



Research Bulletin

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Examining trends and data on incarcerated youth in Illinois

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Illinois began to experience a decline in commitments to the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) Juvenile Division in the late 1990s. While this was a positive sign, there were other trends of concern. The number of female commitments to the IDOC Juvenile Division jumped 65 percent between state fiscal years 1994 and 2004. And black juveniles were committed at increasing rates, raising questions of disproportionate minority confinement. These trends and data may assist juvenile justice system policymakers and practitioners in developing more informed intervention policies and activities.

Legislation

Illinois juvenile court was created in 1899 based, in part, on the premise that youth were less culpable for their actions. Traditionally, juvenile offenders have been seen as in need of supervision and services that will aid them in becoming law-abiding adults. However, public support of community alternatives has wavered over the years, and juvenile incarceration is increasing.

The Juvenile Reform Act of 1998 appeared to support both criminal justice strategies. The Act added immediate intervention procedures for law enforcement, probation, and the courts. These procedures allow informal handling and referral of first-time and less-serious offenders to programs within the community.

The reforms also included provisions for harsher sanctions that allow youth incarceration at earlier ages and keep youth incarcerated for longer periods of time. Youth also may receive extended jurisdiction juvenile sentencing, which includes both a juvenile and adult sentence. The adult sentence is suspended as long as the juvenile does not violate the terms of his or her juvenile sentence.

In 2005, the Redeploy Illinois Act provided financial incentives to counties to develop alternatives to incarceration. Counties that effectively reduce their juvenile correctional population will be eligible to receive money, otherwise spent on incarceration, for local juvenile delinquency prevention programming. Other legislation enacted in 2005 allows counties to attach a court fee to

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Table 1
IDOC juvenile admission types, FY04

		Total	Percent*
Court commitments	Initial sentence	798	26%
	Court evaluation	610	20%
	Court evaluation return	211	7%
	Discharged and recommitted	72	2%
	Total	1,691	54%
Parole violations	Parole violator, new sentence	38	1%
	Technical mandatory supervised release violator	14	1%
	Technical parole violator	1,363	44%
	Total	1,415	46%
Total	All admissions	3,106	100%

*Column total does not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

certain criminal cases in order to generate funding for juvenile court diversion programs.

Data source

The Illinois General Assembly passed legislation in 2005 to create a juvenile department of corrections separate from the state’s adult prison system. The new Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice was instituted July 1, 2006. Illinois joined 39 other states with separate adult and youth correction systems. This *Research Bulletin* summarizes data collected prior to the passing of this legislation.

