

# The Costs and Benefits of Functional Family Therapy for Washington, D.C.



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**DCPI**

DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA CRIME POLICY INSTITUTE

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## Executive Summary

This cost-benefit analysis (CBA) describes the costs of operating of Functional Family Therapy (FFT) and the savings (benefits) to city and federal agencies and to society from reduced juvenile recidivism.

### *Estimated Program Impacts*

The program's effectiveness in reducing reoffending and rearrest is developed from a thorough review of all prior (rigorous) research on FFT.

- We find that on average, FFT reduces arrests by 22.6 percent for program participants within one year.
- We find that an FFT program serving 150 juveniles prevents at least one arrest 76.7 percent of the time.

### *Agency Savings from Averted Criminal Justice Costs*

Benefits to agencies derive from juvenile justice costs that are saved at each stage of case processing (from arrest and intake through disposition and placement). Decades of data from states and jurisdictions across the country are also analyzed to estimate how spending (i.e., budgets) tends to respond to reductions in arrests.

- On average, each prevented arrest saves local agencies \$26,100 and saves federal agencies \$6,100.
- The probability that there would be any agency savings, ignoring the costs of implementation, is 76.7 percent.

### *Societal Benefits from Averted Victimization*

Another benefit to society results from reduced victimization. This benefit depends on the number of crimes prevented, rather than the number of arrests prevented. Where appropriate, clearance rates are used to help infer how many offenses were averted from the reduction in arrests found in prior research. The prices of crimes to victims are based on jury-award and criminal incident data (Roman 2011).

- We find that, on average, each averted arrest prevents \$51,600 in associated victim harms, accounting for more than 60 percent of all savings from averted crimes.
- There is a 75.7 percent probability that an FFT program with 150 participants would produce societal benefits from averted victimization.

### *Costs of Program Operation*

- FFT operating costs are variable, but we estimate that they average roughly \$3,600 per person, and always between \$1,700 and \$5,500 per person.

### *Combining Benefits and Costs Using Bayesian Simulation*

To combine the range of the estimated impact of the program with the range of costs of operating the program and the range of savings resulting from averted offenses and arrests, the District of Columbia Crime Policy Institute (DCPI) uses Bayesian methods to simulate costs and benefits for programs serving 150 people. These simulations are repeated for 5,000 hypothetical programs.

- We find that there is a 66.0 percent chance that a new FFT program will be cost-effective, that is, that the combined agency savings and societal benefits are greater than the cost of implementing the program.
- Though both large positive and negative values are possible, the average expected net benefit is \$6,900 per person, and the median is \$6,200 per person.

## Introduction

This is the third in a series of reports that forecast how cost-beneficial different evidence-based programs would be if operated locally in the District of Columbia (DC). These reports use data from multiple research studies, combined with DC-specific costs and (where possible) DC-specific case processing statistics, to forecast the costs and benefits of implementing the target programs in the District of Columbia. This report analyzes the annual costs and benefits of implementing Functional Family Therapy (FFT) for delinquent youth in the District.<sup>1</sup>

After briefly describing the expected outcomes of an average FFT program, this report presents the monetary benefits of those outcomes for DC residents and local and federal agencies, and describes expected program costs. These data are then combined to produce estimates of the cost-benefit of FFT in the District.

Most cost-benefit analyses (CBAs) generate only average cost-benefit (CB) results without discussing uncertainty, statistical significance, or confidence bounds. Without knowing how widely results are expected to vary, such average results provide an insufficient basis for forecasting the anticipated results of implementing a single program. When positive results are largely driven by a few program participants with large benefits, as is common in juvenile justice, then average results may reflect that a majority of program participants generate no benefit, but a few generate very large benefits. Especially if the program to be implemented is small (as is the case with FFT), the anticipated effects can vary widely; a positive average CB result may nonetheless be associated with a reasonable chance that a program's results will not be cost-beneficial.

