

Addendum to *Widening the Lens 2008*

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The Vera Institute of Justice has learned that *Widening the Lens 2008* reflects an undercount of detention admissions (secure and non-secure) for Juvenile Delinquency (JD) and Persons in Need of Supervision (PINS) cases outside of New York City.¹ Following the report's release, a handful of counties indicated that local detention numbers in these categories were, in some cases, significantly higher than the numbers captured and maintained by the Juvenile Detention Automated System (JDAS), a centralized tracking system managed by the Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS). This addendum, produced in partnership with OCFS, identifies the source of this discrepancy, offers revised figures where necessary, and reflects on their implications for future reports.

When the Task Force on Juvenile Justice Indicators began its work in 2005, it sought to track admissions to detention by case type—JDs, PINS, and Juvenile Offenders (JOs). It wanted this information in order to examine long-term trends in how the juvenile justice system responds to different case types and to identify system points in need of reform.

JDAS prompts counties to indicate case type when they are recording admissions data into the tracking system. This information may not yet be available when a case is first entered into the system, however, so it does not require this information to be entered. Nevertheless, in 2004, the first year of data used to produce statewide indicators, most counties entered data into JDAS in a way that allowed the state to reliably differentiate admissions by case type: only 3 percent of total detention admissions, across secure and non-secure facilities, were missing a case designation (and were therefore excluded from

¹ As explained in the report, New York City detention figures were not included in the statewide 2004 to 2008 indicators. The task force decided that data for all counties should conform to a standardized structure. To conform with this organizing principle the task force selected indicators drawn from statewide data systems. The New York City Department of Juvenile Justice (DJJ) collects extensive and high quality juvenile detention data. However, from 2004 to 2006, the agency did not use a data system that matched the statewide reporting system. Therefore, the data from DJJ was not included in the full set of indicators presented in *Widening the Lens 2008*. The City and the State are discussing ways to include DJJ data going forward.

the indicators).² In 2005 and 2006, however, several counties began entering case type information into JDAS with far less frequency. The number of detention admissions that did not designate case type rose to 839 (10 percent of total admissions) in 2005. By 2006, the figure had jumped to 1,136 (15 percent of total admissions). The current process for calculating the New York State juvenile detention indicators is dependent on knowing the type of case entering a facility; therefore, these undesignated admissions were not included in the *Widening the Lens 2008* charts that depict total JD and PINS admissions, leading to an undercount of detention usage.

Fortunately, subsequent investigation confirmed that the database does accurately record overall admissions to both secure and non-secure facilities, regardless of case designation. We can therefore report total admissions to facilities even if it is impossible to differentiate case type within this population. ***Observations and Figures 3 and 4 from Widening the Lens 2008 have, therefore, been updated and are presented below.***

Examining the state's data systems to understand their purpose and functionality, and determining how best to compile and report accurate data, have been key components of the *Widening the Lens* project. So complex a process will inevitably encounter challenges, along with opportunities to address them. In this case, we have come to understand that OCFS designed and implemented JDAS to calculate detention reimbursements to counties and offer them a timely mechanism to track their use of detention and expenditures. The system was not designed for research purposes.³ Nevertheless, OCFS officials have expressed a commitment to finding ways to make comprehensive statewide detention data available in the future and, in particular, to track and examine detention admissions by case type.

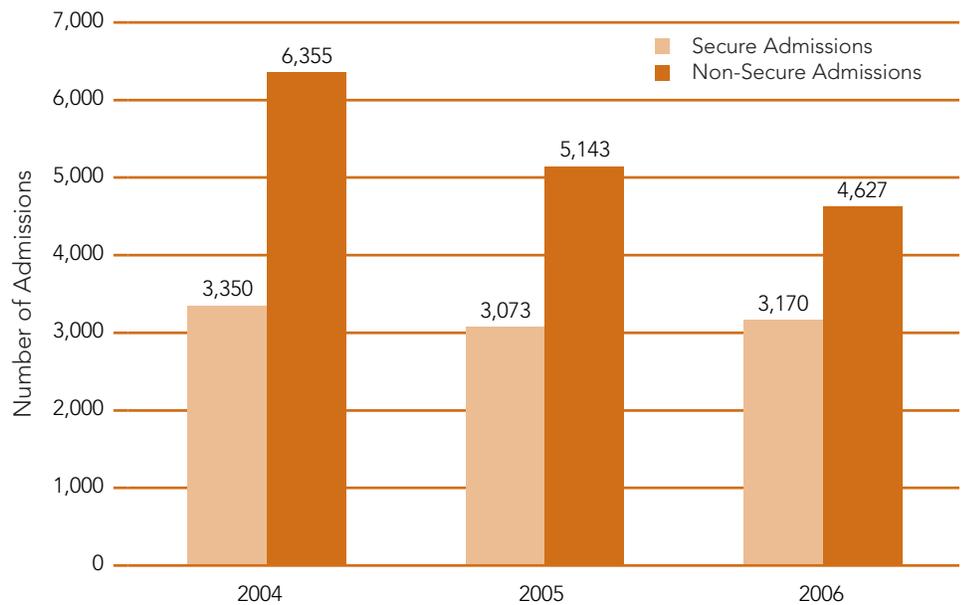
² These figures do not include some cases that were excluded following a standardized "cleaning" process that removes from the raw data any duplicative records or admissions lacking extensive information.

³ Under New York State statute, counties receive 50 cents on the dollar for each detention admission. This amount was recently reduced to 49 cents for the fiscal year 2008-09 and ongoing.