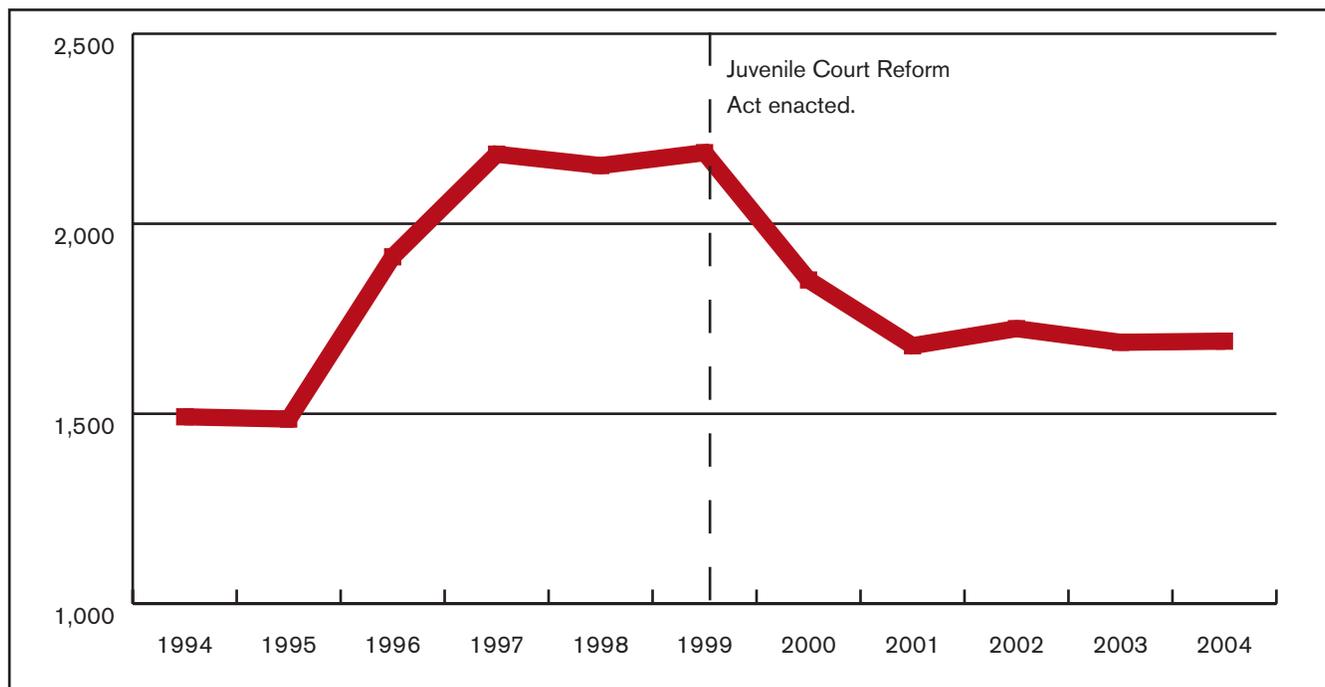
Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) juvenile admission data was examined in this *Research Bulletin* to provide information on juveniles committed by the courts to IDOC’s Juvenile Division in state fiscal year 2004 (FY04), which ran from July 1, 2003, to June 30, 2004. Juvenile commitments include initial commitments from court, court-ordered evaluations, and court commitments to IDOC. This document describes the type of youth sentenced, types of offenses

committed, number and types of admissions, and the average sentence length.

IDOC collects data from each juvenile upon admission to its juvenile division. After admission, youths are sent to designated reception centers at Illinois Youth Centers in Harrisburg, St. Charles, and Warrenville. Each youth is examined in regard to medical, psychological, and social conditions, including substance abuse issues, and school and vocational histories. This assessment determines education, training, and treatment needs, and appropriate juvenile facility placement.

The IDOC intake assessment aids staff in determining the placement of juveniles into the appropriate facility. The IDOC Juvenile Division operates eight Illinois Youth Centers, each of which has security classification that ranges from minimum to maximum. In FY04, 55 percent of juveniles admitted to IDOC were placed in medium security (n=1,705), 26 percent were placed in minimum security (n=802), and 17 percent were

Figure 1
Number of IDOC juvenile court commitments, state fiscal years 1994 to 2004



Source: Illinois Department of Corrections

placed in maximum security (n=540). Two percent (n=59) were listed as unknown.

IDOC Juvenile Division admissions

Total admissions

In FY04, 3,106 juveniles were admitted to IDOC. Juveniles may be admitted either by a court commitment or for a parole violation.

Court commitments include juveniles entering IDOC for an initial sentence or to undergo a court evaluation or a court evaluation return. Court evaluations are short-term, court-ordered, 30-, 60-, or 90-day commitments to an IDOC youth center to determine the needs of delinquent youth through a comprehensive diagnosis and assessment. This information assists the courts in making effective placement decisions.

A court evaluation return occurs when a juvenile court judge sentences a youth to serve an indeterminate term based on the court evaluation. In FY04, 26 percent of juvenile court evaluations resulted in a return to a youth center.

Parole violators admitted to IDOC included both technical violators and those who were convicted of a new offense.