The District of Columbia Crime Policy Institute's (DCPI's) CB model therefore predicts the range and distribution of expected costs and benefits, and forecasts both the average expected CB result and the probability that the result will be positive.

We find that there is a 66 percent chance that an FFT program for 150 offenders would yield benefits that exceed its costs. The expected net benefit per participant of FFT is over \$6,900, suggesting that the program can be quite cost-effective.

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<sup>1</sup> This report does not, however, evaluate any existing juvenile justice programs in the District, be they FFT or any other program.

## Functional Family Therapy

Functional Family Therapy is a model, evidence-based family counseling intervention targeted toward at-risk youth. For the purposes of this report, FFT is assumed to be targeted toward juveniles who have had previous contact with the juvenile justice system in the District and have been placed into the custody of the Department of Youth Rehabilitation Services (DYRS) or Court Social Services. FFT can, however, be implemented for juveniles who have been deemed to be at-risk but have not had contact with the juvenile justice system.

FFT consists of 12 to 14 therapy sessions over the course of three to four months, during which a clinician meets in the home with the juvenile and his or her family. During these sessions, the case clinician progressively builds protective factors against delinquency while mitigating risk factors for delinquency. The intermediate program goals focus on improving interpersonal relationships between family members and then building those skills in extra-family relationships.<sup>2</sup>

FFT is a clearly defined program with specific activities. Because of this, therapists and service providers are trained in the model program before implementation and receive technical assistance and on-the-ground support from FFT Inc., as the program becomes operational. Previous studies have found little correlation between therapist background and recidivism outcomes as long as the program is implemented with a high degree of fidelity to the model (Barnoski 2004).

FFT has been implemented with great success across the country since its inception in the 1960s. Several randomized control trials have shown extraordinary benefits to juveniles served with FFT. As a result of the clinical success of the program, hundreds of sites across the world have adopted the program in the past decade. DCPI uses the results of a recent meta-analysis that combines the highest quality information on the expected outcomes of implementing FFT in forecasting the benefits of implementing the program in the District (Aos et al. 2011).

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<sup>2</sup> For more information on the program model, please visit the FFT website: <<http://www.fftinc.com/index.html>>.



## **Data and Methods Used in DCPI Cost-Benefit Estimates**

DCPI CBAs combine estimated impact of the program on participant behavior, costs of operating the program, and benefits from the program to estimate the net benefits to city agencies, to federal agencies, and to society. Final results include average cost-benefit estimates as well the probability that the program is cost-effective.

### ***Program Impacts***

The program's impacts are estimated in terms of reduced reoffending and rearrest for one year of Family Functional Therapy. These impacts are estimated from prior evaluations of FFT. Prior evaluations are combined statistically via a meta-analysis (see appendix A) to generate the average program effect and a distribution about that average. Comparison juveniles under DYRS supervision are assumed to be rearrested within one year at the average rate, which is 55 percent (DYRS 2012).

### ***Savings from Averted Arrest and Offending***

Benefits to agencies derive from juvenile justice resources costs that are saved. For example, preventing a juvenile intake saves resources related to detention, trials, juvenile probation, placement, and other cost-intensive steps of juvenile case processing. The juvenile justice resources saved therefore depend on the probability that an averted intake would have led to any of these outcomes. These probabilities are derived from two sources: District-specific juvenile justice intake and detention statistics (Superior Court of the District of Columbia 2012) and national juvenile case processing data (Puzzanchera and Kang 2012) (see appendix A).

### ***Societal Savings from Averted Victimization***

Society also benefits from reduced offending in the form of avoided losses to victims. This benefit depends on the number of *crimes* prevented, rather than the number of *arrests* prevented. Where appropriate, clearance rates are used to help infer how many offenses were averted from the reduction in arrests found in the program evaluations. DCPI bases the monetary value of harm experienced by victims of crime on jury awards (Roman 2011).

The number of offenses prevented (from the meta-analysis) is combined with a mix of types of offenses prevented by FFT.

