

A Study of the PINS System  
in New York City:  
Results and Implications

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## Executive Summary

When parents feel unable to control children who routinely skip school, run away, or are constantly disobedient, they sometimes turn to government for help. Across the country, local child welfare agencies, juvenile justice agencies, and family courts struggle to respond to the needs of these children and their parents—children who in New York are called “persons in need of supervision,” or PINS.

Most families who seek help in New York City are referred to community-based agencies for a needs assessment and services and are able to remain intact while they work on their problems. However, a significant minority follow a very different path through the PINS system. At the wishes of their parents, these children often are brought to family court on a warrant and are remanded to foster care group homes while their court cases are pending. Their parents enter the PINS system believing this is the best solution to the family’s problems but are disappointed later on because foster care group homes are not equipped to address their family’s needs. And group home care is the most expensive aspect of the PINS system, costing much more than community-based services.

Beginning on July 1, 2002, 16- and 17-year-olds statewide will be able to enter the PINS system, which currently accepts only juveniles younger than 16. In the summer of 2001, the Vera Institute studied the likely impact of the change for New York State. The resulting report, *Changing the PINS System in New York: A Study of the Implications of Raising the Age Limit for Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS)*, concluded that the number of children coming into the system is expected to double, and that the most expensive part of the system, foster care, is also the least satisfying. This report and the additional demand on counties statewide has focused attention on how the PINS system operates and how it could be improved.

At the request of the New York City Administration for Children’s Services, Vera took a close look at 200 PINS cases in Brooklyn and Queens to see how agencies in these New York City boroughs respond to families in crisis and which children spend time in foster care as part of the process. We found that almost half of PINS cases lead to family court cases and that more than a third of these children spend time in foster care group homes—four months on average—while their court case is open. Yet in nearly all the cases that involve foster care, either the judge dismisses the case or the parents stop pursuing it. In other words, the vast majority of children who are sent to foster care go home, but without the services they need to change their behavior. Among the 34 children in our study who were remanded to foster care, only seven were placed in foster care at the end of their court case.

We found that when families seek remedies in court—instead of completing a needs assessment—and especially when parents use warrants to pressure their children to come to court, the children are more likely to be remanded to foster care. In these cases, parents

usually demand that judges remove their children from the home, and with few other options, judges tend to honor their wishes. We also found that girls are more likely than boys to be involved in these cases.

These findings suggest that making the PINS system more useful and efficient in preparation for the influx of new cases depends first on identifying children who are likely to be remanded to foster care as they enter the system. It also depends on informing their parents about the limitations of foster care and offering them an alternative, such as respite care, that would provide a short break from their children and intensive services to help families address their problems and quickly reunify.

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## I. Introduction

*A mother arrives in Queens Family Court and says that her 14-year-old daughter has been gone for a week and refuses to come home. The neighbors have seen her, and she knows the girl is staying with a friend but doesn't know which friend. When her daughter calls to talk with her sister she won't say where she is living. According to the school attendance worker, the girl has been mostly absent since the beginning of the semester. The mother doesn't like her daughter's friends and says that the girl has been spending a lot of time with older men, one of whom is known to be in a gang. She's worried that her daughter is having sex with at least one of them. And while she doesn't think her daughter is doing drugs, she's worried that the girl has been drinking often with these men. She wants someone to make her daughter come home.*

When families are in crisis, parents sometimes turn to government for help. While family court is the first place some parents go, more often it is their last resort. Years of troubles—and the inability of agencies ranging from schools to community-based organizations to help solve a family's problems—culminate in a crisis or series of events that pushes parents and guardians to take drastic measures.

State governments offer help to people like the mother in the case above who say they cannot control and, therefore, cannot protect their children. Laws vary greatly as to when and how a state can intervene and exert control over families. Under New York State law, a juvenile who is habitually truant, incorrigible, and generally beyond a parent's or guardian's control—or who is in unlawful possession of marijuana—can be declared a “person in need of supervision,” or PINS. The policies and procedures operating locally to help these families are referred to as the PINS system.

While the law specifies a few broad behaviors that qualify a child as a person in need of supervision, children typically enter the PINS system with complex problems that challenge the agencies responsible for serving them. Their problems include substance abuse, mental illness, and past abuse or neglect. And many children from an early age have had trouble in school and been involved in special education classes.

In the vast majority of cases in New York City, the parent or guardian files the PINS petition. But many of these caretakers are referred to the PINS system by other adults who know about their child's problems—usually a school administrator or police officer. When the petitioner comes forward, government must determine whether the child's behavior meets the legal definition of a person in need of supervision. If it does, various public and private agencies work together to assess and then respond to the child's and the family's problems and to provide the necessary services. In cases where the family seeks court intervention, judges decide whether the child remains at home or is placed temporarily in foster care pending the outcome of the family court case, and ultimately, how the case should be resolved.

Officials in New York City appreciate the need for government to intervene in the lives of these families and operate a system where the majority of families seeking help are referred to community-based services to address their problems. But they also acknowledge that for those children who do not receive services at home the system too often fails and is expensive. Beginning next summer, PINS systems statewide will come under additional strain. Legislation increasing the age limit from up to 16 to up to 18 is scheduled to take effect on July 1, 2002.<sup>1</sup> Opening the system to older adolescents will likely double the number of PINS children statewide and bring in kids with more serious problems, according to a recent study the Vera Institute conducted for the state, yet no additional state funds have been allocated to meet the new demands.<sup>2</sup>

To prepare for an influx of PINS cases, officials at the New York City Administration for Children's Services asked Vera to help them examine how the system serves children and families, focusing particularly on the use of foster care placements. The use of foster care in these cases concerns people who run the PINS system because many parents and children feel that this costly resource is the least helpful part of the process.<sup>3</sup> This report is an initial result of our work together. It examines the roles of the various agencies that make up the PINS system, shows the paths kids follow through the system, and, most importantly, identifies which children are likely to spend time in foster care. By analyzing how the system works, city officials are learning how they can better meet the needs of families in crisis.

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<sup>1</sup> The legislation was originally scheduled to take effect November 1, 2001, but the expense of responding to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the unpreparedness of the counties prompted the state legislature to postpone the implementation date.

<sup>2</sup> Jesse Souweine and Ajay Khashu, *Changing the PINS System in New York: A Study of the Implications of Raising the Age Limit for Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS)* (New York: Vera Institute of Justice, 2001).

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

## II. The Children and Families Studied

In August 2001, staff at Vera began reviewing the cases of 200 children who entered New York City's PINS system in November and December of 1999, selecting at random one hundred cases from Brooklyn and one hundred from Queens. We chose completed cases because we wanted to look at what happened from start to finish. And we focused on these two boroughs because children who enter the PINS system there are more likely than those from the city's other boroughs to go directly to family court without first engaging community-based services.<sup>4</sup> As we discuss in more detail later on, when the department of probation opens a PINS case, the probation officer either sends the family directly to court or diverts the family for services. A designated nonprofit agency in each borough assesses the family's needs and refers the family to appropriate local service providers. Families that go to court are of particular interest because approximately twenty percent of these children end up spending weeks or even months in foster care, predominantly in group homes, while their cases are pending. And group homes are the most expensive service in the PINS system, costing up to \$170 per day, much more than diversion.<sup>5</sup>

We consulted several sources of information to determine what happened in our sample of 200 cases. We reviewed the family court files of all the cases that went to court to understand how judges respond to and eventually resolve PINS cases. We reviewed the records of Designated Assessment Service (DAS) providers to understand the needs assessment process and patterns in referrals for services. Using the Comprehensive Juvenile Information System (CJIS)—which captures and integrates city data from the department of probation, the mayor's office of the criminal justice coordinator, the law department, and the department of juvenile justice—we reviewed the allegations against these children, who were referred by their parent or guardian to the PINS system, and whether the children had any prior delinquency charges or involvement with the department of probation or family court. We learned about any foster care placements, services to prevent placement, and other involvement with the New York City Administration for Children's Services related to the PINS case from the agency's Child Care Review System (CCRS). We also reviewed 20 of the 200 probation files, which contain the completed needs assessment. The files provided an in-depth, narrative account of these children and their families, including mental illness, marriages, divorces,

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<sup>4</sup> In 1999, 53 percent of PINS cases in Brooklyn were referred initially to court, and 49 percent of cases in Queens went directly to court. The rates in the other boroughs are as follows: 46 percent in Staten Island, 36 percent in the Bronx, and 19 percent in Manhattan. Source: *Changing the PINS System in New York*, map 2. In our sample of 200 cases, Brooklyn referred 42 percent of the cases directly to court while Queens referred 51 percent.

<sup>5</sup> This figure was provided by the New York City Administration for Children's Services as the daily cost of caring for a PINS child in a group home. ACS reports that the cost for preventive services per family per year is \$6,200.

custody, other children, substance abuse, and domestic violence, just to name a few issues addressed in the records.

In addition to reviewing 200 completed cases, we examined the PINS system from other angles. Vera staff interviewed probation officers and their managers, and observed officers screening potential PINS cases and referring families for an assessment or to court. We met with the Brooklyn and Queens DAS providers to discuss in detail the problems that bring families into the PINS system. We also met with sitting and administrative family court judges, court attorneys, and attorneys at the Legal Aid Society's Juvenile Rights Division. We interviewed parents at family court to understand why they were filing a PINS petition and what they expected from the system. We met with senior staff at the New York City Administration for Children's Services, the office of the mayor's Criminal Justice Coordinator, the New York City Department of Probation, the New York City Family Court, and the New York City Board of Education to get their perspectives on the process. Additionally, before we began this study, other Vera staff conducted focus groups with parents, children, and others involved in the PINS system and observed numerous court hearings. What they learned also informs this study.

