

# Police Review Boards, Not Just Police Officers, Need Training in Youth Trauma

By **Daniel Pollack** | The Crime Report, July 7, 2020

The exact number of youths who are simultaneously or consecutively involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems is unknown. The presumed prevalence ranges between 10 percent and 29 percent.[\[1\]](#)

In some jurisdictions the percentage is disturbingly higher. Researchers in **Washington State for example, found that “[A] staggering 67 percent of youth referred to the juvenile justice system in King County, Washington, in 2006 had at least some history of contact or involvement with the county’s child welfare agency.”**

**They continued: “Dual status youth, particularly those with a history of legal activity/placement in child welfare, were shown to have started their delinquent careers a year or more earlier than youth without child welfare involvement.”[\[2\]](#)**

Distinct categories of these youth have specific definitions. The three categories are **“cross-over youth,” “dually involved youth” and “dually adjudicated youth.”**

**“Cross-over youth” refers to youth involved in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems. Similarly, “dually involved youth” refers to young people who have experienced both dependency hearings and criminal proceedings. “Dually adjudicated youth” refers to youth who have actually been adjudicated in both the child welfare and juvenile justice systems.**

A number of young people who become involved with the police and juvenile justice system will eventually have their cases reviewed by a civilian police review board, also known as a police oversight agency or police ombudsperson. By providing an objective, third-party complaint review process that is free from bias, the hope is that the board will help to foster communication, accountability and credibility with the public.

These boards may be tasked with oversight functions regarding various aspects of policing:

- Reviewing investigations in which there were complaints alleging abuse of authority or discretion;
- Reviewing allegations of misconduct or bias;
- Examining evidence to determine whether a more formal hearing should be held;
- Reviewing and evaluating policies, procedures and practices; and
- Providing input on needed reforms.

## **150 Police Oversight Boards in U.S.**

Olugbenga Ajilore **reports that “nearly 150 oversight boards or civilian–police oversight agencies operating in the United States are primarily associated with large municipal police agencies.”**[\[3\]](#)

The composition of the board may consist of volunteers or may be appointed by political officials. The length of service may vary as well. Despite the composition and term of service being specifically prescribed, the qualifications, training and experience necessary for an individual to serve on a board are less exacting.

In particular, board members are rarely asked about their education or knowledge of policing or trauma, and they receive little guidance in those areas. Yet a significant body of scholarly evidence indicates that trauma is one of the most significant predictors that an individual will require mental health services.

While police review board members do not act as clinicians, they should be aware of the nature of cross-over youth, dually involved youth, and dually adjudicated youth, not to mention the basic definitions of trauma and trauma-informed care.

Trauma refers to an overwhelming and intense experience that often **involves significant loss or harm to a person's physical**, emotional, and/or or psychological safety. Trauma-informed care is cognizant of the potential pervasive impact of trauma, integrates empirical knowledge of trauma into treatment, and promotes the healing of children and families. Without such rudimentary knowledge police review board members are not able to see the youth in his or her true, three-dimensional context.

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The need was endorsed by Attorney Jeff Korek, past president of the New York State Trial Lawyers Association.

### **Here's how he recently put it:**

*My years of experience representing young people who have endured injury and trauma have shown me that government agencies that serve young people, like the civilian complaint review board, must be prepared to not only address concerns about their treatment at the hands of the police, but the trauma that these young people may suffer as a result.*

As the nation weighs transformative changes to the youth justice system, the key role civilian oversight agencies play in dealing with justice-involved youth needs a lot more attention.

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[1] Smith, C.A., Ireland, T.O., Thornberry, T.P. & Elwyn, L. (2008). Childhood maltreatment and antisocial behavior: Comparison of self-

reported and substantiated maltreatment. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 78(2), 173-186.

[2] Robert F. Kennedy National Resource Center for Juvenile Justice. (2006). *From Conversation to Collaboration: How Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Agencies Can Work Together to Improve Outcomes for Dual Status Youth*.

[3] Ajilore, O. (2018). How Civilian Review Boards can further police accountability and improve community relations. Scholars Strategy Network. Available at: <https://scholars.org/brief/how-civilian-review-boards-can-further-police-accountability-and-improve-community-relations>.