Youth of color have more frequent contact with the juvenile justice system than white youth. Minority youth are overrepresented at every contact point within the process—they are more likely to receive a complaint, be petitioned and confined. One cannot explain this disparity through differences in rates of offending.

Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) is apparent in the number of referrals to the juvenile justice system in Durham County. In 2012-2013 only 70.3% of Durham’s youth were minorities yet 95.6% of the youth referred to the juvenile justice system were minorities. This referral rate equates to a Relative Rate Index (RRI) in 2012-2013 of 9.17 in Durham County compared to a statewide RRI for referrals of 2.55 (the RRI compares the juvenile justice referral rate for white youth with the referral rate for all racial minorities as a group). Furthermore, Durham’s current RRI for referrals increased over the prior year from a rate of 6.24 in 2011-2012.

Studies have found that juvenile court involvement is correlated with hurdles to attaining education, as well as barriers to employment, professional licensing, subsidized housing, military service, and college entrance. These collateral consequences are magnified for minority youth as a result of DMC.

Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) refers to overrepresentation of minority youth who come into contact with the juvenile justice system at a rate that is not proportionate to their representation in the general population.