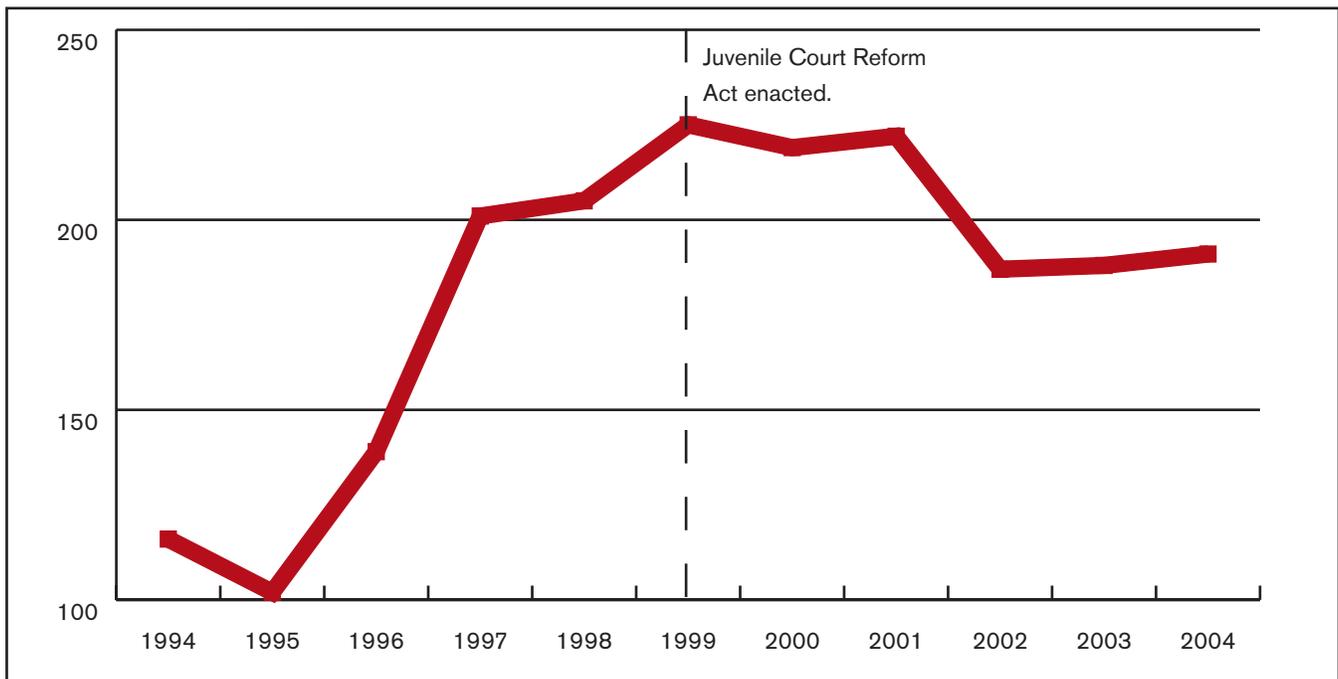
Table 1 details the frequency and types of commitments. This *Research Bulletin* focuses exclusively on court commitments. In FY04, slightly more juveniles were court-committed (n=1,691), than parole violators (n=1,415).

Court commitments

The court can commit delinquent juveniles who are at least 13 years of age and under 17 years of age to IDOC's Juvenile Division, and they may remain there until they are 21. Juvenile commitments cannot be longer than the incarceration term of an adult for the same act and are given an indeterminate sentence. The sentence, based on many factors, may be extended depending on the youth's progress.

Of all FY04 admissions, 54 percent were sentenced by the courts and admitted to IDOC statewide. Almost half (47 percent) of all court commitments were initial commitments and 4 percent of court commitments were discharged and recommitted.

