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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT to release new *Issue Brief*: *Children of Incarcerated Parents in Rhode Island*

Providence, RI (May 23, 2017): Rhode Island KIDS COUNT will release its newest publication, *Children of Incarcerated Parents in Rhode Island*, at a policy roundtable on **Thursday, May 25, 2017, from 10:00 a.m. – 11:30 a.m.** at Rhode Island KIDS COUNT, One Union Station, Providence, RI.

Featured speakers will include Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT; A.T. Wall, Director of the Rhode Island Department of Corrections; and Bianca Perry, a young woman whose mother was incarcerated during Bianca's childhood. Rhode Island KIDS COUNT Policy Analyst Kara Foley and Senior Policy Analyst Stephanie Geller will co-present the *Issue Brief* findings.

The *Issue Brief* presents information on parental incarceration in Rhode Island, racial and ethnic disparities, and key strategies for meeting the unique needs of children with incarcerated parents and their families while a parent is incarcerated and after a parent is released from prison.

Serious Consequences of Parental Incarceration on Children

Parental incarceration can contribute to children's insecure attachment to their parent, which can lead to poor developmental outcomes. Parental incarceration increases children's risk for learning disabilities, ADHD, conduct problems, developmental delays, mental health issues, and speech problems.

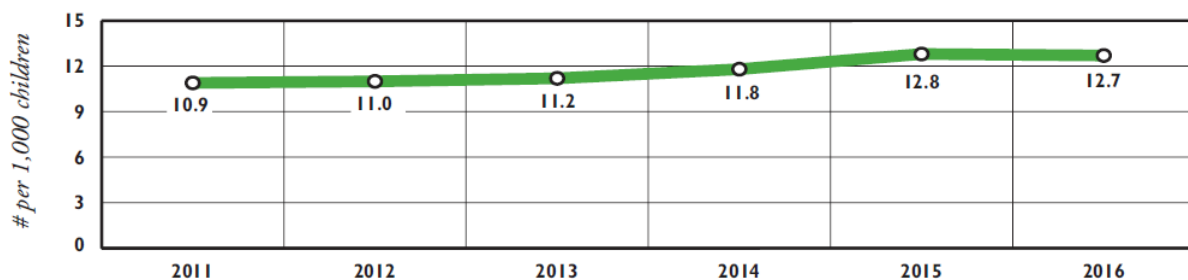
Children of incarcerated parents are more likely than other children to be involved with the child welfare system and to drop out of high school.

“Strong, positive relationships with parents and other caregivers are the building blocks for healthy development – and incarceration threatens that critical foundation,” said Elizabeth Burke Bryant, Executive Director of Rhode Island KIDS COUNT. “The consequences of parental incarceration are serious and long-lasting for children, but can be ameliorated with proper prevention and intervention. Policymakers, elected officials, and community leaders can use this *Issue Brief* to improve policies and practices to better meet the needs of this especially vulnerable group of children.”

- Many parents who become incarcerated live with their children just prior to incarceration. Even if parents were not living with their children before incarceration, many provide primary financial support. Most children of incarcerated parents live with their other parent, a grandparent, or other relatives.
- Nationally, almost 9 out of 10 (88%) incarcerated fathers identify the child's other parent as their child's current caregiver. In comparison, nearly 7 out of 10 (68%) incarcerated mothers identify a grandparent or other relative as the child's current caregiver. Incarcerated mothers are five times more likely than incarcerated fathers to report that their child was in foster care (11% vs. 2%, respectively.)

