

Black Disparities in Youth Incarceration

Black Youth Almost Five Times As Likely To Be Incarcerated As White Peers

For a decade, incarceration disparities between Black and white youth have remained stubbornly high. As of 2021, Black youth were 4.7 times as likely to be placed (i.e., detained or committed) in juvenile facilities as their white peers, according to nationwide data collected in October 2021 and recently released. This disparity has hardly changed over the past decade.¹

Juvenile facilities, including 1,323 detention centers, residential treatment centers, group homes, and youth prisons² held 24,894 youths as of October 2021. (These data do not include the 291 people under 18 in adult prisons at year-end 2021³ or the estimated 2,000 people under 18 in adult jails at midyear 2021.)⁴

Nationally, the youth placement rate was 74 per 100,000 in 2021. The Black youth placement rate was 228 per 100,000, compared to the white youth placement rate of 49 per 100,000.

Forty-two percent of youths in placement are Black, even though Black Americans comprise only 15% of all youth across the United States.⁵ Among all states with a population of at least 8,000 Black youth, (between 10 and 17), a cutoff that allows for meaningful comparisons, Black youth are more likely to be in custody than white youth. Black and white youth have similar juvenile placement rates in the District of Columbia.

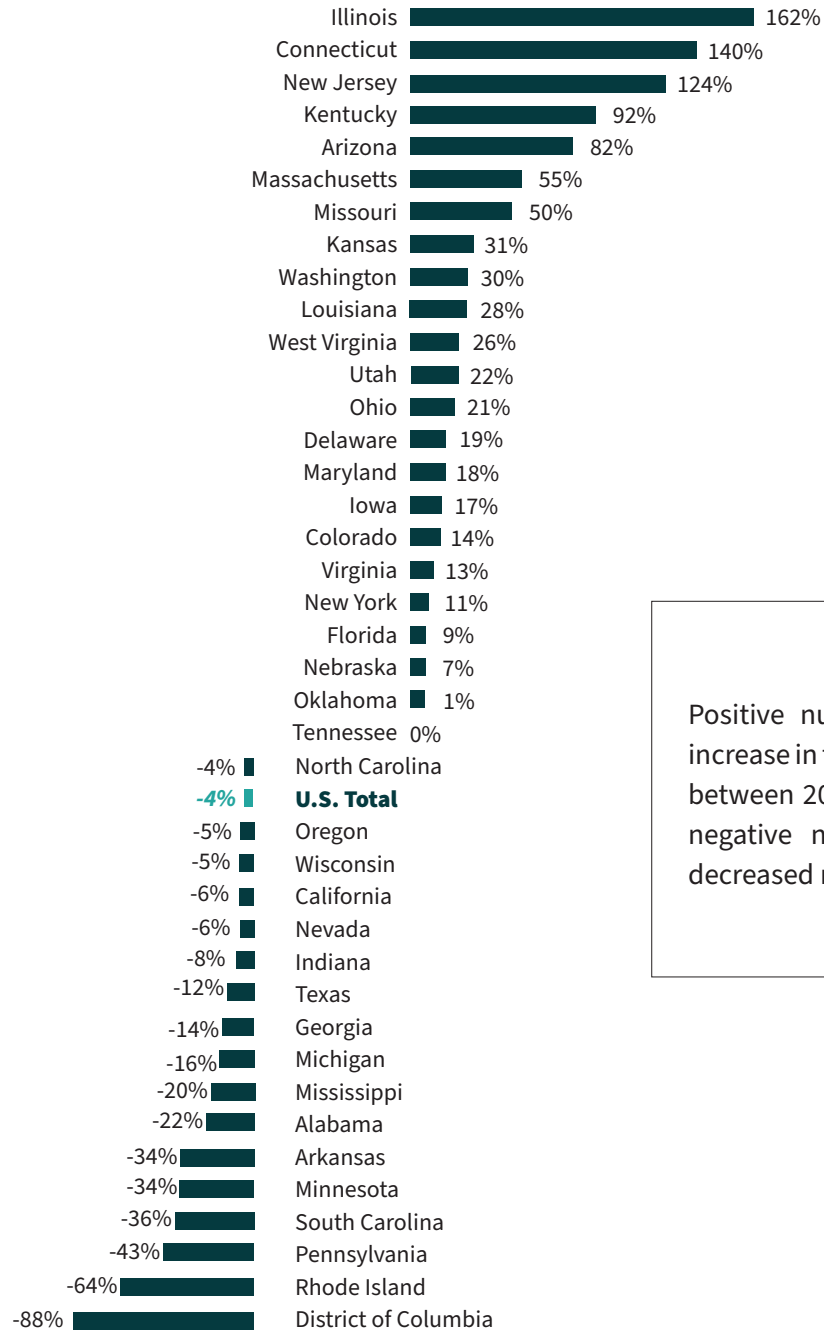
Between 2011 and 2021, juvenile placements fell 59%. During this same period, racial disparities grew more than 10% in 19 states and decreased by at least 10% in 23 states and the District of Columbia.

