

**REPORT OF THE
RACIAL JUSTICE STATISTICS ADVISORY COUNCIL
STATE OF VERMONT**

January 2025

To: Senate Committee on Government Operations
Senate Committee on Judiciary
House Committee on Government Operation and Military Affairs
House Committee on Judiciary
From: The Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council
Date: January 15, 2025
Subject: Annual Report and Recommendations on Addressing Racial Disparities in Vermont's Justice System

This memorandum is submitted on behalf of the Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council (RJSAC) pursuant to Act 142 of 2022.

As anticipated during the passage of Act 142 of 2022, the Division of Racial Justice Statistics (DRJS) is still in the process of developing its technical, administrative, and advisory infrastructure. While the relationship between the Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council and the Division remains in its nascent stages, the Division has worked diligently to meet its mandate, despite the challenges posed by limited capacity and resources. As the Division continues to staff up and define its role, key initiatives such as the VT EquiData Project, the Data & Policy Research Hub, and the PreSchool Development Grant Project have been launched, demonstrating the Division's ongoing commitment to identifying racial disparities and improving data practices and accessibility across the state.

In terms of findings, the DRJS's recent research and analyses highlight systemic racial bias and disparities across several critical areas of Vermont's justice system. These include:

- **Traffic Stops:** Data reveals that Black males are ticketed at a significantly higher rate than White males, with Black and Hispanic individuals facing elevated arrest rates, especially in cases involving contraband.
- **Corrections:** Black individuals are more likely to face longer sentences and higher bond amounts than their White counterparts, with Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islanders receiving the longest sentences.
- **School Discipline:** Exclusionary discipline data indicates that Black students are disproportionately subjected to disciplinary actions.

In an effort to better understand the root of these disparities and provide recommendations, the DRJS is developing relationships with the Department of Corrections, Department for Children and Families, and the Agency of Education to analyze arrest, detention, discipline patterns, and more. Additionally, the Division is enhancing its data management systems, including the development of a comprehensive Data Lake and Catalog in collaboration with the Agency of Digital Services to improve data access and coordination across state agencies.

In terms of recommendations, while the RJSAC is still familiarizing itself with the Division's projects and advisory needs, we wish to remind the legislature of some critical staffing concerns.

The Division for Racial Justice Statistics currently operates with only three staff members which, based on a [2021 report](#) from the Racial Disparities in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice System Advisory Panel, is not sufficient for the DRJS to fulfill its responsibilities effectively. Moreover, in order to meet the legislature's expectations of identifying racial disparities and implementing systems of accountability across state agencies, ongoing support will be crucial. The Division's capacity to continue this essential work depends on adequate staffing and support.

As the Division continues to develop and strengthen its infrastructure, it is imperative that the legislature recognizes the need for additional resources to ensure the success of these efforts. The capacity to address racial disparities, promote equity, and create effective systems of accountability will require not only sufficient staffing but also sustained financial and institutional support.

We urge the legislature to consider these needs as it evaluates the ongoing work of the Division for Racial Justice Statistics and its ability to meet the goals set forth by Act 142 of 2022.

Sincerely,

Breanna Sheehan
Chair, Racial Justice Statistics Advisory Council