### III. Who Seeks Help from the PINS System

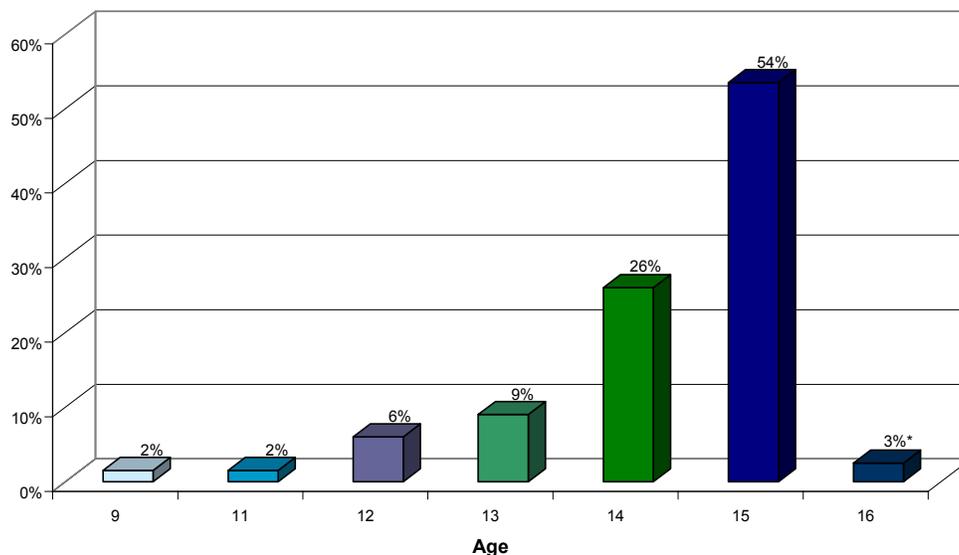
Children who enter the PINS system are predominantly 14- and 15-year-olds whose parents or guardians are seeking help from the government. About half these parents are referred by their child's school or by the police. Although parents make various allegations about their children's behavior, most say that their kids chronically skip school. Almost twenty percent of these children have been through the PINS system before.

#### The Children

*Age.* Although even very young children can be declared to be persons in need of supervision, teenagers, particularly older ones, enter the PINS system much more often than younger children. Eighty-nine percent of the kids in our sample were between 13 and 15 when their parents filed a PINS petition. Just over half of them (54 percent) were fifteen when their PINS case began. Fourteen-year-olds were also present in large numbers, making up about a quarter of our sample. That the use of the PINS system increases with age is particularly important given the recent legislation that raises the age limit to 17.<sup>6</sup> Once the law takes effect, 16- and 17-year-olds could potentially use most of the resources in an already burdened system.

Figure 1.

Age at Intake  
(n=200)



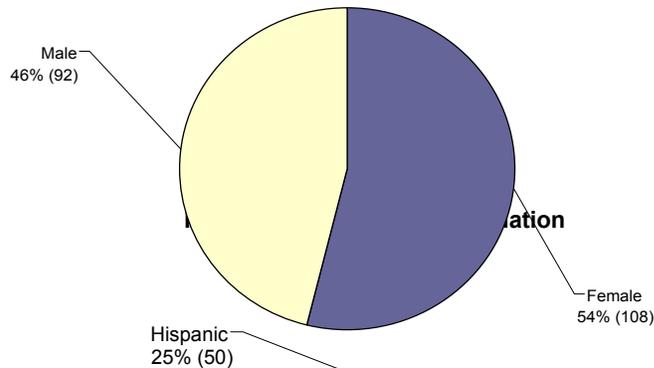
\* Initial contact with Probation occurred before child turned 16.

<sup>6</sup> This pattern exists in other counties in New York State and nationally. *Changing the PINS System in New York*, A-6.

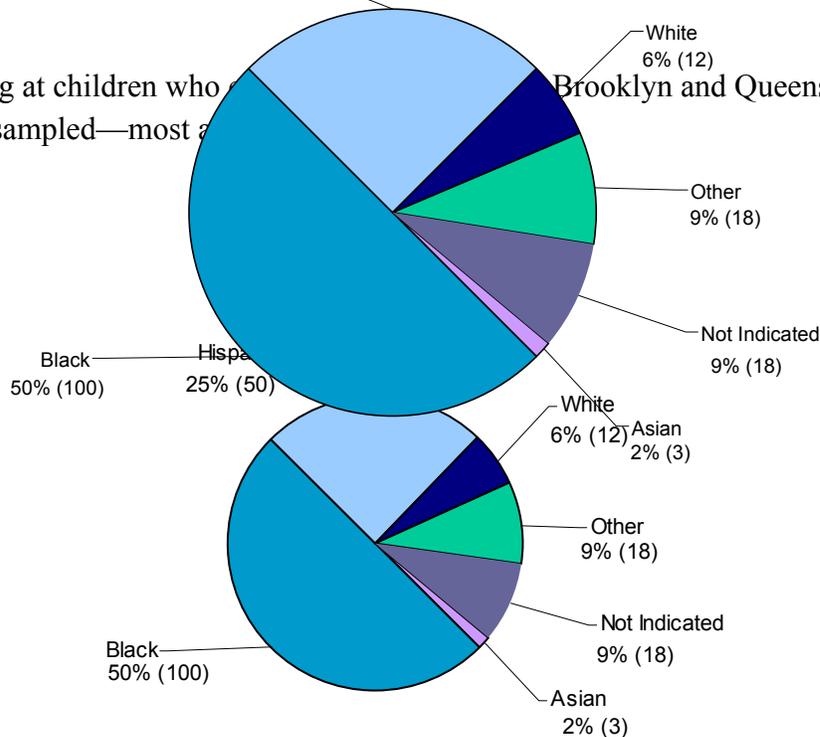
*Gender.* In our sample, girls and boys entered the PINS system at about the same rate, which is consistent with the pattern citywide.<sup>7</sup> The gender parity in these cases differs from delinquency cases, which much more often involve boys.<sup>8</sup>

Figure 2.

Gender of PINS Population  
(n=200)



*Race.* Looking at children who were arrested in the five boroughs we sampled—most of whom were from Brooklyn and Queens—the

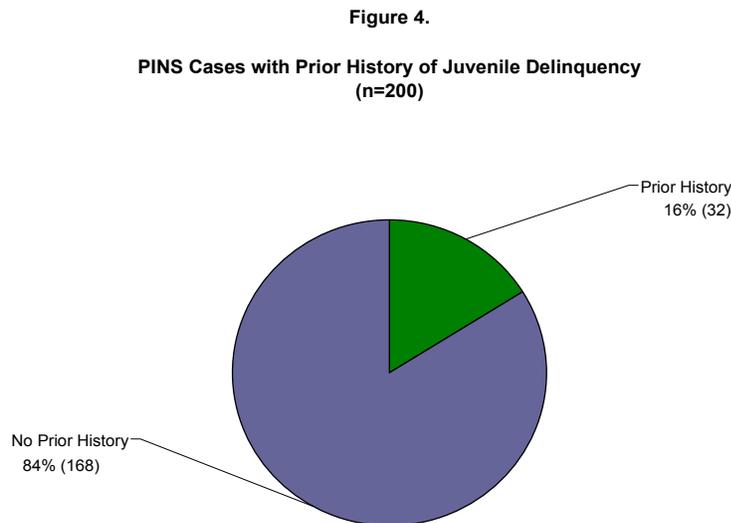


<sup>7</sup> *Changing the PINS System in New York*, Figure D-22.

<sup>8</sup> In 1999, girls made up just over a quarter (27 percent) of all arrested juveniles. *OJJDP Juvenile Justice Bulletin*, December 2000.

<sup>9</sup> While the citywide PINS population is also largely Black and Latino, Latinos have a higher representation—39 percent—citywide. This is because they make up 56 percent of the PINS population in the Bronx. Citywide, blacks comprise 50 percent of the PINS population, as in our sample.

*History of juvenile delinquency.* Only 16 percent of the children in our sample had any history of delinquency.<sup>10</sup> Research has shown that the majority of children whose first referral to the juvenile justice system was for a status offense do not become serious delinquents.<sup>11</sup>



*Previous PINS petitions.* Nearly one out of every five children in our sample (18 percent) had been the subject of a PINS petition before. Four of them were beginning their third trip through the system.

*Involvement with the child welfare system.* We know of eight children who had been placed in foster care prior to their PINS case and 18 who had received services to prevent placement and it is possible that additional children in our sample had prior involvement with the child welfare system.<sup>12</sup>

DAS providers told us that it is not uncommon for information about abuse or neglect to surface during their work assessing children involved in the PINS system. When this occurs, providers file a report with the state’s central registry for child abuse, triggering

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<sup>10</sup> We did not have access to data on subsequent juvenile delinquency charges; this is an important subject for future research.

<sup>11</sup> Randall G. Sheldon, John A. Horvath, and Sharon Tracy, “Do Status Offenders Get Worse? Some Clarifications on the Question of Escalation,” *Crime and Delinquency* 35, no. 2 (1989): 202-216.