Rhode Island Children with Incarcerated Parents

**Children of Incarcerated Parents
per 1,000 Children, Rhode Island, 2011-2016***

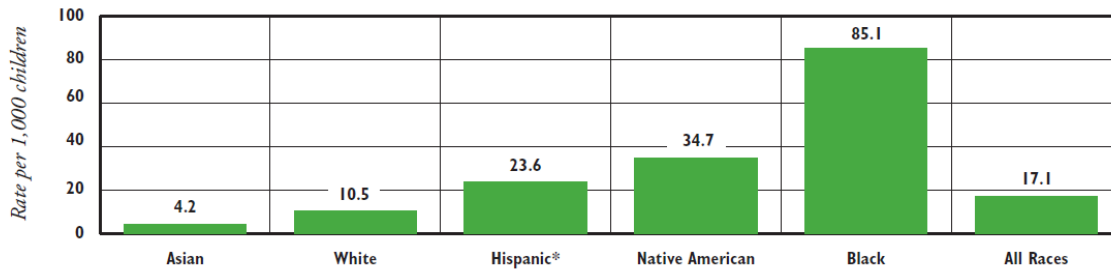


- From 2011 to 2016, the rate of Rhode Island children with incarcerated parents has increased from 10.9 per 1,000 children to 12.7 per 1,000 children.
- On an annual survey, the Rhode Island Department of Corrections asks ACI inmates about their number of children. Of the 3,097 inmates at the ACI on September 30, 2016 who answered the question on number of children, 1,857 inmates (60%) reported having 4,146 children. Of the 1,857 incarcerated parents at the Rhode Island ACI on September 30, 2016, 93% (1,730) were fathers and 7% (127) were mothers.

Racial and Ethnic Disparities

- Racial and ethnic disparities exist throughout the judicial and criminal system. People of color make up more than 60% of the prison population throughout the United States.
- Of the 1,857 parents incarcerated in Rhode Island on September 30, 2016 (including those awaiting trial), 41% were White, 30% were Black, 26% were Hispanic, and 3% were of another race.

Rhode Island Children of Incarcerated Parents, Race and Ethnicity, September 30, 2016



- In Rhode Island, Black children are more than eight times more likely to have an incarcerated parent than White children. Incarceration has a disproportionate impact on Black, Native American, and Hispanic adults and their children, and the communities in which they live.
- Rates of children of incarcerated parents are highest in the four core cities of Central Falls, Pawtucket, Providence, and Woonsocket, as well as Newport and West Warwick, communities with high poverty rates, and high percentages of children of color.

A Ripple Effect: Incarceration's Impact on Families

- **Foster Care:** Children and youth who have a parent who has been arrested and/or sentenced may end up in the foster care system. In State Fiscal Year 2016, 5% (51) of children in Rhode Island entered the foster care system with parental incarceration as one of the reasons for entry. National data show that in Fiscal Year 2015, an estimated 8% of children in the U.S. foster care system entered due to parental incarceration. While incarceration cannot be the determining factor for termination of parental rights, it has been increasingly linked to the likelihood of parental rights termination due to absence from their children, particularly if the parent is a mother.
- **Housing:** Parents returning to their communities and families after incarceration often struggle to find and maintain housing due to low incomes and bans on people with criminal records put in place by public housing authorities that operate housing assistance programs, including public housing and Housing Choice Voucher programs, as well as by private landlords.
- **Parental Employment:** Parents returning to their communities after incarceration often struggle to find employment due to lack of training and work experience, low literacy and education levels, an interrupted or illegitimate employment history, and employers' policies and practices about hiring employees with a criminal history.
- **Child Support:** Child support is a major part of the safety net for children and families, providing a mechanism for noncustodial parents (usually fathers) to contribute to the financial support of their children. More than one-quarter of U.S. inmates are estimated to have a child support case. Incarcerated parents with active child support orders are often unable to pay child support while in prison and may face legal and financial burdens upon release.

Recommendations

The *Issue Brief* includes specific recommendations on ways that Rhode Island can:

- **Support children while parents are incarcerated and after they return.** *This includes:*
 - Consider the impact on children and families when making sentencing and prison assignment decisions.
 - Ensure that children are able to visit with their parents on a regular basis while they are incarcerated by helping with transportation and providing a child-centered location for parents and children to have quality time together.
 - Support safe and appropriate family reunification.
 - Help parents, grandparents, foster parents, and other caregivers meet children's needs while a parent is incarcerated by connecting them to financial, legal, health care, child care, nutrition, and housing assistance.

- **Connect parental employment, housing, and economic supports.** *This includes:*
 - Prepare parents to return to the community by connecting them to education and training programs while incarcerated.
 - Consider how subsidized employment programs can help parents returning to the community gain job experience and prepare for permanent employment.
 - Encourage public housing authorities and private landlords to reduce barriers to housing for families that include a parent with a criminal history.

- **Require interagency coordination and response.** *This includes:*
 - Require that of all of the systems that touch the lives of children with incarcerated parents, including corrections, child welfare, health and human services, education, and the courts, work together to jointly assess and improve their policies, programs, and practices to improve outcomes for these children.

The full list of the Recommendations can be found on page 7 of the *Issue Brief*.

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Rhode Island KIDS COUNT is a statewide children's policy organization that works to improve the health, economic well-being, safety, education and development of Rhode Island children.