### ***Costs of Program Operation***

Prior program evaluations are used to estimate the resources involved in program operations. Where possible, a range of costs is used, because not all programs and participants use the same level of resources. These cost estimates are combined with District-specific prices for each resource, which in turn are based on current data and expert perspectives from the District agencies.

### ***Simulation***

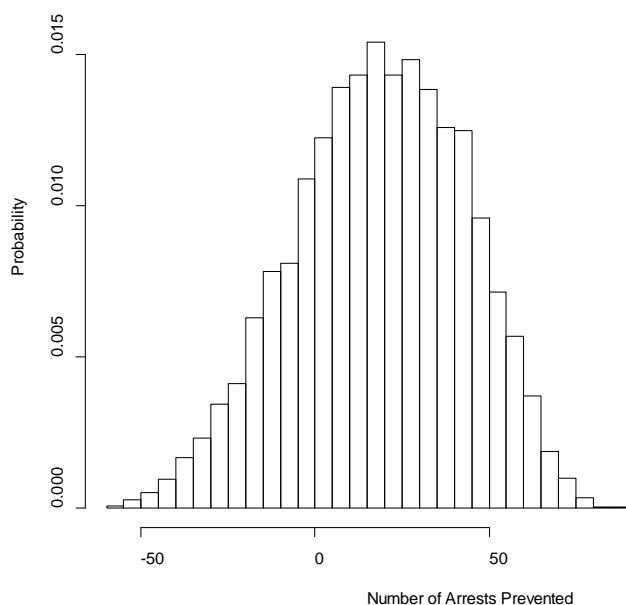
DCPI uses Bayesian simulations to combine the range of the estimated impact of the program with the range of costs of operating the program and the range of benefits resulting from averted offenses and arrests. For these estimates, we simulate the impacts, costs, and benefits for a hypothetical program serving 150 juveniles, and run this simulation 5,000 times. For each simulated program, the average costs and benefits per participant were calculated. (We find that the smaller the program, the greater the risk that a generally effective program will be found not to be cost-beneficial.)

## Estimated Program Impacts

Using a previous meta-analysis comparing FFT to community-based juvenile supervision, which is the service usually received when FFT is not used (Aos et al. 2011), we find that the simulated FFT programs are generally effective in reducing offending. However, effectiveness varies considerably among programs.

**Figure 1** shows the results for 5,000 simulated FFT programs, each involving 150 offenders.

**Figure 1. Histogram of Number of Arrests Prevented by FFT Programs Serving 150 Juveniles**



The simulated FFT programs are effective (the number of arrests prevented is greater than zero) 76.7 percent of the time, and FFT reduces rearrests by 22.6 percent, or by 18.9 arrests, on average. (Our simulations find that on average, 64 of the 150 juveniles in the FFT group are rearrested, compared to 83 rearrests for standard community supervision.) There is a 25 percent chance that the program will prevent 37 arrests or more, and there is also a 25 percent probability that FFT will prevent two arrests or fewer.

That variability means that there is some possibility that the program would produce negative outcomes. In figure 1, the distribution of arrests prevented extends below zero—meaning that arrests actually go up for FFT participants relative to the comparison condition.

## Program Benefits from Averted Arrests and Offending

CBA requires that the arrests prevented by the FFT programs be translated into dollars to be compared to the program cost. The savings from preventing new crimes and new arrests include averted juvenile justice agency costs, as well as savings from averted victimization.

The arrests prevented by an FFT program (shown in **figure 1**) are expected to generate \$10,500 in benefits per participant, on average, as shown in **table 1**. Note that this estimate is at the participant level, and does not include the cost of program implementation.

The savings from FFT also show considerable variation. For society as a whole, there is a 25 percent chance that benefits per participant will be \$20,100 or more, and a 25 percent chance that benefits will be \$250 or less. For city agencies, there is a 25 percent chance that benefits will exceed \$6,400 per person, but a 25 percent chance that they will be \$30 or less. The majority of the social benefits of reduced crime (more than \$6,500 per participant) accrue to the would-be victims of crime.

