

# Strategies

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## Chicago's South Suburbs: The New Ground Zero for DMC?

By T. Shawn Taylor

*When juvenile justice advocates talk about disproportionate minority contact and confinement (DMC) in the south suburbs, they point to a laundry list of social ills ranging from high unemployment, to a lack of after-school programs, to strains on social services to explain why they believe DMC is worse out **there** today than it is in Chicago.*

But many say the main reason the rate of south suburban teens in the justice system has grown by 5 percent every year since 2005, when the government began tracking, stems from a particular social phenomenon: A rapid shift in the region's racial and economic demographics beginning in the mid-to late-1990s.

**D**uring that time, displaced Chicago Housing Authority residents, armed with Section 8 vouchers, flocked to south suburban communities such as Calumet City, Chicago Heights, Robbins, Riverdale, Sauk Village, Harvey and Dolton as part of the CHA's Plan for Transformation. Sources say the influx of economically disenfranchised residents contributed to white and black flight, school crowding and declining property values. It also drained resources for the wraparound social services the new residents were in desperate need of.

"A lot of times, these are areas that have been hardest hit by unemployment, or areas where people have moved out of their property and rented to subsidized residents," said Theo Chapman, a probation officer for the Cook County Juvenile Probation Department and a member of the South Suburban Disproportionate Minority Contact Forum on Youth Foundation (SSDMC). "When one moves, there's a dumping event. Everybody eventually starts to be placed in this area."

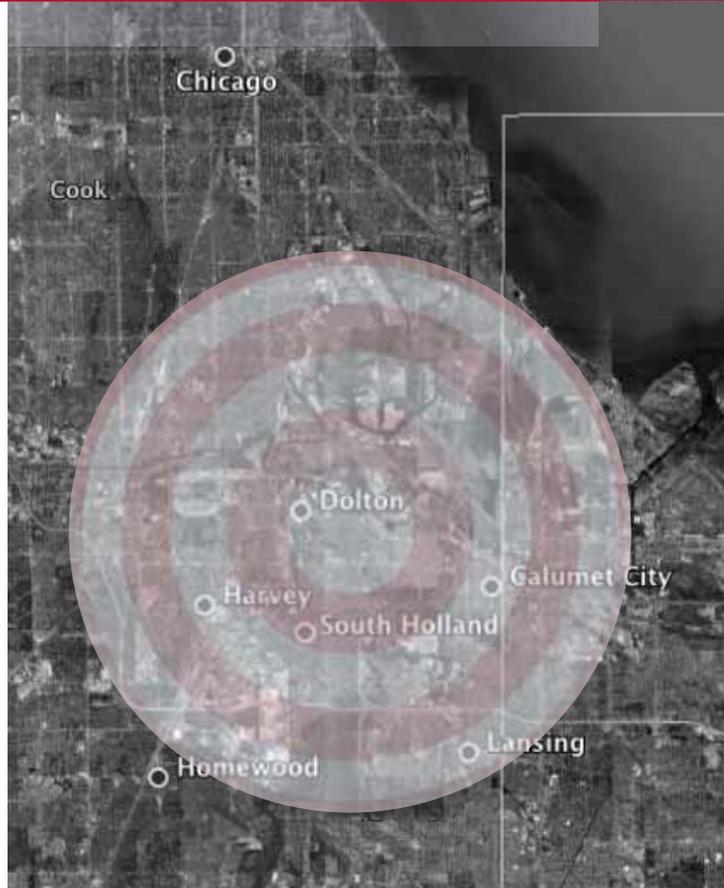
The SSDMC is an advocacy group that was founded in 2002 to reduce the disparities in

police contact and sentencing among youth of color in the juvenile justice system. The DMC initiative began as a pilot project to provide activities focused on influencing system policy as it relates to juvenile justice, including community support and alternative programming. The organization also tracks data as it relates to youth detained from the south suburbs.

Heightened cultural insensitivities and a lack of diversity on south suburban police forces appeared to run parallel to the changing demographics, sources say.

"In Sauk Village, we noticed that the youth were being detained for not very serious offenses," said Gary Jackson, technology director for SSDMC and a member of its advisory board, recalling several jaywalking incidents that led to the arrest of Black youth who were detained at the Cook County Juvenile Detention Center in Chicago.

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE POLICY DIRECTOR

Greetings, and welcome to the Fall 2010 issue of *Strategies*, the journal of ideas from the Chicago Urban

League's Policy & Research Department.