<sup>12</sup> Three of the eight children were placed because of an abuse or neglect finding; two were placed because of a juvenile delinquency finding; and one was placed on a prior PINS petition. We could not locate information about why the other two children were placed. It is possible that other children had prior ACS involvement but their records were not found in the Child Care Review System (CCRS). For example, 34 children whose court records indicated they were placed in foster care during their PINS case, only 28 records could be found in the CCRS. We also were unable to determine how many of the children in our sample had prior abuse and neglect proceedings that did not result in placement because we did not have access to those records which are not part of the CCRS.

an investigation by the New York City Administration for Children’s Services and possibly an abuse or neglect petition in family court. Eighteen percent of PINS children who participated in a DAS assessment in the year 2000 in Brooklyn had an active abuse or neglect case—even though families with open abuse and neglect cases are supposed to be barred from filing a PINS petition. Once the assessment process began, the DAS workers, who are mandatory reporters of child abuse, called in an additional 21 percent to be investigated.<sup>13</sup>

### **The Allegations**

Parents report that their children engage in a variety of negative behaviors. Some of the most common allegations in our sample were truancy (61 percent), keeping late hours (33 percent) and having undesirable companions (31 percent). In most cases, there are multiple allegations against the child. For example, a child could be alleged to be truant, a runaway, and have undesirable companions in the same petition.<sup>14</sup> Our interviews with parents in Brooklyn and Queens confirm that these three problem behaviors are the most common and suggest that school-related problems, such as disrupting class and acting out, are also common reasons for filing a PINS petition. Petitions against girls were much more likely than those against boys to include the allegation of running away: forty-seven percent compared with 27 percent. Citywide in 2001, the most frequent allegations were incorrigible or ungovernable behavior, followed by truancy and running away.<sup>15</sup>

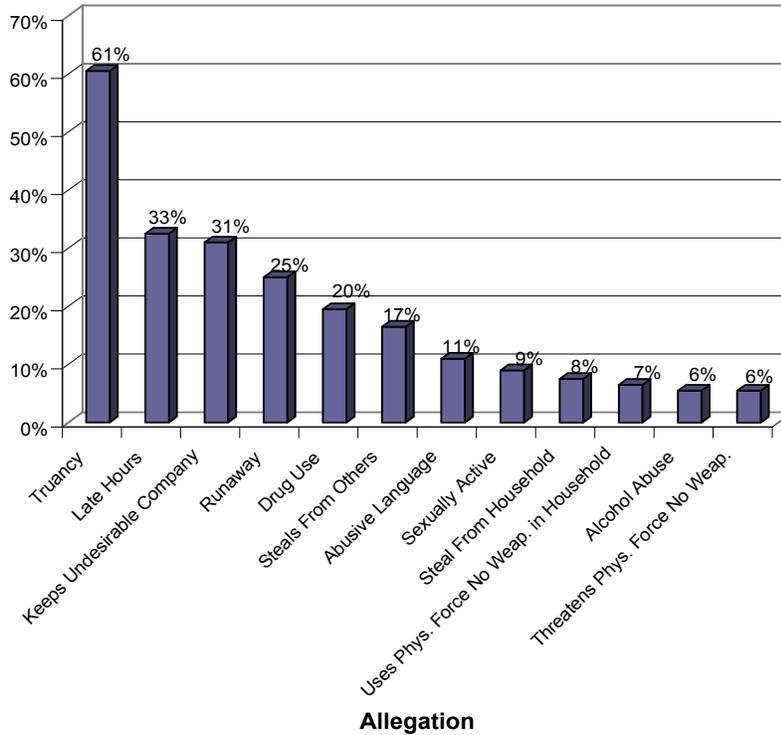
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<sup>13</sup> These figures, although provided by the Children’s Aid Society, are maintained by ACS.

<sup>14</sup> For the child to qualify as a person in need of supervision, the specific allegations must fall under one of the broad categories defined by New York State Law: chronic truancy, incorrigibility, being ungovernable or habitually disobedient, being beyond the lawful control of a parent or other lawful authority, and unlawful possession of marijuana. N.Y. Family Court Act Section 712(a).

<sup>15</sup> New York State Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives, *Quarterly Report 1/01/01- 9/30/01*.

**Figure 5.**  
**Allegations Included in PINS Petitions**  
**(n=200)**



Vera’s review of the PINS system statewide suggests that in New York City some allegations, like truancy and running away, are more frequent among older kids while others, including complaints about the child’s lifestyle (such as keeping late hours, having undesirable friends, and being sexually active), are more common among younger children.<sup>16</sup>

**The Petitioner and Referral Source**

*On Monday morning, a woman came to the family court in Queens, New York, desperate for help. Over the weekend, her 13-year-old granddaughter had been involved in an incident that made her fear for the girl’s safety. According to the woman’s neighbors, the girl had been threatening some kids, and when an adult intervened, she cursed at and threatened him too. The police who were called to the scene told the grandmother that she should go to family court and file a PINS petition against her granddaughter. She did not know what else to do. Although the girl got along well with her sisters, she was acting out in school, and this last incident really troubled the woman. She wanted her*

<sup>16</sup> *Changing the PINS System in New York*, 12.

*granddaughter to get help. She has been caring for the girl and her two sisters since they were little and adopted all three a few years ago. The girls' mother is in drug treatment and has little involvement with her daughters. Their father has never been involved with them.*

In New York City, the PINS petitioner is almost always the child's parent or guardian, although the law allows others to file a petition.<sup>17</sup> For example, among the 93 cases in our sample that were referred to court, only one petition, in Queens, was filed by a school. The rest were filed by a parent or another relative probably acting as the child's guardian. The majority of petitioners are single mothers. According to the DAS provider in Brooklyn, 63 percent of the PINS children they saw in the year 2000 came from homes where they were being raised by a single mother. Twenty-three percent of their cases that year came from two-parent homes. Only two percent were being raised by single fathers. The remaining 12 percent were distributed among kinship care and care by another legal guardian.<sup>18</sup>

Petitioners find the PINS system by different means. Some find it on their own, while others are referred, usually by their child's school or the police. Citywide data for January 1 through September 30, 2001 shows that 45 percent of petitioners said that they had not been referred by anyone in particular, suggesting that they learned about PINS informally or perhaps simply came to the family court seeking help.<sup>19</sup> The next largest groups of parents (22 and 19 percent respectively) were referred by the police or their child's school.<sup>20</sup>

While school administrators can file PINS petitions on their own, they are more likely to encourage or even push parents to initiate the process, usually because the child is chronically truant. During focus groups with parents, those who were referred to the PINS system by a school administrator often said that the school had threatened to file an Educational Neglect complaint unless they filed a PINS petition.<sup>21</sup> Some parents in focus

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<sup>17</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 733 provides that the following persons may originate a PINS proceeding: "a peace officer, acting pursuant to his special duties, or a police officer; the parent or other person legally responsible for [the child's] care; any person who has suffered injury as a result of the alleged activity of a person alleged to be in need of supervision, or a witness to such activity; the recognized agents of any duly authorized agency, association, society, or institution; or the presentment agency that consents to a substitute a PINS petition alleging the person is in need of supervision for a petition alleging that the person is a juvenile delinquent pursuant to section 311.4."

<sup>18</sup> Interview with Michele Dubowy, Director of PINS diversion and court related services for the Children's Aid Society.

<sup>19</sup> These families might also be reluctant to reveal the referral source.

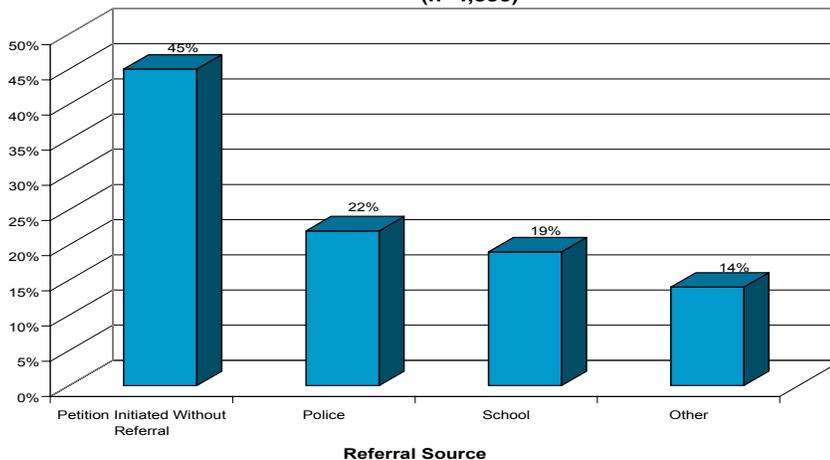
<sup>20</sup> *New York State Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives PINS Adjustment Services Program Quarterly Report, 1/30/01-9/30/01*. This data is consistent with our interviews with parents in Brooklyn and Queens. About half of the parents we spoke to learned about PINS from a school administrator or police officer.

<sup>21</sup> An educational neglect complaint initiates an investigation by the New York City Administration for Children's Services. If the investigation shows that the parent failed to take steps to ensure their child's

groups reported that the threat of an educational neglect case was the first time the school had notified them about their child's truancy.