**Table 1. Expected Benefits per Participant, from a Program Involving 150 Juveniles**

Stakeholder	Mean	Median	25 percent chance greater than	25 percent chance less than	Percent greater than zero
All society	\$10,500	\$9,900	\$20,100	\$250	76.7%
City agencies	\$3,200	\$3,100	\$6,400	\$30	76.4%
Federal agencies	\$790	\$650	\$1,400	\$40	76.7%
Potential victims	\$6,500	\$5,500	\$12,300	\$0	75.7%

The societal benefit from preventing victimizations dwarfs agency savings because monetized harms to victims are considerably larger than juvenile justice costs. For example, the average harm from a prevented assault (a fairly common crime in the District) is more than the cost of a year of commitment to DYRS. (See Downey et al. 2012 for more detail.)

Compared to previous DCPI CBAs, the percentage of benefits that accrue to agencies is higher for FFT than for either adult intervention, as the juvenile justice is more expensive than the adult justice system. Even juvenile cases that do not lead to secure commitment still incur more substantial case processing costs than comparable cases in the adult system.

## Costs of Program Operation

Program costs are estimated from previous reports detailing the costs of implementing FFT. According to the University of Colorado's Blueprints for Violence Prevention, the per-person costs of FFT range from \$1,700 to \$5,500 in 2012 dollars (Center for the Study and Prevention of Violence, 2007). On average, then, FFT costs \$3,600 per juvenile, which is in line with the average cost used in previous cost-benefit analyses. Since the cost of FFT is largely dependent on the labor costs associated with the practicing clinicians, though, and those clinicians can come from a diverse array of backgrounds (and therefore have widely divergent pay scales), the entire distribution of possible costs was used. There is a 50 percent chance that the average per-person cost is between \$2,700 and \$4,700.

Though there are also training and technical assistance costs associated with implementing the program initially, these are ignored in the case of implementing FFT in the District, as the District already has FFT-trained clinicians (Markman et al. 2012).

## Combining Costs and Benefits

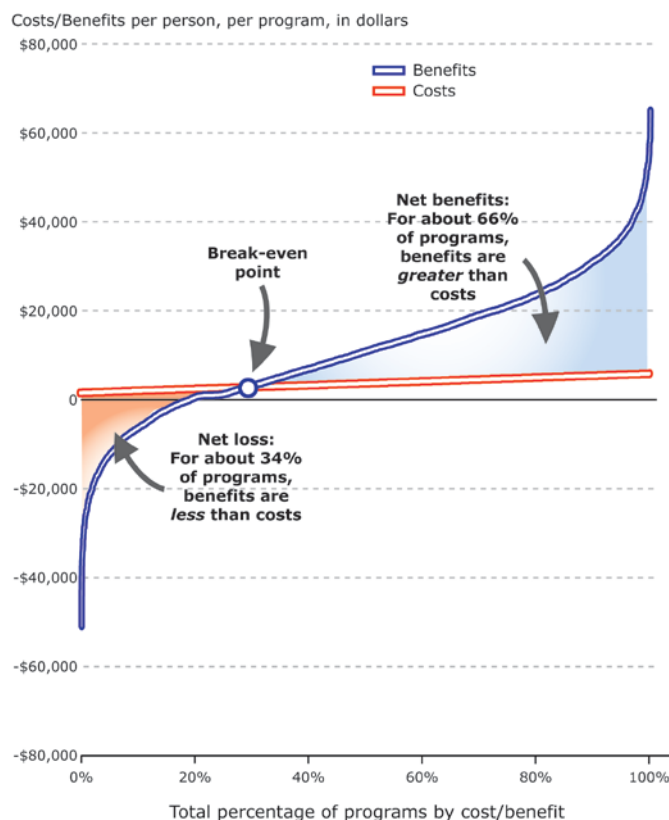
When costs and benefits are combined, the result is a *net benefit*. **Figure 2** shows the expected costs and benefits, per participant, for FFT programs involving 150 juveniles. The net benefit is the difference between cost (the red line) and benefit (the black line). When benefits exceed costs, then the program has a positive net benefit.

