EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Denied Existence:
The Untold Stories of 90,000 Cases in Ohio's Juvenile Courts

Each year thousands of Ohio's children and families go through juvenile courts – a multi-million dollar system sustained by taxpayer dollars from federal, state, and local levels of government. Decisions made by juvenile courts can have deep, lasting impacts on youth, families, and communities.

Data is key to make sure taxpayer dollars are spent efficiently and effectively and youth and families are treated fairly and matched with tailored, outcome-based programs that help get youth on the right track. All juvenile court best practices rely heavily on data collection

While some data is available, we don't know a lot about youth and families in Ohio juvenile courts – **statewide data is available on less than 5,000 youth out of 95,000 status offense and delinquency cases.** The Juvenile Justice Coalition's analysis showed less than half of Ohio's juvenile courts have publicly available annual reports. Based on these reports and limited statewide data, much information is missing, including:

- How many and what populations of youth are involved in Ohio's juvenile courts: While we know there are approximately 95,000 status offense and delinquency cases, youth can have multiple cases. Therefore, it is unknown exactly how many youth touch Ohio's juvenile courts.

  In addition, Ohio has no data on youth in the juvenile justice system who may need unique support, such as LGBTQI youth, youth from immigrant families, and youth with disabilities. Available data on racial disparities is troubling: Black youth make up 18% of Ohio's youth population, but are 51% of youth adjudicated delinquent of felonies, 61% of youth in youth prisons, and 87% of youth in the adult court system.

- What offenses youth face: Ohio lacks basic data on offenses with which youth are charged in juvenile courts. Statewide data focuses on the small percentage of youth who commit felonies, which can skew our view of court-involved youth by leaving out youth with lower-level offenses (like status offenses or misdemeanors).

- What happens to youth in the juvenile courts: No comprehensive data exists on how juvenile courts respond to youth and whether these responses are actually improving outcomes, such as reducing the likelihood that youth will reoffend. For example, we do not know how many youth are on probation or what programs various courts across the state use to respond to youth.

- How much money is spent on juvenile courts: Statewide Ohio spends about $230 million/year on youth with status offense and delinquency cases, but no comprehensive information is available on local court budgets.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

To ensure transparency and accountability and keep Ohio competitive for funding from government or grant-based sources, we must improve our juvenile court data collection by.

1. Assigning a centralized entity to collect juvenile justice data: Currently, too few data points are being collected by too many entities, including county commissioners, the Ohio Supreme Court, and the Department of Youth Services. Ohio must designate one entity – likely either the Ohio Supreme Court or the Department of Youth Services – to coordinate juvenile court data collection in the state.

2. Creating a uniform data collection form: Information collected varies greatly by county and various data points are collected for different programs, but then are never collated together. Ohio must begin collecting uniform data to form a comprehensive picture of what is happening in individual courts and at the state level.

3. Providing courts tools to collect data: Every court should have hardware and software at the local level to collect data, training for court personnel on how to accurately report data based on common definitions, and technical assistance to analyze and make positive changes based on the data collected.

4. Making data publicly available: The juvenile justice system is run almost entirely on taxpayer dollars and led by elected judges, making transparency and accountability critical.