Good research is the foundation on which all our work stands; policy is research in action. *Strategies* lies at their intersection, where theory and practice come together.

The Chicago Urban League is best known for its groundbreaking Entrepreneurship Center and award-winning *nextTV* television show. But there is another arm of our work that is just as important: juvenile justice. Keeping young people out of the justice and penal systems, diverting the trouble-bound away from crime and onto paths that lead to school and work: these are our goals. Today, our team works under project manager David Wise. Along with a group of distinguished partners under a grant from the MacArthur Foundations Models for Change Initiative, Wise has become a visible presence in Chicago, advocating for better data, more community-based alternatives, expungement assistance, and intensive counseling for youngsters.

Disproportionate Minority Contact – or DMC as it is known, exacts a terrible cost. African-Americans comprise approximately 18% of Illinois' youth (ages 10 – 16), yet make up 57% of youth arrests and 41% of youth held in detention. Evidence shows that smart interventions and enthusiastic advocacy can make a big difference in the realities of students, schools, and communities.

Evidence shows that while DMC work in Chicago is improving outcomes, demographic changes have spread beyond city boundaries. DMC is now a major problem in the south suburbs. This issue looks at the problem and points to solutions.

We hope this issue enlightens you and prompts you to support DMC-reducing strategies in your area.

*David E. Thigpen*

David E. Thigpen  
VP for Policy and Research  
Chicago Urban League

The problem got worse as police departments began relaxing residency requirements and hiring new recruits from outside the community. Charlie Calvin, chief administrator for the county's Juvenile Justice Department recalls that communities such as Riverdale and Dolton at one time had a nearly all-white police force.

"There is no vested interest in these communities," Calvin said. "The community hasn't had time to adjust. Now you see an explosion. The system's people are being overworked. All of these things are responsible for communities becoming less stable."

Gary Jackson, technology director for the SSDMC, points out that because the south suburban region is so spread out, transportation and access to services has also become an issue. "The fact is that the suburbs are not adequately equipped as the City of Chicago has been in terms of having accessibility," he said.

SSDMC introduced a cultural competency program in Riverdale and is working with communities to diversify their police departments. As a result, departments in Chicago Heights, Dolton and Harvey have become more mixed, Calvin said.

"When you have people moving in the community, mostly renters or transients from public housing, there is a tendency in the suburban community to react, to preserve and protect what is left of the community," said Chapman, who also heads up the Jumpstart program, which works with students who have been out of school for a year or two and have had problems succeeding due to truancy and behavioral issues. "There is a fear factor also. There is the natural element to protect what is yours."

Some communities have fought back by instituting "home rule" which allows communities to hold homeowners who are renting out their properties accountable for the activity that takes place in the homes.

"You had homeowners who had moved and had no idea individuals in their properties were running crack and drug houses and eroding the community," Chapman said.

Home rule also gives homeowners who live in the community the power to go to the City Council and express a complaint about a nearby tenant, in which case the council can assess the renting homeowner fines.

"Home rule has played a major role," Chapman said. "The areas that have the worst DMC don't have home rule, such as Harvey."

Jackson added that south suburban courthouses in Markham and Bridgeview not only need more minority judges, but judges that are fair to youth of color.

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*T. Shawn Taylor is a writer and media consultant who formerly covered police and courts in the south suburbs for the Chicago Tribune.*

If you want to end DMC, fully fund the school systems. Give the young folks a good education and crime will decrease substantially --

*Judge Michael Stuttley --*

Michael Stuttley recently retired as Judge, Circuit Court of Cook County, Juvenile Justice Division. Angela Greene is Illinois' South Suburban Disproportionate Minority Confinement Project Director.

## From the Inside: A Judge Reflects On How DMC Is Changing Along With Chicago's Changing Demographics

### **Q: Why was the South Suburban Disproportionate Minority Confinement project created?**

**A: The Honorable Judge Stuttley:** The project is an offshoot from the issue of disproportionate minority confinement throughout the United States. The question was: how do we address the disproportionate number of people of color who are incarcerated, as opposed to other ethnic groups? We have a Board of Directors that is very community driven. In most jurisdictions, they have the police at the table and not the educators. Or they have the educators and not the community people, or they have the community people and not law enforcement. Or they have all three but didn't have the courts. South Suburban is probably the only project in Illinois, and maybe in the country, that has all those entities involved. We have all the police chiefs, the superintendent of schools, local politicians, law enforcement, community agencies, the court system, and the youth involved. Our Board of Directors consists of those different entities, and at least 85% to 90% are South Suburban residents.

