

TO: House Committee on Human Services
House Committee on Judiciary

FROM: Laura Carter, Data Analyst, Division of Racial Justice Statistics

DATE: January 16, 2025

RE: Testimony of the Division of Racial Justice Statistics, Office of Racial Equity on data infrastructure and data concerns within the Juvenile Justice System

The Division of Racial Justice Statistics (DRJS), within the Office of Racial Equity (ORE) submits this testimony for two main purposes: First, to provide context on the establishment and mission of the Division, and second, to offer preliminary suggestions for prioritizing new policy and funding to support improvements to the State’s data infrastructure and data systems. As a division of ORE we are committed to advancing recommendations that can best guide the development of effective, data-driven decisions in the context of juvenile justice, and to address upstream factors contributing to juvenile justice involvement and outcomes.

Enabling Legislation

The Division of Racial Justice Statistics was established through Act 142 of 2022,¹ which requires the Division to: “collect and analyze data relating to racial disparities with the intent to center racial equity throughout these efforts. The purpose of the Division is to create, promote, and advance a system and structure that provides access to appropriate data and information, ensuring that privacy interests are protected, and principles of transparency and accountability are clearly expressed. The data are to be used to inform policy decisions that work toward the amelioration of racial disparities across various systems of State government.”

Overview of Data Concerns and Prioritizations

On January 15, 2025, the Committees held a Joint Juvenile Justice Oversight hearing and shared roughly 20 unique data or data system concerns and requests from witnesses. Many of the Committees’ questions focused on Department for Children and Families (DCF) and Judiciary data systems. Substantial reports and preliminary research exist on these topics. As an example, many of the questions regarding data collection and improvement, as well as data areas of interest for both the Juvenile and Adult criminal legal systems were outlined in [a report](#) submitted by the Racial Disparities in the Criminal and Juvenile Justice Systems Advisory Panel (RDAP) in December 2020. These

¹ [Act 142 of 2022](#)

recommendations by the RDAP outline data elements with the potential to be captured from entrance to exit of the system.²

Despite the years of effort dedicated to questions of criminal legal systems and their use and management of data, broader updates and revisions are critical if the State is to have a robust, functional, and worthwhile data landscape. Current systems cannot always easily query data, and the turnaround time for queries that *can* be made is long due to insufficient data governance and accessibility protocols. As a result, a lot of information is still manually pulled or recorded on paper, rather than being captured in electronic format for ease of compiling and sharing or tracking outcomes. This creates more manual work for Department and Agency employees and is further indicative of other system inefficiencies and limitations.

Two pillars of the Office of Racial Equity’s statement of values are [a] **systemic solutions** for systemic problems and [b] **transformational change** over transactional change. Being unable to efficiently and effectively pull accurate and high-quality data exacerbates our inability to identify the gaps and disparities within our systems to be able to effectively make decisions based on accurate and quality data. If we want to see systemic and transformational changes in data quality and consistency in Vermont, the State must prioritize data integration, building up our current data infrastructure, and ensuring State Agencies and Departments have the resources they need to successfully report and analyze their data. These priorities have been discussed in policymaking settings broadly but have not been codified or otherwise meaningfully reflected in statute and rulemaking despite increasing demand for niche data reporting to make data-driven policy decisions. Put simply, the work that we do can only be as good as the tools that we are given to do them.

In a 2023 report from the Office of the Child Youth and Family Advocate³, the Vermont Citizens Advisory Board is quoted saying:

“DCF’s data system was launched in the early 1980s, prior to the launch of the world wide web. Vermont has been asking our DCF Family Services staff to use 11 separate systems and 30+ Excel spreadsheets to support their work and reporting requirements. We know that this practice is time intensive, increases the likelihood of human error, and is cumbersome. We also know that the lack of a comprehensive data system that communicates across silos disadvantages us and the children, youth, and caregivers in our child welfare system. We are currently unable to speak confidently about trends in outcomes for the system that is responsible for the well-being of some of Vermont’s most vulnerable children and youth.”

This is just one example of how the lack of efficient and updated infrastructure means more error and ultimately increased risk and liability for the youth we are trying to protect. These shortcomings prevent Departments from maximizing funding and minimizing staff burden. This reality is especially problematic at a time when many agencies are already understaffed.