Figure 2
Female juvenile court commitments, FY04



Source: Illinois Department of Corrections

Court commitments to IDOC increased 13 percent between state fiscal years 1994 and 2004 (*Figure 1*). Illinois experienced a dramatic increase in juvenile court commitments from 1995 to 1999. This follows a national trend during the late 1980s and early 1990s of increased juvenile violence along with predictions of continued increases of violent youth offenders, known as “super predators.” As a result, states passed juvenile justice reforms in an effort to “get tough.” Such reforms included the incarceration of more juvenile offenders and the transfer of juveniles to the adult criminal justice system. However, the fear and predictions proved unfounded as across the country juvenile violent crime fell for six straight years from 1994 to 2000.

After increases in juvenile court commitments in the late 1990s, Illinois began to experience a decline. From state fiscal years 1999 to 2001, commitments dropped 30 percent from 2,187 to 1,679. The number of court commitments remained relatively steady between state fiscal years 2001 to 2004.

Court evaluations

A high number of juveniles were committed for court evaluation. More than one-third of juveniles (36 per-

cent) were sent to IDOC for a court evaluation and 13 percent returned to IDOC following a court evaluation.

According to IDOC, 75 percent of court-evaluation cases in 2003 were vacated and the youth was released. This indicates a large number of youth who are in need of mental health or other services may be entering youth prisons.

In FY04, 610 youths were sent to Illinois youth centers for court-ordered evaluations. Half of the youth being court evaluated had no prior arrests and one-fourth had no prior criminal petitions.

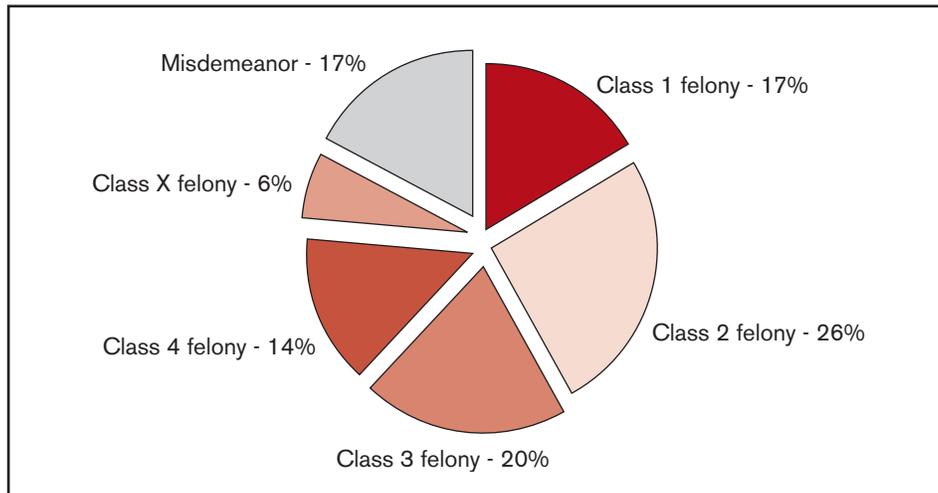
Demographics

Gender of incarcerated juveniles

In FY04, 89 percent of all court-committed juveniles were male. But the number of females committed by the court to an Illinois youth center jumped 65 percent between state fiscal years 1994 and 2004 (*Figure 2*). Female court commitments have remained relatively stable over the past three years.