### **Q: Why is there a need for programs that address disproportionate minority confinement?**

**A: Judge Stuttley:** There's no doubt there's a need, because something is wrong when the penitentiaries consist of 85% minorities. I'm not soft on crime, but I don't think we're the only people who commit crimes. There's not an honest attempt to level the playing field. I'll give an example. A little black boy goes into Lincoln Mall and steals a piece of candy. I'm going to see him the next day, because he's going to be arrested. But a little white boy goes into Lincoln Mall and steals a piece of candy, they'll call his parents saying, "Come get him and take him home." That may happen ten times before I even see him for the first time. That's a large part of the disproportion.

**Q: Some researchers say the South Suburbs have become the new flashpoint for juvenile justice issues.**

### *BY THE NUMBERS: DISPROPORTIONATE MINORITY CONTACT*

- In its 2005 Annual Report to the Governor and General Assembly, the Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission states that "DMC is one of the greatest challenges facing Illinois." African-American youth comprised approximately 18% of Illinois' youth (ages 10 – 16), yet make up 57% of youth arrests and 41% of youth held in detention. In Illinois' juvenile correctional facilities, African-American youth are 52% of the population
- Juvenile detention is costly: Detention can cost as much as 15 times more than alternative programs. Studies have found that detention yields as little as \$1.98 in benefits per dollar in terms of reduced crime rates and cost of crime, while alternative programs yield \$13 in benefits and reduced impacts for every dollar spent
- Juveniles transferred to the adult system are 33.7% more likely to be re-arrested than juveniles who commit the same level of offense but remain in the juvenile system
- 94% of juvenile arrests are for non-violent offenses. Only 6% percent of juvenile crime is violent.
- Nationally, African Americans make up 30% of the juveniles adjudicated delinquent, and 35% of the out-of-home placements. White youth represent 61% of the out-of-home placements, but 67% of the youth adjudicated delinquent
- District 428, the school district of the Illinois Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ), is funded at 1/3 of the minimum level of funding for other public school students across the state
- Almost 75% of girls and 66% of boys at the detention stage met the criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder. That rate is almost four times that of the general population. Also, over 56% of girls and 46% of boys presented more than one disorder.

*(Continued on page 4)*



**A: Judge Stuttley:** Our numbers have gone through the sky. We're talking about four communities where people have moved from the projects in Chicago to the South Suburbs. I have no problem with people moving from the projects to the South Suburbs. I was born and raised in the projects. However, I can see the numbers, and you have to prepare people for that move. In a place like Sauk Village where I was used to getting three or four petitions a month for stolen bikes, breaking a window, criminal damage to property; now I'm getting aggravated battery with a firearm. I'm getting aggravated vehicle hijacking. Of course, the economy has a lot to do with it also. There are no jobs.

**Q: What are the biggest hindrances to your work?**

**A: Judge Stuttley:** I'm not so sure that the Federal Government or the State of Illinois is serious about DMC. The reason I say this is that we've gone through the mapping, then the data gathering, the focus groups, and completed recommendations. When it came time to implement the recommendations, the money dried up. They said to go find another community. How are we going to implement these recommendations? What sense did it make to do these things, although they were important, without follow up? We're seeing the same things now that we've brought Sauk Village in. Since the money is dried up, we don't have the ability to keep it going. The numbers that were once going down are now going back up.

**Q: Why not fund the projects fully?**

**A: Judge Stuttley:** There is money in incarceration. People are making a lot of money off our young black kids. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to understand that it costs on the average \$73,000 a year to incarcerate a person, but in a community like Ford Heights we only spend \$3,000 a year to educate them. How can you justify that? Spending more money on incarceration than education -- it just makes no sense

the way we run the juvenile justice system in Illinois. It's designed to fail. In the last twenty years Illinois has built 16 penitentiaries. Some people are happy about this. Penitentiaries give full and permanent employment. And who is the product? Young black and Latino men. It's not by chance, it's by design. If you want to end DMC, fully fund the school systems. Give the young folks a good education and crime will decrease substantially. As long as you have education underfunded, you're going to have a high crime rate. When I say education is underfunded, they give you the impression that it's like that throughout the State of Illinois. But we know in other communities they're spending an average of \$12,000 to \$15,000 per student, where here we're only able to spend \$3,000. They have classrooms with 16 students, while we're at 30 students per class. We've tried to speak to the Legislative Black Caucus members because we have to change the funding system of education. We have to level the playing field. As long as the funding system is based on property taxes, it's not level. Ford Heights barely has enough property to even have a tax base. A block in Ford heights probably raises fewer taxes than a house in Winnetka.