- As of 2021, in Connecticut, New Jersey, Wisconsin, Massachusetts, and Illinois, African American youth were at least 10 times as likely to be held in placement as white youth.
- Between 2011 and 2021, Illinois, Connecticut and New Jersey saw their racial disparity at least double.
- During these same years, Minnesota, Arkansas, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and the District of Columbia decreased their racial disparities by at least one-third.

The table to the right and the figure on page 2 are limited to the 39 states and the District of Columbia with at least 8,000 Black residents between 10- and 17-years old. Numbers in the third column reveal the extent to which Black youth are incarcerated relative to white youth. For example, in Alabama, Black youth are 2.4 times as likely to be held in a juvenile facility as their white peers.

Black/White Youth Placement Rates per 100,000; 2021			
	Black Rate	White Rate	B/W Disparity
Alabama	229	97	2.4
Arizona	252	41	6.1
Arkansas	179	66	2.7
California	242	32	7.6
Colorado	457	49	9.3
Connecticut	94	3	31.3
Delaware	433	52	8.3
District of Columbia	183	204	0.9
Florida	189	52	3.6
Georgia	151	33	4.6
Illinois	178	14	12.7
Indiana	278	93	3.0
Iowa	448	51	8.8
Kansas	535	63	8.5
Kentucky	325	33	9.8
Louisiana	305	55	5.5
Maryland	79	9	8.8
Massachusetts	137	10	13.7
Michigan	253	50	5.1
Minnesota	243	33	7.4
Mississippi	102	24	4.3
Missouri	358	71	5.0
Nebraska	483	51	9.5
Nevada	326	76	4.3
New Jersey	200	7	28.6
New York	151	18	8.4
North Carolina	102	16	6.4
Ohio	442	63	7.0
Oklahoma	325	46	7.1
Oregon	676	127	5.3
Pennsylvania	272	49	5.6
Rhode Island	243	63	3.9
South Carolina	131	54	2.4
Tennessee	129	24	5.4
Texas	262	60	4.4
Utah	212	23	9.2
Virginia	198	30	6.6
Washington	245	35	7.0
West Virginia	847	177	4.8
Wisconsin	497	34	14.6
U.S. Total	228	49	4.7

Change in Black/White Placement Disparity; 2011 vs. 2021



Positive numbers reveal an increase in the racial disparity between 2011 and 2021, and negative numbers reveal a decreased racial disparity.

Endnotes

¹ Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, T.J., and Kang, W. (2023). “Easy Access to the Census of Juveniles in Residential Placement.” Available: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezacjrp/>

² Puzzanchera, C., Hockenberry, S., Sladky, T.J., and Kang, W. (2022). “Juvenile Residential Facility Census Databook.” Available: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/jrfcdb/>

³ Carson, E. A. (2022). Prisoners in 2021-Statistical Tables. Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/p21st.pdf>

⁴ Zeng, Z. (2022). Jail Inmates in 2021 – Statistical Tables. <https://bjs.ojp.gov/sites/g/files/xyckuh236/files/media/document/p21st.pdf>

⁵ Puzzanchera, C., Sladky, A. and Kang, W. (2021). “Easy Access to Juvenile Populations: 1990-2020.” Online. Available: <https://www.ojjdp.gov/ojstatbb/ezapop>



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Published December 2023.

The Sentencing Project advocates for effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization of youth and adults by promoting racial, ethnic, economic, and gender justice.