Parents who want help dealing with a troubled child sometimes contact the police. If a child has run away and refuses to come home, for example, the police may tell the parent that he or she needs to file a PINS petition and get a warrant in order for an officer to pick up the child.<sup>22</sup> As illustrated in the story above, sometimes an officer refers a parent to PINS after interrupting or learning about a troubling act that is neither criminal nor delinquent but warns of future illegal behavior.

**Figure 6.**  
**Citywide Referral Source for PINS Petitions\***  
(n=4,356)



\* 2001 referral data through 9/30/01. (source: Comprehensive Justice Information System)

Some service providers who work with families involved in the PINS system suggest that parents who feel pressured by a school administrator or law enforcement official to initiate a PINS case have little interest in the PINS process and are just acting out of fear or deference to an authority figure. Since the involvement of parents is crucial to helping these children, it is worth investigating whether these parents as a group are less committed to seeking and participating in services and are more likely to drop out of the process early on.

However parents come to file a PINS petition, the vast majority we interviewed knew little or nothing about how the system works, and many of them expressed unrealistic expectations about what filing a PINS petition would accomplish. For example, one parent expected that someone would come to her house every day and take her child to school. Another mother wanted someone to provide her son with home schooling since she could not get him to attend classes. A few parents thought that filing a PINS petition

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regular attendance in school, the city could initiate a neglect proceeding against the parent or guardian in family court.

<sup>22</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 718 does allow police to pick up children they conclude to be runaways and bring them home without a warrant.

was a way to get their child into a juvenile boot camp. The school officials and police officers who send parents to the PINS system may unwittingly create or reinforce unrealistic expectations if they present PINS as the solution to the family's problems without fully explaining how the system functions. Probation officers and others who are familiar with the PINS system believe that the mismatch between parents' expectations and what the system really offers is important because it leads many parents to demand to see a judge rather than take advantage of community-based services.

## IV. Paths Children Follow Through the PINS System

After a family approaches government for help, the case can take two routes: the family can be assessed for and referred to community-based services, or the case can go before a family court judge. While family-based services are the preferred option, if the child refuses to go to services or if the parent insists on seeing a judge or wants to get a warrant, the case is referred to court. This decision, and its implications for the cost of operating the PINS system and the system's ability to help families, is an important focus of this study. It is of particular interest now because there has been a rise in the number of cases citywide that go directly to court. If the trend continues for the remainder of 2001, the numbers will have doubled from last year. As of December 31, 2000, 1681 cases citywide had been referred directly to court from probation. As of September 30, 2001, 2650 cases citywide were sent directly to court.<sup>23</sup>

### **The Probation Department: Gatekeeper**

When a parent, guardian, or other adult decides to file a PINS petition, that person must first approach the department of probation, located in their county family court, and register to meet with a probation officer. The probation department functions as the gatekeeper of the system and screens all potential PINS cases.<sup>24</sup> While the probation department aims to use the same intake and case management process in each borough, consistency is difficult to maintain. When a probation officer first meets with a family, the officer checks to see whether the child is currently involved in any delinquency or child welfare cases, or another PINS case, which would make the child ineligible for a new PINS case.<sup>25</sup> If the child is not excluded for these reasons, the probation officer listens as the parent or other petitioner describes the child's behavior, then decides whether the behavior falls within the definition of a person in need of supervision.

Following the initial intake interview, the officer schedules a formal PINS interview with another probation officer. This interview usually takes place two to eight weeks after the initial intake, unless the officer considers the case to be urgent and expedites the process. Based on the wishes of the petitioner and the child, the probation officer sends

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<sup>23</sup> New York State Division of Probation and Correctional Alternatives, *PINS Adjustment Services Program, Quarterly Report, 01/01/01 to 09/30/01*. However, officials at the Department of Probation state that as of December, 2000, only 1486 cases were referred directly to court and through November 2001, 1421 cases were referred directly to court.

<sup>24</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 735.

<sup>25</sup> The probation department determines whether a child has any ongoing cases that would prevent opening a PINS case by checking the Comprehensive Juvenile Information System and contacting the New York City Administration for Children's Services. Sometimes, the probation officer cannot determine the answer before he or she must send the case to court or divert the case for services. As a result, some children who already have an open child welfare, delinquency, or PINS case enter the PINS system and receive poorly coordinated or duplicated services.

the family down one of two main paths through the PINS system, either directly to family court or for a needs assessment and services.

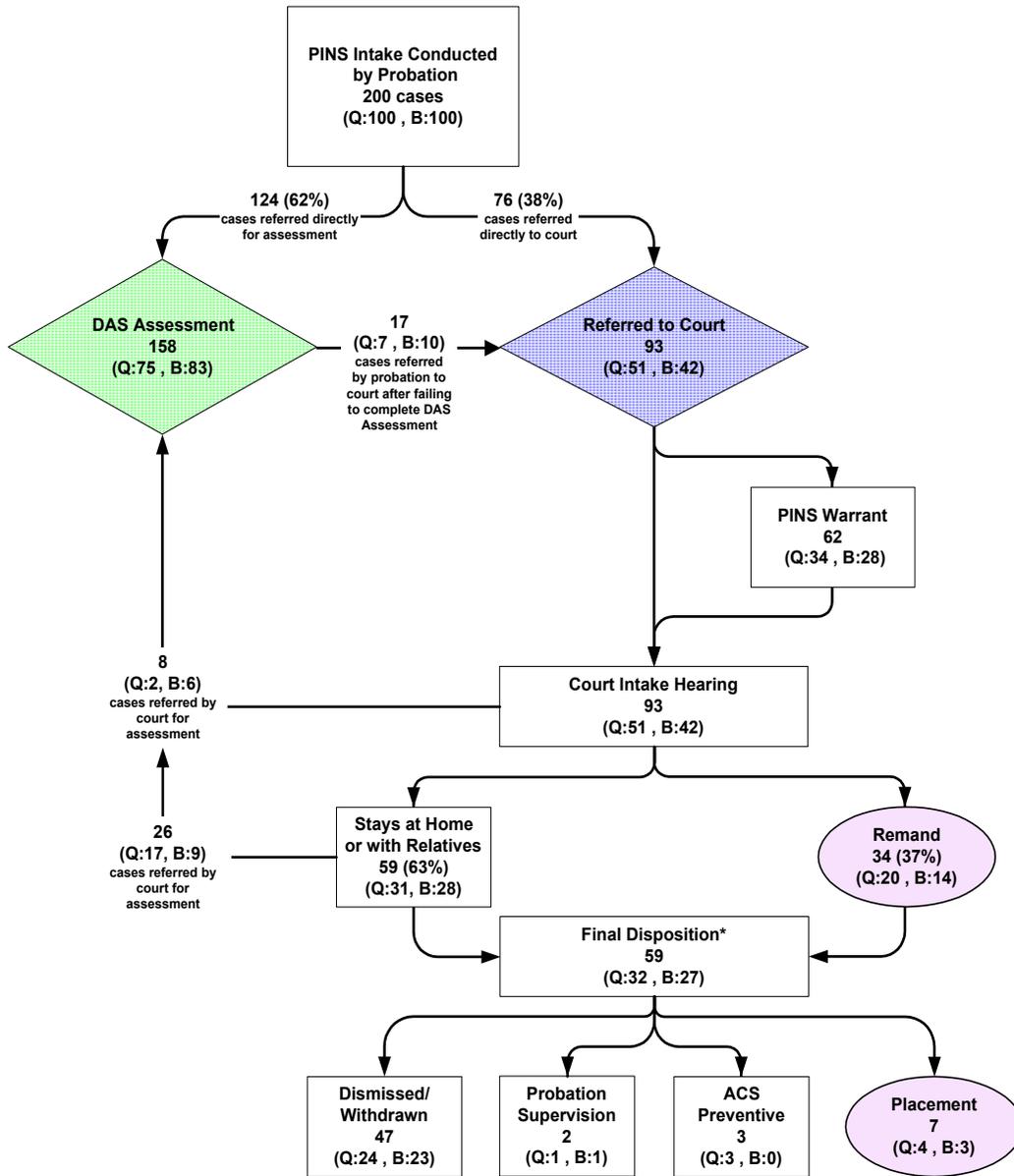
The department of probation oversees cases for up to ninety days from the intake date.<sup>26</sup> According to the department of probation, officers routinely manage 100 to 130 open cases at any one time. Officers can ask the court to extend the monitoring period, and department officials report that they request extensions in 20 to 65 percent of all cases.

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<sup>26</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 735 (g).

Figure 7.

Brooklyn and Queens PINS Process Flow



\* Does not include the cases referred by the court for assessment.

## The Path That Begins With Assessment

If the parent or guardian and the child are willing, the probation officer should divert the family to the DAS provider, which will thoroughly assess the child's and family's situation and determine what services would be most helpful. Probation officers are required to offer this option to families.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, the state legislature established diversion services to reduce unnecessary and inappropriate use of the court.<sup>28</sup> In each borough, a nonprofit agency, working under contract with the New York City Administration for Children's Services, is the DAS provider. In Brooklyn, it's the Children's Aid Society; in Queens, Community Mediation Services fills this role. In 62 percent the cases we reviewed (124 of the total 200), families were referred for an assessment instead of going directly to court. When the cases that judges send to a DAS provider (cases discussed in the next section) are included, more than three quarters of the children in our sample (158 of 200) were referred for an assessment: 75 cases in Queens, 83 in Brooklyn.<sup>29</sup>

Following the probation screening, the assessment is scheduled to begin as soon as possible. While assessments are delayed in some cases, they usually begin within two days. The assessment is very thorough. The child meets two to six times with a social worker from the agency to discuss his or her school performance, family interactions, relationships with peers, and emotional and physical health, including drug and alcohol use. Whenever possible, the social worker meets with the child's parents or guardians, and sometimes with other family members, to get their perspectives on the child's behavior and health.

