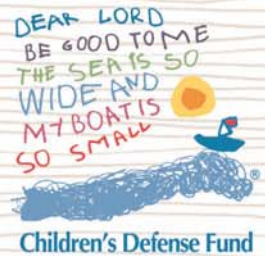


Children's Defense Fund Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign



September 4, 2008

The Children's Defense Fund recently launched the Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Campaign, a national call to action to stop the funneling of tens of thousands of youth, predominantly minorities, down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration and, in some cases, death. Race and poverty are the major factors underpinning the Pipeline. We created the Pipeline and we have the power, knowledge and will to dismantle it. The need is urgent.

KEY FACTS

A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Latino boy a 1 in 6 chance; and a White boy a 1 in 17 chance. A Black girl born in 2001 has a 1 in 17 chance of going to prison in her lifetime; a Latino girl a 1 in 45 chance; and a White girl a 1 in 111 chance.

Pervasive Poverty – Poverty is the largest driving force behind the Pipeline crisis, exacerbated by race. Black children are more than three times as likely as White children to be born into poverty and to be poor, and are four times as likely to live in extreme poverty. One in 3 Latino babies and 3 in 7 Black babies are born into poverty. More than 1 in 4 Latino children and 1 in 3 Black children are poor. Between 2000 and 2007, the number of poor Latino children increased by 960,000 (to 4.5 million) and the number of poor Black children increased by 323,000 (to 3.9 million).

Inadequate Access to Health Coverage – Latino children are three times as likely and Black children are almost twice as likely to be uninsured as White children. The number of uninsured children from birth through age 18 rose from 8.7 million in 2005 to 8.9 million in 2007. This was the second year in a row that the number of uninsured children increased. The majority of these uninsured children have a parent who works full-time.

Gaps in Early Childhood Development – Studies have shown that children who do not get the early intervention, permanence and stability they need are more likely to act out and fail in school because they lack the skills necessary to succeed. Researchers emphasize the importance of early childhood nurturing and stimulation to help the brain grow, especially between birth and age seven, and even beyond, and thus help children thrive and follow a path toward successful adulthood. The importance of stimulation in the first years of life is dramatically underlined in the U.S. Department of Education's study of 22,000 kindergartners in the kindergarten class of 1998-99, which found that Black and Hispanic children were substantially behind when they entered kindergarten.

Disparate Educational Opportunities – Eighty-six percent of Black, 83 percent of Latino and 58 percent of White fourth graders cannot read at grade level; and 89 percent of Black, 85 percent of Latino and 59 percent of White 8th graders cannot do math at grade level. Black students are more likely than any other students to be in special education programs for children with mental retardation or emotional disturbance. Black and American Indian children are almost twice as likely as White children to be retained in a grade. The public school suspension rate among Black and American Indian students is almost three times that of Whites. Black, Latino and American Indian children are more than twice as likely as White children to drop out of school. According to the U.S. Department of Education, only 59 percent of Black, 61 percent of Latino and 62 percent of American Indian students graduated from high school on time with a regular diploma in 2006. When Black children do graduate from high school, they have a greater chance of being unemployed and a lower chance of going to college full-time than White high school graduates. Only 48,000 Black males earn a bachelor's degree each year, but an estimated 1 in 3 Black men ages 20-29 is under correctional supervision or control. Approximately 579,000 Black males were serving sentences in state or federal prison at mid-year 2006.

Intolerable Abuse and Neglect – A child is abused or neglected every 36 seconds. Four in ten of the children who are abused or neglected get no help at all. There are also twice as many Black children in foster care as we would expect. Although they comprise only 16 percent of all children, Black children represent 32 percent of the foster care population.

Unmet Mental and Emotional Problems – A Congressional study found 15,000 children in juvenile detention facilities, some as young as 7 years old, solely because community mental health services were unavailable. Studies have reported that as many as three-fourths of incarcerated youth have mental health disorders and about 1 in 5 has a severe disorder. Children who age out of foster care are less likely to graduate from high school or college and experience more serious mental health problems, including post-traumatic stress disorder, than children generally. They are less likely to receive adequate health and mental health care, and are more likely to experience homelessness, and to be involved in the criminal justice system.

Rampant Substance Abuse – Drugs, tobacco and alcohol lead our children down the wrong path. Disconnected youth, lacking a decent education or high school degree, job training skills, and social support systems or mentors, often resort to self-destructive acts. Unfortunately, alcohol and other substance abuse treatment for youth and for parents and adults is in too short supply.

Overburdened, Ineffective Juvenile Justice System – One-size-fits-all zero tolerance school discipline policies are transforming schools into a major point of entry into the juvenile justice system as children are increasingly arrested on school grounds for subjectively and loosely defined behaviors. Black youth are about four times as likely as their White peers to be incarcerated. Black youth are almost five times as likely to be incarcerated as White youth for drug offenses. Of the 1.5 million children with an incarcerated parent in 1999, Black children were nearly nine times as likely and Latino children were three times as likely to have an incarcerated parent as White children. Most juvenile correctional facility programs focus on punishment rather than treatment and rehabilitation, often creating environments that further harden youth. This makes it more difficult for them to productively reintegrate into their families and communities.

We must speak out against policies that contribute to criminalizing children at younger and younger ages, and fight for policies that help children thrive and put them on track to a productive adulthood.

We need to:

- End poverty through investments in high quality education for every child, livable wages for families, income supplements like the Earned Income and Child Tax Credits, job training and job creation, and work supports like child care and health coverage.
- Ensure every child and pregnant woman has access to affordable, seamless, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services.
- Make early childhood development programs accessible to every child by ensuring such programs are affordable, available and of high quality.
- Help each child reach his/her full potential and succeed in work and life, by ensuring our schools have adequate resources to provide high quality education to every child.
- Expand prevention and specialized treatment services for children and their parents, connect children to caring permanent families, improve the quality of the child welfare workforce and increase accountability for results for children.
- Reduce detention and incarceration by increasing investment in prevention and early intervention strategies, such as access to quality early childhood development and education services and to the health and mental health care children need for healthy development.

For those children who do get caught in the deeper end of the Pipeline, we must accelerate reforms of juvenile justice policy at the federal, state and local levels to ensure that troubled youth get the integrated services needed to put them on a sustained path to successful adulthood.

For more information on the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Campaign, please visit www.childrensdefense.org or contact Natacha Blain, Lead Strategic Advisor, at nblain@childrensdefense.org or (202) 622-3544.