On average, FFT generates \$6,900 in net benefits per participant, with a median net benefit of \$6,200. There is a 66.0 percent probability that net benefits will be positive. There is a 25 percent chance that FFT will generate more than \$16,400 in net benefits per participant. On the low end, therefore, there is also a 25 percent probability that FFT will generate \$3,100 or more in negative net benefits per participant.

The costs (red line) of program implementation are relatively low and increase gradually. All costs are positive, so they are all above zero. The benefits (in black) vary considerably, with both extremely positive and negative outcomes being possible. The point where the two lines cross is the "break-even point" where total benefits equal the costs of program implementation. This occurs at a probability of 0.34, meaning there is a 34 percent chance that FFT will have costs that exceed the benefits and a 66 percent chance

that the benefits will exceed the costs. **Figure 2** shows that in addition to this probability of net benefits being greater than zero, there is also the distinct possibility of large per-person gains.

**Figure 2. Probabilities of FFT Costs and Benefits per Participant, for a Program with 150 Participants**



At the agency level, the mean expected net benefit of implementing FFT is just above zero, at only \$400 per participant. The probability of net benefits being greater than zero is 52 percent, meaning that agencies are almost as likely to see negative net benefits as positive net benefits. This metric, though, ignores the social benefits of averted victimizations, which account for a majority of the benefits of averted arrests, as discussed above. **Table 2** shows agency and societal net benefits.

**Table 2. Expected Net Benefits per Participant, for a Program with 150 Participants**

Stakeholder	Mean	Median	25 percent chance greater than	25 percent chance less than	Percent greater than zero
All society	\$6,900	\$6,200	\$16,400	-\$3,100	66.0%
City and federal agencies	\$400	\$330	\$4,200	-\$3,400	52.0%
Potential victims	\$6,400	\$5,300	\$12,300	\$0	74.7%

## Discussion

The analyses in this report forecast the effectiveness of a hypothetical Functional Family Therapy program in the District of Columbia. Compared to standard juvenile supervision and treatment, business as usual augmented with FFT programming is expected to reduce the rearrest rate within one year by 23 percent; there is a greater than three-quarters chance that at least one arrest will be prevented. Weighing together the costs and benefits of implementing FFT in the District, there is a 66 percent chance that an FFT program serving 150 juveniles will be cost beneficial and that the average benefit will be almost \$7,000 per participant. (See **table 3.**) There is a roughly two-thirds chance that FFT programming will be cost beneficial, but the expected net benefit is actually quite high.

The above results assume that a hypothetical FFT program would be quite small, with 150 juveniles participating annually. The assumptions made about program size, though, affect the CBA findings—especially the probability of net benefit being greater than zero. Though the average (expected) net benefit does not change considerably as a result of program size, the probability of achieving that result is actually a function of program size.