The social worker also gathers and reviews available academic, medical, psychiatric, and any other relevant records. Academic records are often particularly relevant, since staff of these assessment agencies report that a significant proportion of PINS kids are in special education programs and have long histories of academic problems. Drawing on all this information, the agency recommends services to address the needs of the child and the family as a whole. DAS providers, judges, and probation officers argue that the child's behavior is usually a symptom of broader family issues and describe this population as "FINS" (families in need of services). Since involving parents is crucial, people who work with these families report that they make a concerted effort to engage families, although it is not easy.

Assessments are supposed to be completed within thirty days. According to data from the Comprehensive Juvenile Information System, however, only a third are completed on

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<sup>27</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 735(a)(ii).

<sup>28</sup> *Changing the PINS System in New York*, 7.

<sup>29</sup> The DAS providers were only able to locate files for 60 out of the 83 cases in Brooklyn and 50 of the 75 cases in Queens. Perhaps these families did not attend any appointments for the agency to create a file. Also, the DAS providers, which rely on paper files, may not have been able to locate files for all of the children who received assessments.

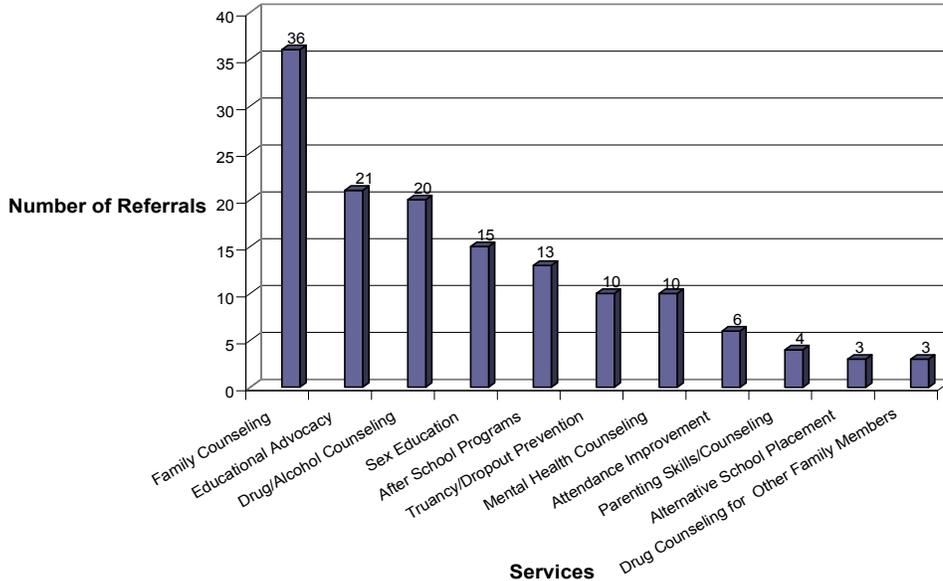
time, and most assessments take between thirty and sixty days to finish. Officials from the Children's Aid Society argue that this delay is partly the result of the thoroughness of the assessment and the significant reporting to various agencies. In some of these cases, the delay is actually the result of a scarcity of services. If the DAS worker cannot find a spot for the child with an appropriate service provider, the case remains open—even though the assessment is finished—until a place becomes available. The length of the assessment is an issue worth further examination. It takes time to thoroughly assess a family's needs and collect relevant information from government agencies, and there may be some families' whose needs can be addressed through a less comprehensive process that facilitates quicker referrals to services.

In cases where the child exhibits severe emotional symptoms, such as suicidal or homicidal tendencies, the agency can refer the child for an immediate psychiatric evaluation or placement in a psychiatric facility. Officials at the Children's Aid Society estimate that 35 percent of the PINS children they see display warning signs of suicidal or homicidal behavior, based on information elicited in their clinical interview with the children and families. DAS providers, however, express considerable frustration that appropriate psychological services—including treatment for children with both mental health and substance abuse problems—are often not available. Specifically, the few residential treatment facilities and diagnostic centers able to treat them are often full and cannot accept referrals directly from the DAS providers. Many of these children end up living, at least temporarily, in group homes that are not designed to address their mental illness.

Based on a review of DAS records for children in our sample, the most commonly recommended services in both boroughs are family counseling and mental health services, followed in Brooklyn by educational advocacy and in Queens by drug and alcohol counseling. Nearly every assessment we reviewed included a recommendation for some type of counseling or mental health service.

In twenty percent of the cases, the assessment recommended services funded by the New York City Administration for Children's Services to prevent placement in foster care.

**Figure 8.**  
**Brooklyn DAS Referred Services**  
**(n=48)**



The DAS provider sends the completed assessment and recommendation for services to the department of probation for review and approval. Generally, probation approves service plans without question. Once the plan is approved, the agency refers the child and family to local service providers. By the time a family has met with one or more probation officers and completed the DAS assessment, the referral to services can occur one-and-a-half to four months from the family’s first meeting with a probation officer. This is a significant waiting period for a family in need of services.

We were unable to learn how many children actually complete their service plans since no agency collects this information. Finding out would require obtaining records from each individual service provider, a task for future research.

*When diversion fails.* The vast majority of families complete the assessment and are referred for services. However, completion rates in the two boroughs differ significantly. In Brooklyn, 80 percent of families completed the assessment, while in Queens the rate was 56 percent. DAS providers give several reasons why families do not complete the assessments. Some families do not attend enough sessions with a DAS social worker for the agency to finish the assessment and recommend services. Sometimes the children stop attending; sometimes parents remove their children from the process. People who work with these families say that parents can become frustrated if they do not see a quick improvement in their child’s behavior. In addition, working parents sometimes have

difficulty attending sessions because of their work schedule.<sup>30</sup> However, these reasons do not account for the difference between the boroughs.

When families fail to participate in the assessment, the agency sends the case back to the department of probation. Similarly, if the assessment is completed but the family refuses to participate in the recommended services, the case ends up back in the hands of probation. The DAS provider in Brooklyn sent 12 incomplete assessments of the 60 cases in our sample for which we found records back to probation; the designated agency in Queens returned 22 incomplete assessments out of 50 cases. When this happens, parents and guardians who still want help can go to family court. Ten of the 12 cases in Brooklyn went to court, while in Queens, just seven of the 22 cases proceeded to court.

### **The Path Through Family Court**

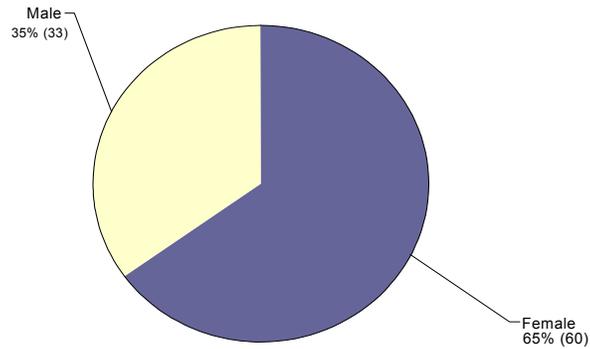
*A mother came to the Brooklyn Family Court with two of her eight children and insisted on seeing a judge. She told the probation officer that her 15-year-old daughter and 14-year-old son cause her nothing but trouble and offered these examples: Because the girl told someone at school that her step father had slapped her, the police arrested him. She also blamed her daughter for her husband wanting a divorce. Her son, who is chronically truant, refused to attend summer school, and has begun smoking pot regularly, never respects her wishes. One day he climbed down the fire escape to visit a friend after she had prohibited him from leaving the house. She did not want to attend any type of services and claimed that her son had been in counseling for eight months with no results. She insisted on seeing a judge.*

Some parents and guardians who want to file a PINS petition are not willing to go through a long needs assessment, drop out midway, or refuse to participate in services. Sometimes the children themselves refuse to participate in an assessment or services. Either early in the process or later on, some of these families simply decide they want a judge to intervene and help them deal with their child. And a few parents want someone else to take over caring for and supervising their child—at least temporarily. In these cases, the department of probation refers the family to court. Out of the 200 cases we reviewed, the probation department sent 93 cases to court, either directly or after the family failed to complete an assessment or services. Cases involving girls were more likely to be referred to court than cases involving boys.

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<sup>30</sup> According to the Brooklyn DAS provider, 68 percent of petitioners in the year 2000 were employed.

**Figure 9.**  
**Gender of Respondents in PINS Cases Referred to Court**  
**(n=93)**



*The use of warrants.* During focus groups and interviews, many parents said they felt that only the threat of police intervention would get their children to behave. A warrant, which gives police the authority to pick up a child, provides such a threat. The majority of cases in our sample of 200 that went to court (63 cases out of 93, or 68 percent) involved warrants. When a parent gets a warrant, the case must go before a judge and the family cannot first seek help from community-based services. Probation officers say that they prefer to pass on requests for warrants only in cases where the parent alleges that the child has run away or is in imminent danger and that they try to discourage parents from requesting a warrant. In practice, however, it appears—and probation officers acknowledge—that they are rarely successful in changing the minds of parents who want warrants as extra leverage to get control of their children.