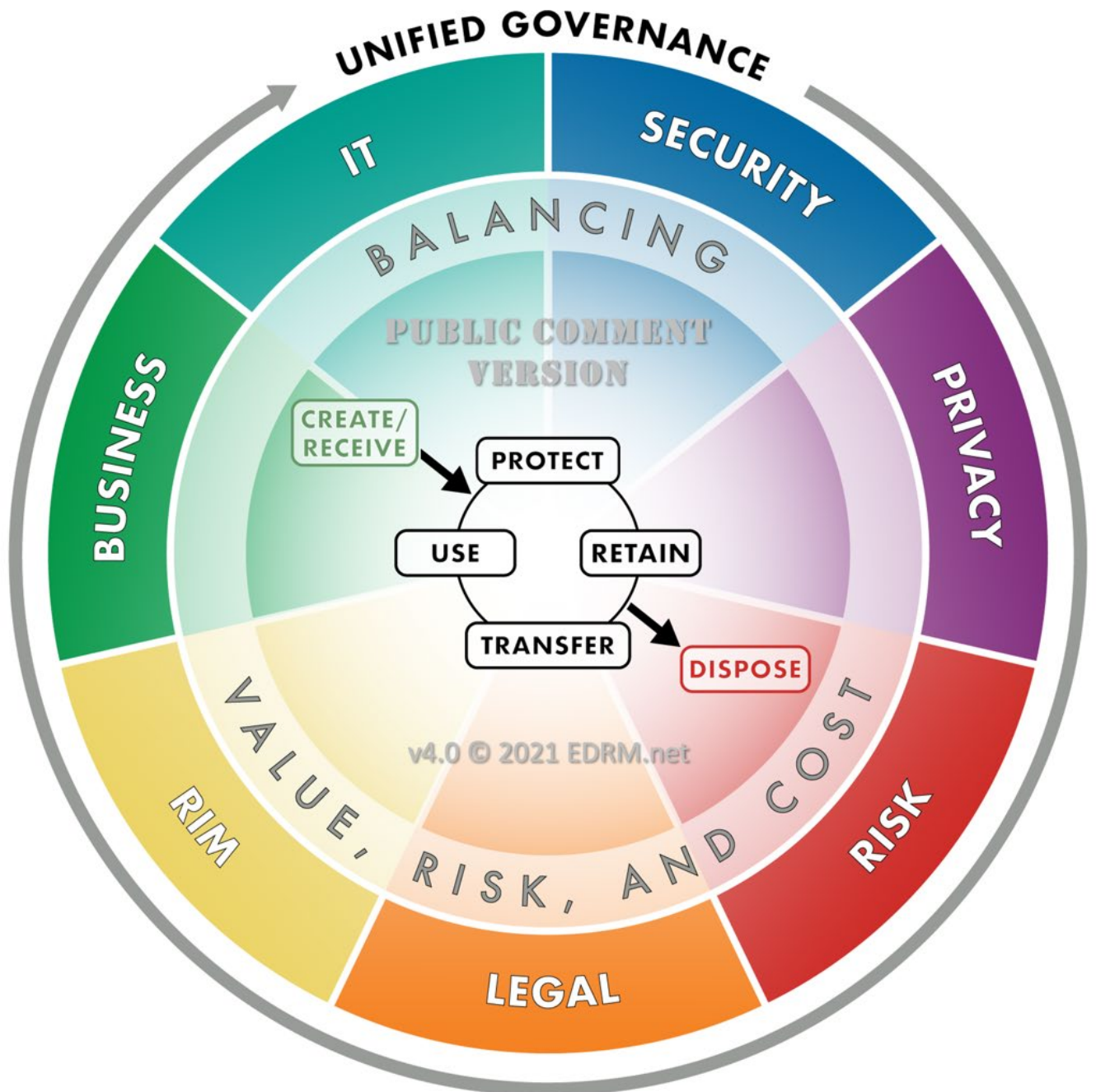
Providing the funding and relevant policy to improve data and information governance toward a more robust data infrastructure will lead the State to more efficient systems that require less employee time on

² [Microsoft Word - RDAPAct148Report FINALfinis.docx](#)

³ [2023 OCYFA CCWIS Report.pdf](#)

the manual aspects of data gathering and reporting, and more time focusing on the children and youth in the care and custody of the State.

Information Governance Reference Model (IGRM)



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⁴ [Information Governance Reference Model - EDRM](#)

Data Governance



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⁵ [What Is Data Governance and Why Is Data Governance Important?](#)