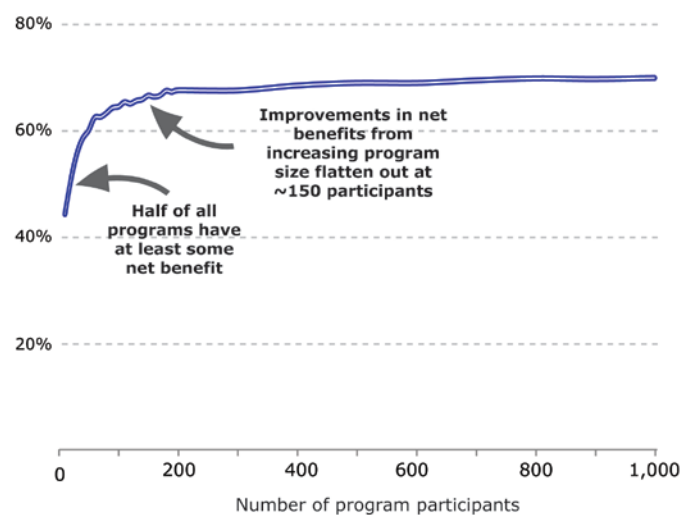
There is more variation in effectiveness in smaller programs, and there is also a smaller probability of preventing socially costly but relatively rare arrests such as aggravated assault or homicide. Indeed, since most crimes have victimization harms below \$1,000, simulated programs with just one or two arrests prevented are unlikely to prevent the rare high-victimization crimes that drive the high average. For smaller programs, by definition fewer arrests are prevented, meaning that the prevented arrests may not contain the infrequent high-victimization crimes that offset the program's costs.

**Table 3. The Probability of Net Benefits for Differently Sized Programs**

Program Size	Mean	Median	Percent greater than zero
10 Participants	\$7600	-\$1,6000	44.2%
20 Participants	\$7,000	\$190	50.5%
50 Participants	\$6,800	\$3,800	59.9%
100 Participants	\$6,700	\$5,700	64.4%
<b>150 Participants</b>	<b>\$6,900</b>	<b>\$6,200</b>	<b>66.0%</b>
200 Participants	\$6,900	\$6,600	67.5%
500 Participants	\$6,800	\$7,300	68.8%
1000 Participants	\$6,900	\$7,400	69.8%

**Figure 3** shows how the probability of net benefits being greater than zero increases precipitously before leveling off. The probability of positive net benefits stabilizes between 65 percent and 70 percent with a program size of approximately 150.

**Figure 3. The Probability of Net Benefits for Differently Sized Programs**



It is also important to note that a comparison of FFT to other interventions (including secure placement) may lead to very different results. On the one hand, comparing secure placement to FFT, for example, the expected budgetary savings would be much higher, as secure detention is more expensive than community supervision. On the other hand, crime would always be higher for the community population being served by FFT than for juveniles who are securely placed. This means that societal benefits would always be *negative* for the FFT population—in contrast to the current findings that offenders under FFT commit fewer offenses than while under standard community supervision. The current results, therefore, provide little basis for estimating the cost-effectiveness of FFT to anything besides business-as-usual community supervision and the menu of services that juveniles in the District receive as a part of that.



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## Appendix A. Juvenile Case Processing for the District of Columbia

The juvenile justice agency savings that result from preventing an arrest are the costs that would have been incurred had that arrest not been prevented. For instance, while an arrest may lead to costly commitments, it also may prevent new crime by keeping an offender off the streets. We estimate the likelihood that an arrest for a particular crime would lead to juvenile probation or commitment to DYRS. We refer to these as “conditional probabilities,” as they are the probability of an event, conditional on there being an arrest. To capture the variation in these probabilities, the analysis used simulation-based methods, rather than simply using an average value. This table, compiled using data from the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention and the Superior Court of the District of Columbia, includes the probabilities of arrest and case processing for juveniles, which are used in the analyses.

