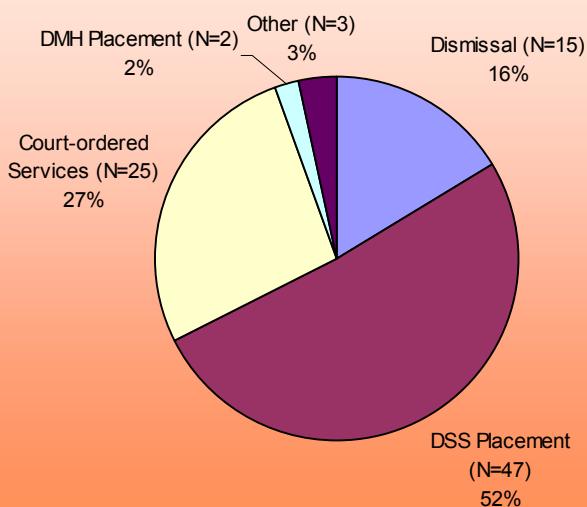
Continue analysis of the petitioned CHINS population by petitioner, age at intake, gender, race, ethnicity, average court processing time (by allegation and petitioner), pre-adjudication placements (by allegation, petitioner, age at intake, gender, race, and ethnicity), and referrals for mental health clinic.

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Decision Point #4

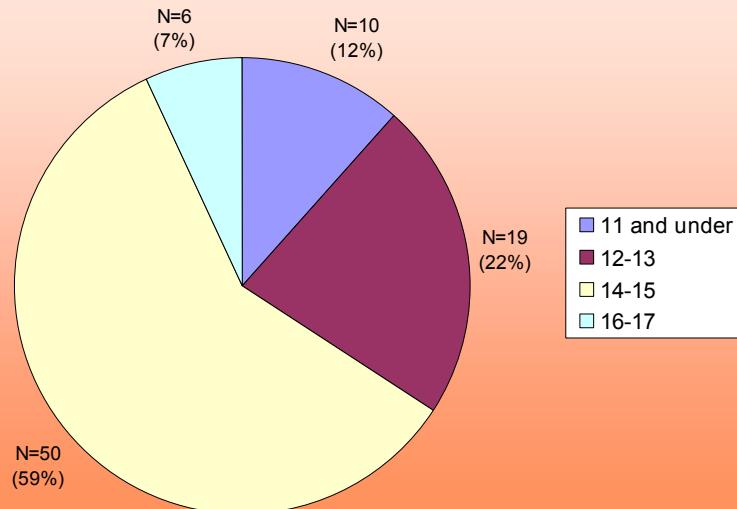
Court Dispositions

CHINS Dispositional Outcomes



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CHINS DSS Placements: by Age



CHINS Dispositional Outcomes

Continue analysis of the CHINS dispositional outcomes by allegation, gender, race, ethnicity, petitioner, and average length of stay for program/services.