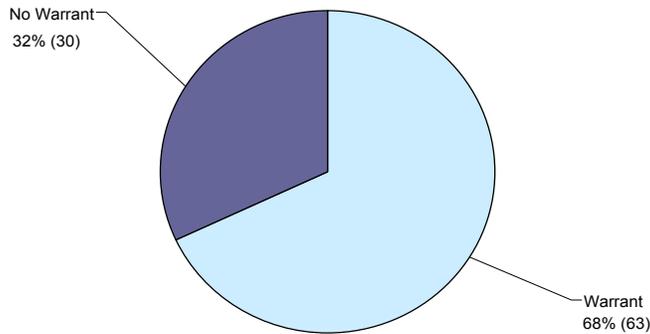
Family court judges decide whether or not to issue a warrant, and they almost always follow the parent’s wishes.<sup>31</sup> In the fall of 2000, Vera staff observed 31 cases in which the petitioner requested a warrant. Judges issued warrants in 28, or 90 percent, of these cases.

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<sup>31</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 738 provides, in part, that the court may issue a warrant for the respondent to be brought before the court if it appears that: “a summons cannot be served; or the respondent or other person has failed to obey a summons; or the respondent or other person is likely to leave the jurisdiction; or a summons, in the court’s opinion, would be ineffective; or a respondent on bail has failed to appear in court.” Warrants expire after six months but can be extended for up to six additional months with good cause.

Figure 10.

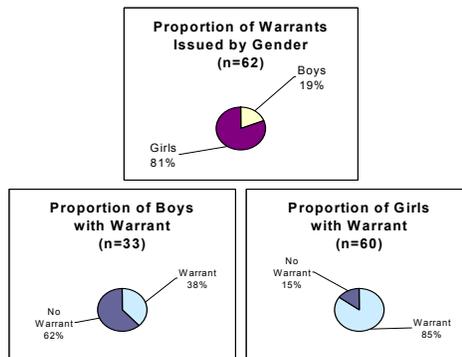
Rate of Warrant for Cases Referred to Court  
(n=93)



Warrants are issued more often against girls than against boys. Of the 63 warrants issued, 81 percent were for girls. And among all the girls referred to court, 85 percent (51 out of 60) had a warrant issued for their return compared with 38 percent of boys who were referred to court (12 of 33).

Figure 11.

Gender of PINS Cases with Warrants



Observations of court hearings suggest that warrants do indeed offer parents some leverage with their children, since they seem to help convince many kids to come to court. Among the cases involving warrants that Vera staff observed in the fall of 2000, in 70 percent of these cases the children came to court voluntarily.<sup>32</sup> If merely showing a child a piece of paper that threatens police action convinces that child to come to court,

<sup>32</sup> If a child refuses to come to court voluntarily, a police officer can execute the warrant and take the child to court, (or to the Administration for Children’s Services’ Emergency Children’s Center if the family court is closed) but generally officers will only pick up a child if the parent tells them exactly where the child is.

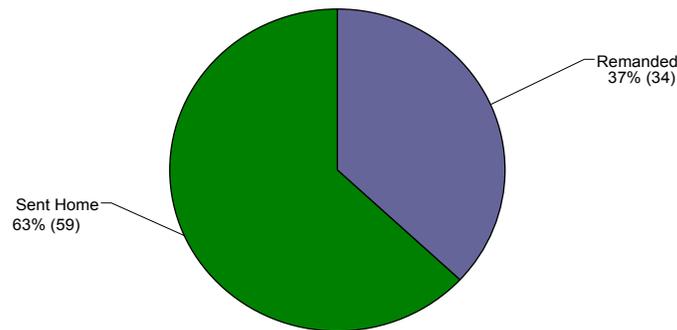
there may be other ways to engage the child in services without involving the family court.<sup>33</sup>

The first court hearing, called an intake hearing, involves several issues but focuses initially on any requests for warrants or returns on warrants. When a child comes to court on a warrant, sometimes the judge decides that the case should be diverted for services. Judges have expressed frustration at the number of cases they see that could have been diverted by probation. Judges sent 37 percent of the cases in our sample (19 cases in Queens and 15 in Brooklyn) to DAS at some point between the first and fourth court hearings. In cases that are not diverted, and after resolving any issues involving warrants, judges use the intake hearing to determine whether the allegations are sufficient for the case to go forward and to decide where the child will live while the court gathers the facts necessary to resolve the case.<sup>34</sup>

*Deciding where the child lives while the case is pending.* Under the statute, judges have two options: send the child home (or to live with a relative willing to care for the child) or place the child temporarily in foster care pending the outcome of the case.<sup>35</sup> In 34 of the 93 court cases we reviewed, the judge remanded the child to foster care. In the other 59 cases, the judge sent the child home.

Figure 12.

Rate of Remand for Cases Referred to Court  
(n=93)



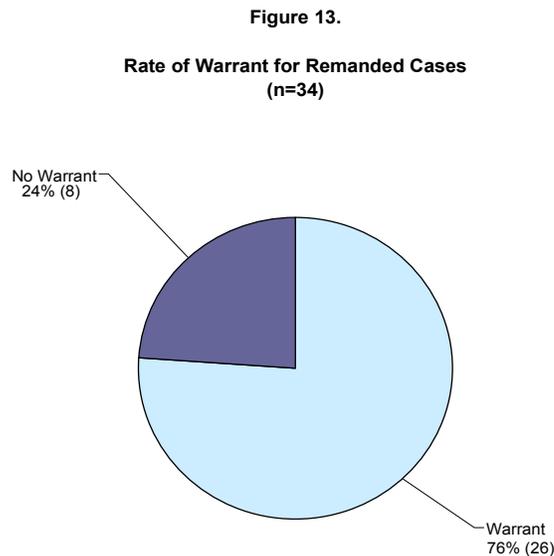
<sup>33</sup> For example, the N.Y. Family Court Act Section 718 provides for the return of a runaway without bringing that child to court. The police or a peace officer can pick up a runaway and return the child to “a parent or other person legally responsible for such child’s care” or, any facility “certified for such purpose by the division for youth or to a facility approved by the state department of social services.” The city could use this section of the statute to offer parents an alternative to a warrant that would not involve the family court.

<sup>34</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 728.

<sup>35</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 739.

Based on observations of court hearings, judges generally follow the wishes of parents and guardians about whether or not to place the child in foster care: if the parent does not want to take the child home and no relative is willing to care for the child, the judge usually remands the youth to the care of the city's child welfare agency. During our observations of court hearing in December 2000, in ten out of 11 cases where a parent asked the judge to place the child outside the home, the judge remanded the child. Our interviews with judges and court attorneys support this finding and suggest that judges also tend to put children in foster care whom they feel are a danger to other members of the household. Parents ask judges to place their children in foster care for many reasons. Often they are seeking a way to provide the supervision, discipline, and help for their kids' problems that they cannot offer at home. In some cases, parents are afraid their kids will hurt them or a sibling. Some are just desperate to control their child and see no other solution. And there are other less common reasons. One judge remembers a mother who was getting remarried and came to court to have her son placed because her new husband did not like him.

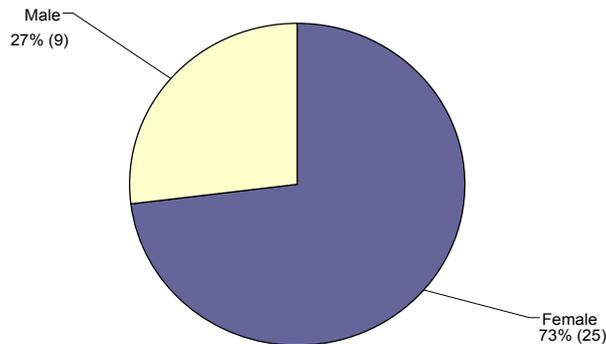
Our review of completed PINS cases also shows that children with warrants against them are remanded to foster care more often than other kids.



Girls are much more likely than boys to have warrants issued against them and to be remanded to foster care. In fact, 73 percent of the children who were remanded to foster care were girls.

Figure 14.

Proportion of Remanded PINS Cases by Gender  
(n=34)



*Determining the facts.* If the child is remanded to foster care, the law requires a fact-finding hearing to begin within three days, but there is no limit to the number of adjournments and thus how long the fact-finding process can take.<sup>36</sup> During this hearing, the petitioner tries to substantiate the allegations in the petition. The child can admit to the allegations or contest them. During the hearings, children are generally represented by law guardians from the Legal Aid Society’s Juvenile Rights Division. The judge asks parents, school officials, mental health professionals, and other interested parties to provide information about the child’s behavior, medical and psychological history, and any other relevant issues. Ultimately, the judge decides whether the allegations are true—the finding in nearly all the cases in our sample that judges considered. Just four of the cases were dismissed because the allegations could not be established.

*Resolving the case.* After determining the facts in a case, the judge must offer a ruling, or disposition. The fact-finding and dispositional hearings can be held on the same day but more often occur over a period of weeks or months, usually because judges are unable to obtain information they need. The delay in these cases is a source of frustration for judges and one of the reasons that children stay in foster care for long periods.