	Overall Probabilities: Conditional on Intake					Conditional on Petition				Conditional on Adjudication	
Offense	Probability of Intake	Prob. of Secure Detention	Prob. of Non-Secure Detention	Prob. of No Detention	Prob. of Petition	Prob. of Waiver <sup>3</sup>	Prob. of Pre-Probation	Prob. of Other Pre-Adjudication Resolution	Prob. of Adjudication as Delinquent	Prob. of Post-Probation	Prob. of Placement
Murder <sup>4</sup>	0.2%	50.0%	0.0%	50.0%	100.0%	100.0%	NA	NA	NA	NA	NA
Forcible Rape	0.5%	20.0%	10.0%	70.0%	75.0%	3.0%	9.5%	14.3%	69.7%	50.0%	50.0%
Robbery	13.0%	23.9%	22.3%	53.8%	86.9%	6.0%	10.5%	15.4%	64.6%	47.5%	52.5%
Aggravated Assault	13.9%	27.8%	17.3%	54.9%	73.1%	2.6%	17.9%	22.2%	63.2%	61.7%	38.3%
Simple Assault	15.2%	13.2%	15.9%	70.9%	51.9%	0.0%	18.9%	26.3%	55.1%	70.6%	29.4%
Other Violent Sex	0.7%	6.7%	6.7%	86.7%	73.8%	2.8%	16.7%	15.3%	68.2%	65.2%	34.8%
Other Person	0.3%	0.0%	20.0%	80.0%	60.0%	0.0%	18.3%	24.5%	58.3%	73.7%	26.3%
Burglary	3.9%	25.9%	16.0%	58.0%	74.9%	1.2%	26.4%	24.6%	65.8%	64.0%	36.0%
Larceny Theft	9.0%	19.8%	13.2%	67.0%	42.1%	0.0%	26.2%	35.2%	58.9%	74.1%	25.9%
MVT	0.2%	33.1%	14.4%	52.5%	77.2%	0.0%	17.8%	20.3%	63.1%	55.2%	44.8%
Arson	0.2%	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%	59.5%	0.0%	23.3%	25.2%	59.6%	69.2%	30.8%
Vandalism	3.7%	12.7%	25.5%	61.8%	52.8%	0.0%	21.8%	26.2%	59.4%	76.1%	23.9%
Trespassing	6.9%	3.6%	21.4%	75.0%	43.4%	0.0%	18.0%	28.1%	53.2%	73.7%	26.3%
Stolen Property	1.4%	13.8%	13.8%	72.4%	72.3%	0.0%	18.4%	22.4%	61.7%	59.7%	40.3%
Other Property	0.2%	0.0%	25.0%	75.0%	60.6%	0.0%	22.3%	25.9%	62.4%	66.7%	33.3%
Drug Law Violations	8.8%	11.3%	17.0%	71.6%	57.7%	0.0%	24.3%	30.4%	62.7%	72.8%	27.2%

<sup>3</sup> Waiver refers to trying juveniles as adults. To establish case-processing statistics for adults, we rely on the methodology and data outlined in Downey and Roman (2012).

<sup>4</sup> Murder is a highly infrequent crime; as such there were insufficient cases to produce reliable statistics for juvenile case flows. We therefore assumed that juveniles arrested for this offense are, after intake, processed as adults.

Obstruction Of Justice	1.3%	53.8%	15.4%	30.8%	70.0%	0.0%	21.0%	27.8%	65.9%	56.8%	43.2%
Disorderly Conduct	0.5%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%	40.6%	0.0%	16.5%	28.9%	56.1%	78.4%	21.6%
Weapons	6.1%	28.2%	18.4%	53.4%	60.6%	0.0%	24.3%	27.2%	63.0%	65.7%	34.3%
Other Public Order	13.7%	12.1%	3.0%	84.8%	43.9%	0.0%	18.8%	28.5%	60.1%	76.3%	23.7%

## District of Columbia Crime Policy Institute (DCPI)

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DCPI is a nonpartisan, public policy research organization focused on crime and justice policy in Washington, D.C. DCPI connects a diverse team of prominent scholars and policy experts. With funding from the Justice Grants Administration (JGA) in the Executive Office of the District of Columbia Mayor (EOM), DCPI was established at the Urban Institute in 2009.

Administered by the Justice Policy Center at the Urban Institute, DCPI's mission involves three tasks: conduct analyses of the costs and benefits of justice policies and programs for the District of Columbia; create a publicly accessible research library of crime and justice research in the District of Columbia; and conduct research and evaluation projects concerning District of Columbia crime and public safety, crime prevention, and crime policy.

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