**Q: What are the main challenges you see with running effective DMC intervention in general and in the South Suburbs in particular?**

**A: Angela Greene:** When you build something that is not community-based, DMC becomes nothing but a research project. None of the work is getting down to the community level. We've identified gaps in services. We know transportation is almost non-existent out here. We know that we have to do things to bring youth and families together; otherwise, we're setting them up for defeat before they even get started. If I have a kid in Sauk Village and I say, "Well, you have to do community service in Robbins," then your probation

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has already been violated because you have no transportation. Parents are working. These communities are in transition. Cultural competency needs to come into effect. There have been nine new mayors in this area in the most recent elections. My job is to keep people engaged in this process, whether the entire administration changes, from the mayor to the Chief of Police all the way down. There are families being pushed into the suburbs, there's generational gang affiliation. There are people who lived in public housing with five floors all the same gang. We don't have public housing out here, so these people are spread all over. There's a lot of crossover crime, and our police forces are small.

**Q: You've noted that the community piece is very important? Explain.**

**A: Judge Stuttley:** DMC should be community-driven. You can't sit up high and tell people what they need. That happens quite often, which is why many programs don't work.

**A: Angela Greene:** Communities need to feel there is a safe haven for their families to speak out about issues that affect their lives. Also, it allows the community to see the juvenile justice system in a less punitive role. Furthermore, it gives the community an outlet to participate and gives the community a sense of ownership. It creates a BARJ (Balance and Restorative Justice) program within the community. Why would I come to something if I have to go through metal detectors and talk to the people who have prosecuted my son or daughter and placed them in detention, placement or incarceration?

**Q: What about the school districts?**

**A: Judge Stuttley:** I think that sometimes we make a mistake by expelling a student. Being frank, kids don't

like school, and they don't know any better. In one district we're setting up a pilot program where there will be no expulsions. We'll bring him to the court and get them some wraparound services. Give them in-school suspensions instead of out-of-school suspensions. They'll have to come to school early or stay late. Do community service. The number of dropouts will decrease substantially. Our job is to keep them out of the penal system by any means necessary. Sometimes I bring them in because the parents need assistance. They're not going to get a record, but sometimes they need wraparound services, because if it's not done now, down the road something big will happen and it will be too late.

**Q: Once a youth enters the juvenile justice system, what steps can be taken so that they don't return?**

**A: Judge Stuttley:** The most important part is how you step them down. You have to change the environment. It doesn't do any good for the kid to go back to the same environment. I have kids that go to one of the best boot camps in the nation. If they stay down there in that community, they make it. If they come back, what they learn will be wasted in three months time. It serves another purpose. If "Johnny" is a menace in Ford Heights, he can go to the Department of Corrections and turn his life around, but Ford Heights will not allow it. He will still be a menace. If you put him in say, Hazelcrest, without them knowing anything, he can prosper. Kids have to be allowed to make mistakes. If they don't make them when they're kids, they'll make them as adults.

*Interview by Chicago Urban League Policy & Research Associate Jessica Fulton*

## Snapshot: The Changing South Suburbs

City	High School Diploma or More		Single Mother Home		Individuals Below Poverty Level		Unemployed	
	2000	2006-2008	2000	2006-2008	2000	2006-2008	2000	2006-2008
Harvey	69.40%	74.30%	31.80%	31.70%	21.70%	29.70%	8.70%	11.40%
Calumet City	80.70%	84.20%	22.40%	25.80%	12.20%	16.40%	5.10%	7.70%
Lansing	86.60%	88.60%	11.40%	15.80%	5.40%	11.70%	3%	3.80%
Dolton	80.40%	87.80%	26.10%	30.10%	8.40%	17.60%	4.90%	10.40%
South Holland	87.90%	86.00%	12.90%	18.40%	4.60%	8.90%	3.80%	8.30%



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# 49<sup>th</sup> annual golden fellowship dinner

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