Judges typically decide among three dispositions: probation, placement in foster care, or dismissal. In the vast majority of court cases we reviewed that had reached this stage, 47 out of 59, the judge either dismissed the case (34 cases) or the petitioner withdrew the allegations (13 cases). And in more than half these cases (27 of the 47 cases), the parent or guardian did not appear at the final hearing. While 38 of the cases that were dismissed

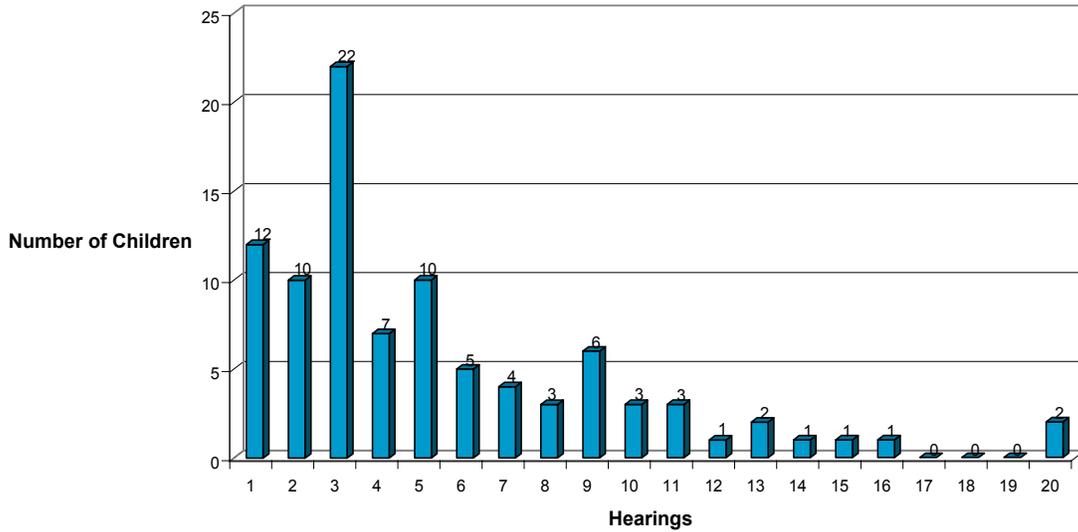
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<sup>36</sup> N.Y. Family Court Act Section 747. Successive adjournments of a fact-finding hearing “may only be granted under special circumstance.” N.Y. Family Court Act Section 748 (b).

or withdrawn were resolved by the third hearing, the other 55 court cases in our sample involved more hearings—as many as 20 in two cases.

**Figure 15.**

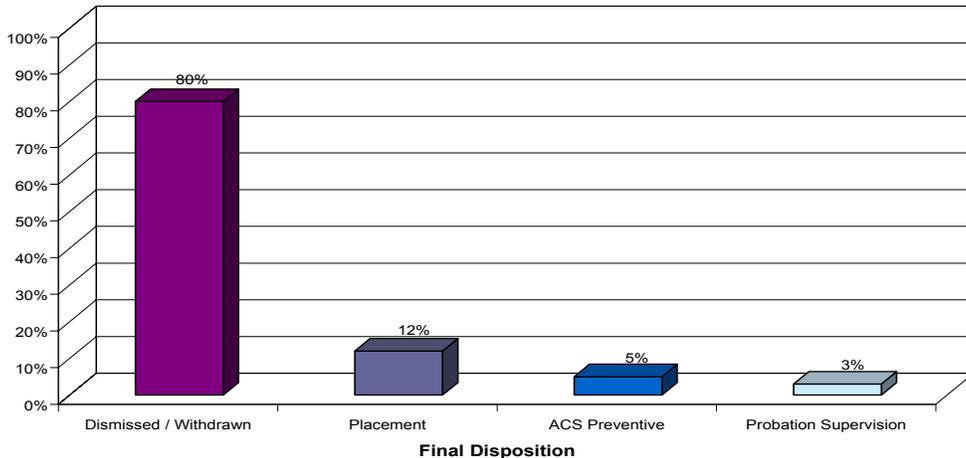
**Number of Hearings  
(n=93)**



Looking at the 12 cases that were not dismissed: in two of them, the judge sent the child to probation for supervision; in three cases, the judge referred the family to the city’s child welfare agency for services to prevent foster care placement. And in just seven cases, the judge placed the child in foster care as the final disposition. In each of these seven cases, the child had been remanded to foster care while the case was pending.

**Figure 16.**

**Final Disposition of PINS Cases  
(n=59)\***



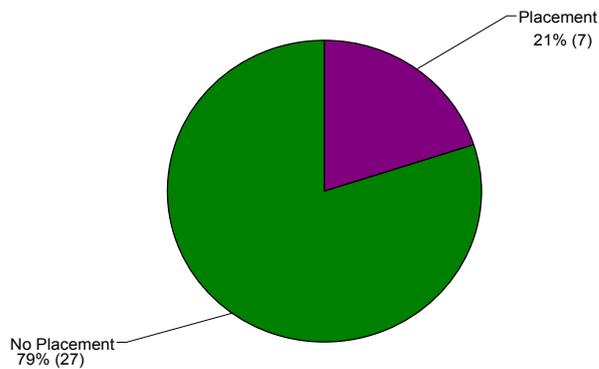
\* Does not include cases referred by the court for assessment.

It is important to note that judges dismissed most of the cases in which the child had been remanded to foster care—27 of the 34—and either returned the child home or, less often, placed the child with a relative.

Judging from this sample of 200 PINS cases, most children who are remanded to foster care are not ultimately placed in care. Instead, they go home or to live with a relative at the end of their PINS case. Maybe removing these children from their homes was never necessary. Family court judges, in particular, are frustrated about the lack of options available to them throughout the process. They see a need to respond differently to these families who will enter the system in even larger numbers after the age eligibility is raised in July. Perhaps a brief period of separation, and the respite that it would provide, combined with services designed to help children and parents address their problems would be a more effective and less expensive response in these cases.

Figure 17.

Proportion of Remanded PINS Cases with Final Disposition of Placement (n=34)



## V. The Experience of Foster Care

Children who are remanded to foster care while their court cases progress and those who are placed in foster care as the final disposition of their PINS cases almost always live in group homes rather than with foster families. These homes operate under contracts with the city's child welfare agency. Of the 34 children remanded to foster care in our sample of 200 cases, we were able to review placement information for 28 of them. We could not find records for the other six children in the Child Care Review System, although court records show that these children were remanded. Eighteen of the 28 children (64 percent) lived in group homes with seven to 12 other kids. Nine children (32 percent) lived in larger group homes with a maximum of 25 kids. Five of these children were placed in diagnostic residential centers.<sup>37</sup> Only one child was placed temporarily with a foster family.

*Length of Stay.* Children who are remanded remain in care while their case is pending for as little as a few days and as long as several months. In the cases we reviewed, the average length of stay was 117 days, or almost 4 months.<sup>38</sup> Thirty days after being remanded, 65 percent of the children we followed were still in care. After 60 days, 56 percent of these kids remained in foster care. Even after 150 days, 36 percent of the children who had been remanded were in care waiting for their case to be resolved. Obviously, children who are placed in foster care as the final dispositions of their PINS cases remain in care even longer. As of March 1, 2001, the most recent date for which we have data, the average length of stay among the seven children in our sample placed in foster care at the conclusion of their court cases was 310 days—more than 10 months.

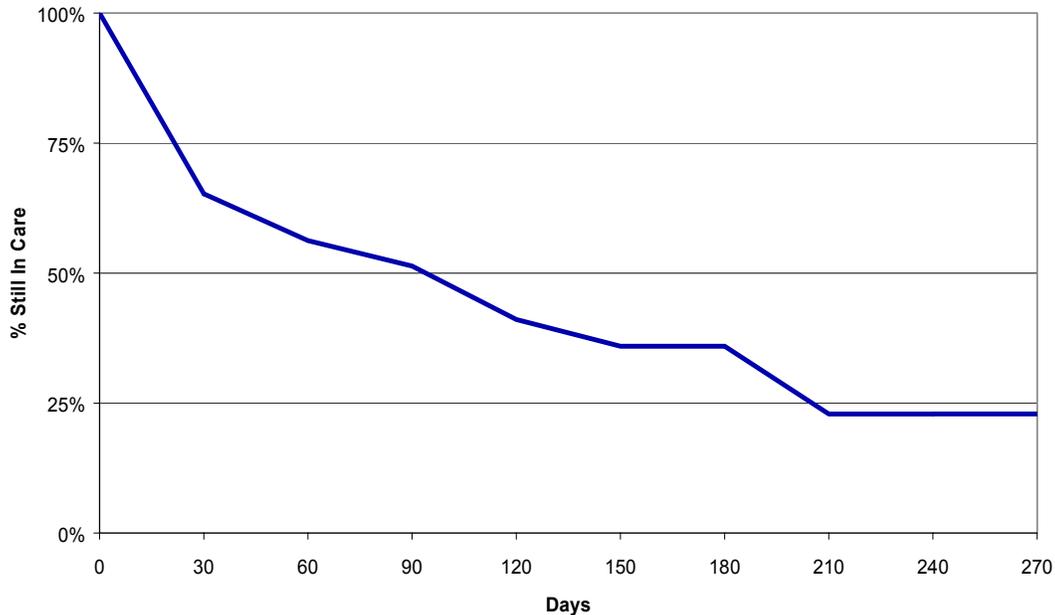
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<sup>37</sup> These five are counted with the nine children remanded to larger group homes because diagnostic residential centers tend to house more than 12 children.