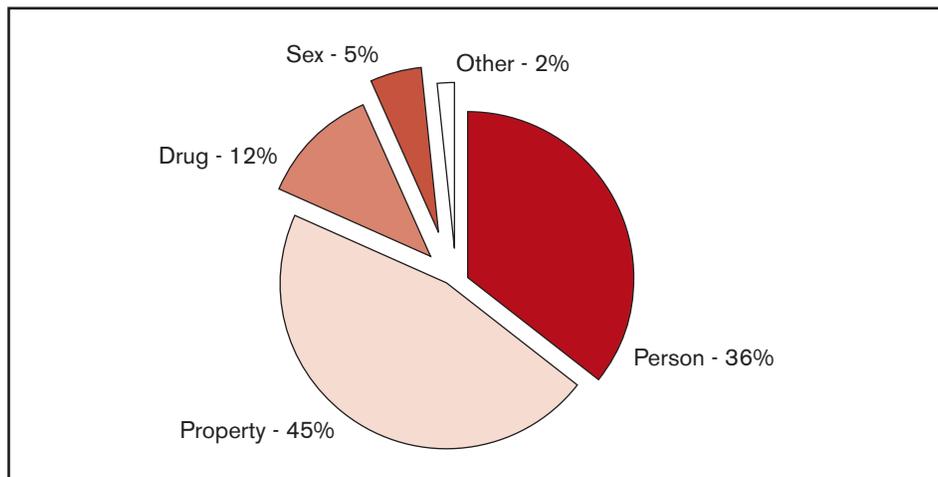
Both male and female youths were predominately sent by the court to IDOC for property crimes. In FY04, 50

Figure 3
Juvenile court commitment offense classes, FY04



Source: Illinois Department of Corrections

Figure 4
Juvenile court commitment offense types, FY04



Source: Illinois Department of Corrections

percent of the female offenders and 46 percent of the male offenders committed property crimes. Surprisingly, more young females (41 percent) than males (35 percent) were committed for crimes against a person, which indicated use of physical violence. Boys were committed to IDOC for drug offenses four times more than girls, at 13 percent and 4 percent, respectively. Six percent of the boys had committed sex crimes while the girls had committed none.

Age

In FY04, the average age of a court-committed juvenile was 15.7 years old. Thirty-six percent of juveniles admitted had completed 8th grade, 27 percent had finished 9th grade, and 12 percent had finished 10th grade. While 85 percent of the juveniles entering IDOC from the courts were 15 years old or older, only 38 percent were grade school graduates, 43 percent had some high school education, and 1 percent had graduated from high school. Only 11 court-committed youths had obtained a general equivalency degree.

Table 2
Prior criminal arrests and delinquency petitions filed of initial juvenile sentences to IDOC, FY04*

Number of arrests	Number of juveniles	Percentage	Number of petitions	Number of juveniles	Percentage
0	416	52%	0	163	20%
1	84	11%	1	107	13%
2	79	10%	2	94	12%
3	44	6%	3	99	12%
4	47	6%	4	92	12%
5	30	4%	5	54	7%
6-10	72	9%	6-10	159	20%
11-15	16	2%	11-15	19	2%
16-20	6	.8%	16-20	7	.9%
21-25	3	.4%	21-25	2	.3%
26+	1	.1%	26+	2	.3%
Total	798		Total	798	

*Excludes court evaluations. Columns may not equal 100 percent due to rounding.

Race

In recent years, efforts have been made to reduce over-representation of minority youth in the state’s juvenile justice system. Disproportionate minority confinement occurs when the proportion of minority youth detained or confined in secure facilities exceeds the minority groups’ proportions in the general population. It is estimated that while minority youth account for about one-third of the U.S. juvenile population, they comprise two-thirds of the juvenile detention and corrections population. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, while minority youth accounted for an estimated 40 percent of the Illinois juvenile population in federal fiscal year 2004, 62 percent of youth committed to IDOC were minorities. (The federal fiscal year runs from Oct. 1 to Sept. 30.)

Illinois courts committed 52 percent black, 37 percent white, 10 percent Hispanic, and less than 1 percent Asian and American Indian youth to IDOC’s Juvenile Division in FY04. A 17 percent increase was seen in the number of black juveniles entering IDOC from the courts between state fiscal years 1994 and 2004. In

FY04, 52 percent of all court commitments were black. In FY04, the courts committed 38 percent more black juveniles than white juveniles.

In FY04, black youth were 427 percent, more likely to be committed to a youth center than those who were white. Hispanic youth were as likely as white youth to be committed to a youth center. Asian youth were committed at a rate that was 3 percent less than the rate of white youth.