Observation 3: Statewide juvenile detention admissions—secure and non-secure combined—have decreased by 20 percent since 2004, excluding New York City.

Counties across the state (excluding the five New York City boroughs) recorded a total of 7,797 juvenile detention admissions in 2006, a 20 percent decrease since 2004. Figure 3 shows the aggregate secure and non-secure detention admissions from 2004 to 2006.

Figure 3 (updated): Statewide juvenile detention admissions (excluding New York City), 2004 to 2006



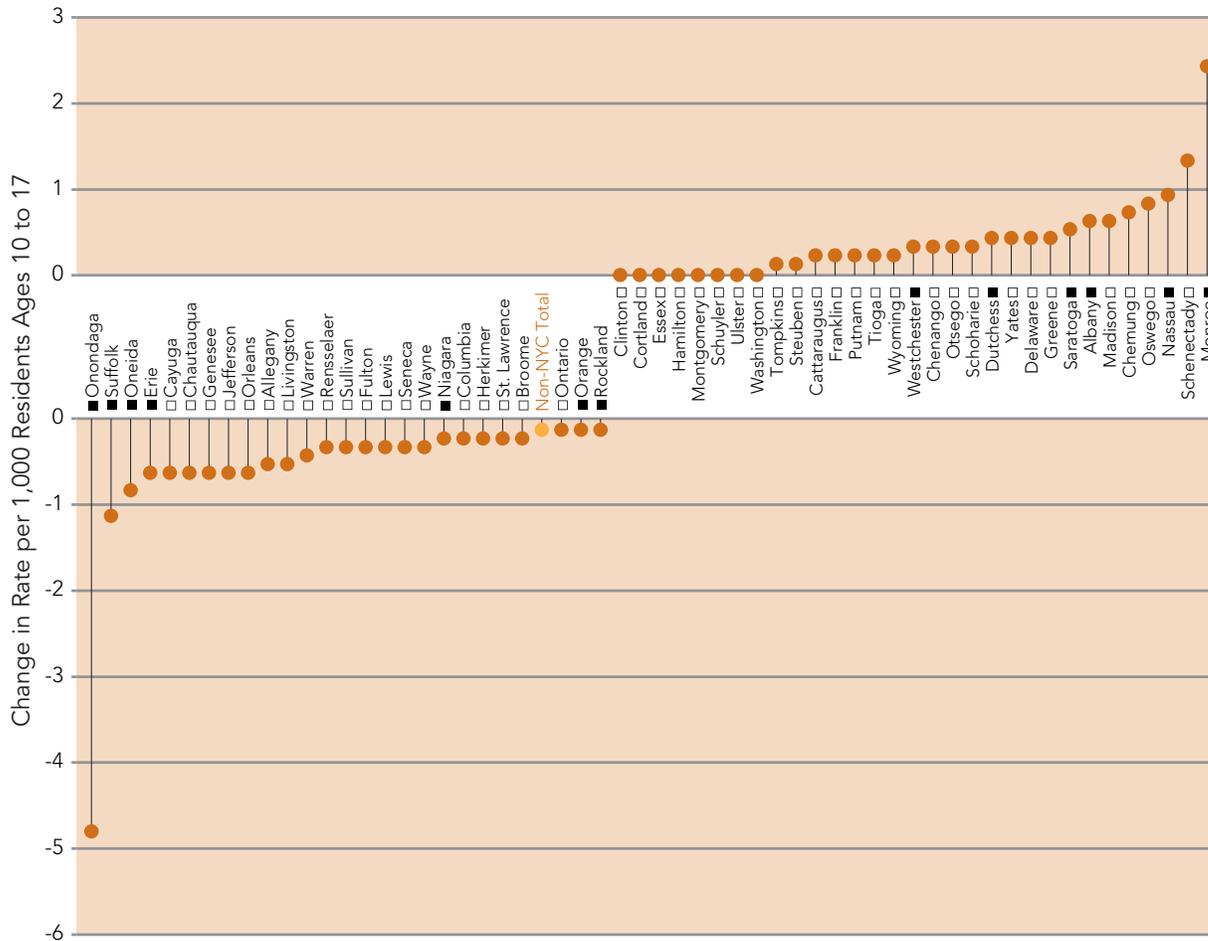
Admissions to non-secure detention (JDs and PINS combined) fell by 27 percent while admissions to secure detention (JDs and JOs combined) decreased by 5 percent.

Observation 4: Twenty-six counties have seen a decrease in secure detention admissions rates since 2004. The most striking decrease occurred in Onondaga County.

As stated in the report, the indicators reflect the rates at which young people are placed in detention facilities across the state. Local secure detention rates are calculated based on the number of admissions to a secure detention facility per 1,000 county residents ages 10 to 17. Detention rates used in this way—in lieu of raw numbers—allow practitioners and policymakers to more appropriately and thoughtfully gauge and compare detention usage across counties

of varying size. Figure 4 shows the change in local secure detention rates (JDs and JOs combined) from 2004 to 2006.

Figure 4 (updated): Change in secure detention admission rates (excluding New York City), 2004 to 2006



Some of these decreases have been quite modest. Onondaga County, however, experienced a dramatic change: a decrease from 8.4 secure detention admissions for every 1,000 county residents age 10 to 17 in 2004 to 3.6 per 1,000 in 2006. In raw numbers, this translates into a drop of more than 58 percent.