



Final Report from the Illinois Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force:

Executive Summary

In August 2010, Senate Bill 2271 became law in Illinois (Public Act 97-0433), establishing the Illinois Racial and Ethnic Impact (REI) Research Task Force. The Task Force was charged with determining a practical method for the standardized collection and analysis of data on the racial and ethnic identity of arrestees by State and local law enforcement agencies. This report reflects the outcome of that effort in accordance with the law.

The impetus for the Task Force was a recommendation from the Illinois Disproportionate Justice Impact Study (DJIS) Commission in its 2010 final report. Among its findings was the unreliability or lack of data on the race and ethnicity of individuals arrested and involved in the justice system in Illinois. Different agencies (e.g., the State Police, the courts) collect different information, often using different coding schemes, to capture demographic information, thus making it difficult or impossible to match, compare, or analyze data or trends.

If data are to be meaningful and useful, standardization – a system for categorization with minimum requirements – must be implemented. This means race and ethnicity categories must be consistent in meaning and practice, within and across entities comprising the justice system. Decision-makers attempting to address racial/ethnic disparities in the system are hampered by incongruent and insufficient data and the resulting incomplete or inaccurate understanding of who is involved in and moving through the system.

The Commission recommended the creation of a Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force to help improve the capacity for measuring, analyzing, and addressing the racial/ethnic disproportionality that occurs in the justice system. Under the co-chairpersonship of The Honorable Mattie Hunter and The Honorable La Shawn Ford, the Task Force assessed the current state of data collection by justice system entities. Its members sought public input from policymakers, researchers, justice practitioners, service providers, advocacy groups, and community stakeholders to better understand the current landscape, issues, and challenges related to the collection of information on the racial/ethnic identity of justice-involved populations in Illinois.

As a result of its efforts, the Task Force developed eight recommendations for policy or practice change, or other next steps. These recommendations intend to address the complex and challenging issues of collecting racial/ethnic information in the justice system at State and local levels, and to lay a foundation for improved analysis and understanding of racial/ethnic disproportionality. While there are real challenges to implementing standards for the collection of racial/ethnic identity information, they are not insurmountable.

Recommendation 1: In alignment with OMB's preferred standard and as adopted by the U.S. Census Bureau and others, data collected by local and State justice system entities should include ethnicity and race information as distinct variables, with the following minimum ethnicity and race designations:

1. Ethnicity (*Select Hispanic / Latino origin or Not Hispanic / Latino origin*)
2. Race (*Select one from the following list of options: American Indian / Alaskan Native, Asian / Pacific Islander, Black, White, or Unknown*)

Recommendation 2: Racial and ethnic identity should be self-reported by the individual involved in the justice system whenever possible. Clear protocols should be developed for the collection and verification of self-identified race and ethnicity information, and to guide the deduction of such information when self-identification is not possible. Minimum protocols should be adhered to (see full recommendation in Section 4 for minimum protocols). Training and education should be provided to justice system practitioners and data collectors to ensure fidelity to protocols.

Recommendation 3: Race and ethnicity information should be collected at the earliest point of justice system contact by justice system entities, and it should follow individuals throughout their involvement in the system, from one entity to another. At each decision-making point, individuals should have the opportunity to verify or correct their race/ethnicity information on record, and the most current version should be carried forward.

Recommendation 4: The availability of opportunities to correct race/ethnicity and other demographic information in juvenile and criminal records should be made known to the general public and to criminal justice practitioners. Avenues for information dissemination should include education, training, and public awareness campaigns, including but not limited to annual “free” days on which the fee charged by state or local law justice system entities to individuals requesting a copy of their record would be waived.

Recommendation 5: A single data repository containing de-identified criminal/juvenile history, charge, and demographic data on individuals involved in the justice system should be accessible to researchers, community groups, advocates, and justice system practitioners, for purposes including, but not limited to, the creation of Racial and Ethnic Impact Statements. The repository should be housed and maintained under the auspices of Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority (ICJIA).

Recommendation 6: The State and local justice system entities should appropriate funds and allow adequate periods of time to support and implement data collection standardization, protocol development, and training for practitioners and data managers throughout the system, and to support the decennial (following the U.S. Census) investigation of and action on current issues and needs relating to data standardization.

Recommendation 7: Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force Co-Chairs should engage the Illinois Secretary of State in a collaborative investigation of the advantages and disadvantages involved in the inclusion of race/ethnicity information on State identification cards.

Recommendation 8: Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force Co-Chairs should engage representatives of the Illinois Framework project to explore and promote the integration of Task Force recommendations into the project.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This report was prepared by Laura Brookes at the Center for Health and Justice (CHJ) at TASC on behalf of the Illinois Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force. Staff and logistical support were provided by CHJ.

This report can be downloaded at www.centerforhealthandjustice.org.

RECOMMENDED CITATION

The Illinois Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force. (2012). *Illinois Racial and Ethnic Impact Research Task Force Final Report: Executive Summary*. Chicago, IL: Author.