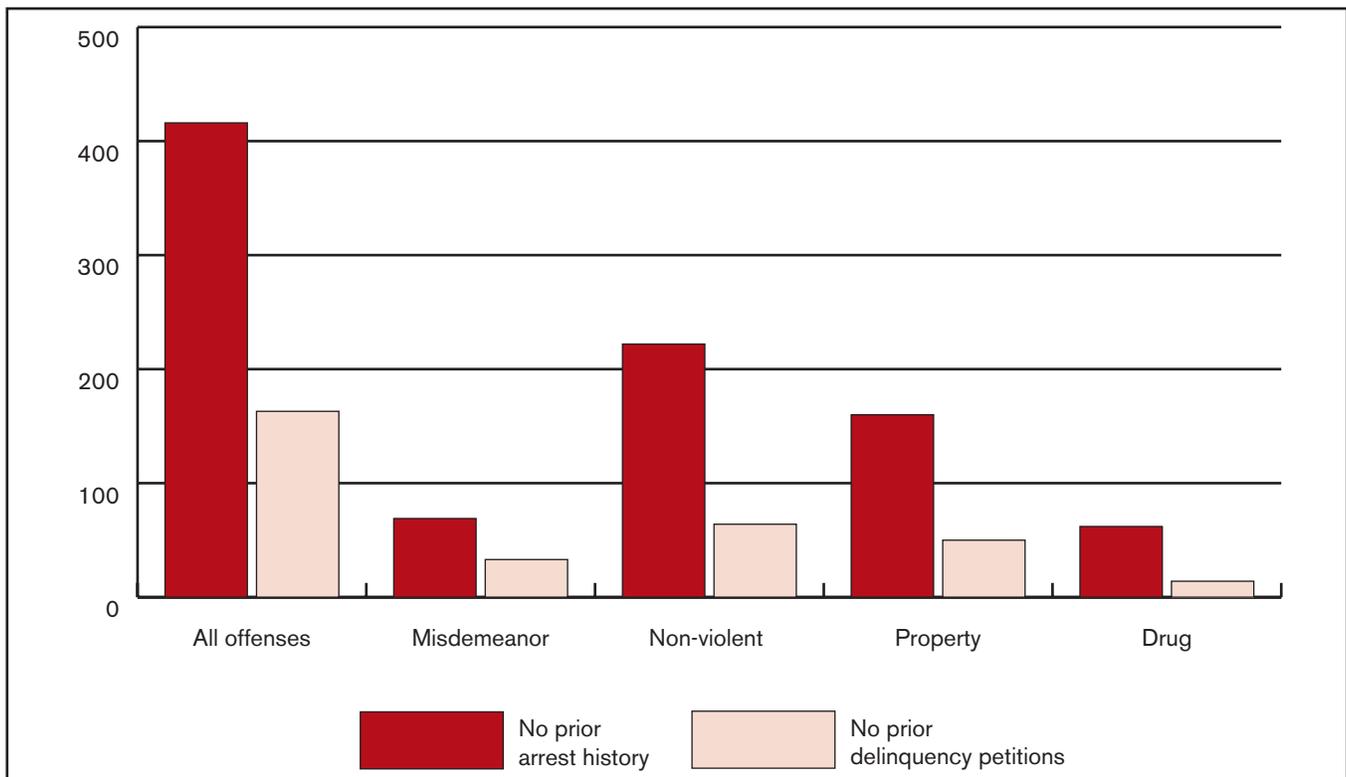
Region

In FY04, Cook County sentenced the most youths, 29 percent of all juvenile court commitments, to IDOC’s Juvenile Division. By region, 39 percent of committed juveniles were sentenced from urban counties, 29 percent from Cook County, 20 percent from rural counties, and 12 percent from the counties surrounding Cook County.