<sup>38</sup> Ultimately, the average length of stay for these cases will be longer than 117 days. We only had data from the Child Care Review System, our source for this information, through March 1, 2001, and 11 of the remand cases in our sample were still pending in court as of that date.

Figure 18.

Length of Stay  
(n=34)



Foster care, particularly group homes, is an expensive service. In New York City, the average system rate is \$170 per night for these placements.<sup>39</sup> At that rate, the cost of keeping a child in a group home for 117 days is \$19,890; the cost for 310 days is \$52,700. By contrast, preventive services cost, on average, just \$6,200 per family.<sup>40</sup>

Despite great expense, and parents' initial belief that a temporary foster care placement is the right choice, our focus groups with parents and children suggest that foster care does not satisfy them or address their needs. Parents who want their children to have more supervision are often disappointed and frustrated. Both the parents and children we spoke with believe the group homes provide less structure, supervision, and therapeutic services than parents hope for.<sup>41</sup> Certainly parents looking for a boot camp-type setting are disappointed when they learn that group homes are not secure facilities. Furthermore, parents feel that out-of-home placements rarely solve the underlying problems.

While group homes in New York City vary widely, few are designed to address the particular needs of families involved in the PINS system. Generally, group homes do not distinguish between children placed because of a PINS petition and those placed because

<sup>39</sup> This amount was provided by the New York City Administration for Children's Services as the average cost of keeping a PINS child in a group home. The city is reimbursed by the state for fifty percent of the cost under Title IV-E, Article 19G of the Executive Law, Section 530 (2-a).

<sup>40</sup> This figure was provided by the New York City Administration for Children's Services for one year of preventive services.

<sup>41</sup> PINS children are not allowed to be held in secure detention. N.Y. Family Court Act Section 720 (2).

they have been abused and neglected by their parents. Indeed, many children involved in the PINS system deteriorate in foster care. Most of them enter the PINS system with a history of truancy and are even less likely to attend school regularly after they are placed in foster care.<sup>42</sup> In contrast, the attendance rates of kids who are placed in foster care because of abuse or neglect often improve following placement.<sup>43</sup>

More than sixty percent of the children in our sample who were remanded to foster care ran away from their group homes.<sup>44</sup> Children placed in foster care in conjunction with a PINS case are three times more likely than other children in foster care go AWOL (Absent Without Leave).<sup>45</sup> Their disobedience frustrates judges, who feel they have few if any other options to offer these families. Some judges have responded by trying to hold foster care agencies or even the children themselves in contempt of court, meaning that they could be put in jail for refusing to obey court orders.<sup>46</sup> But these decisions have been overturned by appellate courts, which have ruled that such actions are an illegal use of judicial authority.<sup>47</sup> Even though parents look to judges to provide the authority they feel they lack, in practice judges have no more, and perhaps less, power than parents and guardians. People who work in foster care group homes say that many of the children who run away go home, indicating that home-based services might more effectively, and with less cost, address the child's and family's problems.

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<sup>42</sup> Dylan Conger and Alison Rebeck, *How Children's Foster Care Experiences Affect Their Education* (New York: Vera Institute, 2001), 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> We could only obtain files from the Child Care Review System for 68 percent of the kids in our sample who spent time in foster care. Among this group, 61 percent left their foster home without permission at some point.

<sup>45</sup> Timothy Ross, Mark Wamsley, and Ajay Khashu, *The Experiences of Early Adolescence in Foster Care in New York City: Analysis of the 1994 Cohort* (New York: Vera Institute, 2001), 19.

<sup>46</sup> See, e.g., *In the Matter of Naquan, J. 727 N.Y.S.2d 124.*

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

## VI. The Children Who Are Placed in Foster Care

Our review of 200 PINS cases shows that judges place more than a third of children in foster care temporarily while their family court cases are pending rather than release them to the care of parents and guardians, but that they ultimately send most of these children home. Since placement is very expensive and rarely addresses the problems that lead caretakers to file a PINS petition, it makes sense to consider alternatives to foster care for at least some of these children. But who are they? One of the goals of this study was to determine the differences between children judges remand and those they send home.

It turns out the most significant factor determining whether a PINS child will be put in foster care is the parent's wishes. Having a prior PINS petition and coming to court on a warrant are also important determinants. Finally, girls are more likely to spend time in foster care than boys. The Vera Institute is developing a screening instrument able to consider a variety of factors and rate a child's likelihood of being placed in foster care. These children could then be targeted for an alternative intervention.

### **Key Characteristics of Children Who Are Remanded to Foster Care**

*Demographic markers.* In our review of cases, the children who were remanded to foster care while their cases were pending look very much like the overall sample. Most are black and Latino and 14 or 15 years old. While race and age are not useful as indicators of which children judges are more likely to remand, gender is. Although girls slightly outnumber boys in the overall sample (54 percent), they were even more likely to go to court and were much more likely to be remanded than boys. Girls make up about two-thirds (65 percent) of children who went to court and nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of those who were remanded to foster care. Twenty-two percent of all girls in the sample were remanded as compared to ten percent of all boys.

*The parent's wishes.* A parent's or guardian's wishes are perhaps the clearest indicator of which children spend time in foster care. From observations of court hearings, judges appear reluctant to send children home when their parents want them to be remanded. From the cases observed in the fall of 2000, 11 parents asked the judge to place their child in foster care, and in 10 of these cases the judge honored their request. In interviews with Vera staff, sitting and administrative judges said they always try to encourage parents to take their children home and to seek out services that will help resolve the family's problems, emphasizing their responsibility as parents. They said that they only remand children when parents emphatically refuse to take the child home or when the child seems to be a danger to other members of the home. If the hearings we observed reflect trends in the system overall, judges are following the parent's lead in this matter.

*Warrants.* The cases that went to court more likely than not involved a warrant (67 percent of the court cases involved warrants), and judges were more likely to remand these children. Forty-two percent of the children with a warrant were remanded, compared with 26 percent of children for whom a warrant was not issued. Children with a warrant made up three-quarters (76 percent) of the entire group that was remanded.

*History of delinquency and prior PINS petitions.* Children with a record of juvenile delinquency were no more likely to be placed in foster care while their PINS cases were pending, but children who had been the subject of a prior PINS petition were three times more likely to be remanded than children who were beginning their first trip through the system. Forty-one percent of children with one prior PINS petition were remanded, while only 12 percent of kids who had never been the subject of a PINS petition were remanded. Oddly, none of the four children who had been involved in two prior PINS cases were remanded.

*Allegations.* Certain allegations were associated with higher rates of temporary foster care placement, especially the charge “uses abusive language.” In sixty-two percent of cases that include this allegation, the children were remanded. The remand rate in cases that did not include an allegation of abusive language is nearly half as high—33 percent. Other allegations are associated with disparities in the remand rates, but the differences are much less dramatic. Forty-seven percent of cases that include the allegation “keeps undesirable company” were remanded, compared with a 31 percent rate of remand among cases that do not include this allegation. Similarly, 44 percent of cases that include the allegation “running away” were remanded, compared with a remand rate of 32 percent in cases without this allegation.

## VI. Conclusion

Nearly three out of every four families who contact the New York City PINS system because their child is troubled and out of control can stay together while a designated agency examines their needs. The assessment process is thorough, and most families finish it. Further research is needed to determine how many families complete the full course of recommended services and how effective those services are. Although 18 percent of children in our sample went through the PINS system more than once, this is not necessarily a sign of failure. Further research is needed to determine how many children with a prior PINS case enter the foster care or juvenile justice system later on.

Almost half the families seeking help decide to take their problems to a family court judge, usually because they want a warrant threatening police action to get control of their children. While judges are able to divert about a third of these families away from court to community-based services, most cases proceed in court. These parents typically want the judge to take the child out of their home temporarily. Beyond providing a much-needed break from difficult teens, parents hope and believe that spending time in a supervised institution will send a strong message to their children and provide an opportunity for them to address their problems with help from professional counselors. Unfortunately, foster care group homes—where most children are placed—are not designed to meet their needs. In many cases, the experience is actually harmful. Children’s school attendance rates tend to decline while they are in care, and many children run away from these placements. Remanding children to group homes leaves parents dissatisfied and, at best, places children in limbo. It’s also the most expensive aspect of the PINS system, costing many times more than diversion.

In the end, most PINS cases are either dismissed or the parents stop pursuing the matter—including cases where children spend time in foster care. In only seven out of 34 cases where children lived in foster care while the case was pending did the judge resolve the matter by placing the child in foster care. The other children returned home, but with no indication of receiving the targeted services they needed.

Efforts to improve the PINS system should focus on children who spend time in foster care since this is the least effective and most expensive part of the system. But how can officials identify these children? Our research shows that the most important determinant of whether a child is remanded to foster care is the wishes of the parent.

City officials responsible for the system are working together to redesign the intake process so that parents understand the limitations of pursuing a case in family court and the advantages of home-based services. The Administration for Children’s Services is also working with Vera to develop a form of respite care as an alternative to temporary foster care placement. Based on a model used successfully in other parts of the country, respite care would give parents and children the break from one another that they need to begin the process of reconciliation. It would help children work through the problems that

led their caretakers to file a PINS petition and engage the entire family in developing the coping skills and links to community-based resources they need to cope well with future conflicts. And, whenever appropriate, respite care would facilitate a speedy reunification of the family.