Offense class and type

In Illinois, crimes are classified as either a felony or misdemeanor, and further classified by severity. Classi-

Figure 5
Initial juvenile sentences by criminal history and offense type, FY04



Source: Illinois Department of Corrections

fications for felonies, from the most severe to the least severe, are Class X, 1, 2, 3, and 4. Misdemeanors are classified as A, B, or C. Only the crime of murder has its own distinct crime classification.

In FY04, 83 percent of committed juveniles were convicted of felonies. Of the convictions, 26 percent were Class 2, 20 percent were Class 3, 17 percent were Class 1, and 14 percent were Class 4 (*Figure 3*). Two juveniles were convicted of murder and sentenced to IDOC's Juvenile Division. The rest were committed for misdemeanor offenses.

According to IDOC data, juveniles are often committed for non-violent offenses. In FY04, 57 percent of juveniles committed to IDOC were sentenced for non-violent property or drug offenses. Forty-five percent of commitments were for property crimes, 36 percent were for crimes against persons, and 12 percent were for drug crimes (*Figure 4*). The most common offense of court admitted juveniles was assault or battery with force or harm (19 percent), followed by 11 percent for burglary, 10 percent for residential burglary, and 10 percent for controlled substance violation.

Criminal history

IDOC relies on county probation departments for its arrest and delinquency petition data. Probation departments complete social histories on all juveniles prior to admission to IDOC, but the way in which they collect that information may vary. While some probation departments have access to official criminal history records, others must rely on information self-reported by offenders.

According to the data available, in FY04, more than half of juveniles sentenced by the courts to Illinois youth centers (court evaluations excluded) had no prior arrests, 11 percent had one prior arrest, and 10 percent had two prior arrests (*Table 2*). Most had five or fewer prior arrests (88 percent). The average number of arrests was two.

No prior delinquency petitions had been filed on 20 percent of sentenced juveniles, while 13 percent had one petition filed and 12 percent had two petitions filed. Most had five or fewer delinquency petitions previously filed (76 percent). The average number of delinquency petitions was four.

Criminal history and offense type

Some juveniles entering a youth center had no prior criminal history and some were sentenced for non-violent, misdemeanor offenses. Of juveniles with initial sentences (excluding court evaluations) in FY04, 9 percent convicted of misdemeanor offenses had no prior arrest history, and 4 percent convicted of misdemeanors had no prior delinquency petitions. Twenty-eight percent of juveniles entering IDOC were convicted of nonviolent offenses, including property and drug offenses, and had no prior arrest history. And 8 percent of juveniles were convicted of nonviolent offenses and had no prior delinquency petitions (*Figure 5*).

Conclusion

IDOC Juvenile Division data revealed a 23 percent reduction in commitments to Illinois youth centers since 1999, after the Juvenile Court Reform Act was passed. In addition, black youth were four times more likely to be committed to an Illinois youth center than white youth in FY04. Also, courts committed 36 percent of arrested juveniles to an Illinois youth center for up to 90 days of court evaluation.

Juvenile justice system professionals, particularly in the area of juvenile courts and corrections, may use this information to further understand and aid their juvenile clients. In addition, these juvenile incarceration trends may also guide juvenile policies and practices.

Notes

¹ Butts, Jeffrey, Travis, Jeremy, "The Rise and Fall of American Youth Violence: 1980 to 2000," the Urban Institute (2002): 2-3.

² Ibid, 3.

³ National Center for Juvenile Justice, "State Juvenile Justice Profiles." From the World Wide Web, <http://www.ncjj.org/stateprofiles/profiles/IL04.asp?topic=Profile&state=IL04.asp>. Retrieved February 10, 2005.

⁴ Yednak, Crystal, "State attempts to keep more kids out of prison 'Redeploy' plan to offer alternatives" Chicago Tribune (May 31, 2004).

⁵ Bridges, George S., Heidi M. Hsia, and Rosalie McHale, "Disproportionate Minority Confinement: 2002 Update Summary," U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (NCJ 201240) September 2004.