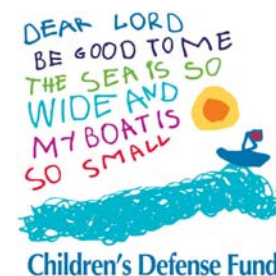


Children's Defense Fund

Cradle to Prison Pipeline® Juvenile Justice Factsheet

Stop the Criminalization of Children at Increasingly Younger Ages



July 2009

The Children's Defense Fund's *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* Campaign is a national and community crusade to engage families, youth, communities and policy makers in the development of healthy, safe and educated children. Poverty, racial disparities and a culture of punishment rather than prevention and early intervention are key forces driving the Pipeline. These problems are particularly prevalent in many of the overburdened and ineffective juvenile justice systems around the country.

We have no time to waste. It is time to step up and take action. Every step counts.

FACTS:

- **Children and youth face high risk of future involvement in the juvenile and adult criminal justice system.** A Black boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 3 chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Black girl has a 1 in 17 chance. A Latino boy born in 2001 has a 1 in 6 chance of going to prison in his lifetime; a Latino girl has a 1 in 45 chance.
- **Too many youth are incarcerated for non-violent offenses.** In 2006, two-thirds of the 92,854 youth in residential placement were there for non-violent offenses.
- **There are significant racial disparities in the juvenile justice system.** Although they represent about 40 percent of the U.S. juvenile population, minority youth represent about 60 percent of committed juveniles.
- **Every day thousands of children and youth are locked up in adult jails and prisons.** An estimated 200,000 youth are arrested, charged, tried or sentenced as adults every year across the United States.
- **The number of girls in the juvenile justice system is growing.** Between 1996 and 2004, juvenile court cases involving girls increased by 8% while those involving boys decreased 14%.

STEP UP AND TAKE ACTION TO DISMANTLE THE PIPELINE!

Families and Communities

- **Mentor or tutor a child.** Positive relationships with adults can be the first line of defense against future delinquent behavior.
- **Volunteer at a school, secure juvenile facility or other program that serves court involved youth.** Guidance and support from adults are necessary to help youth set and achieve educational goals and have a better chance of thriving as adults.

- **Fundraise for community programs that serve youth.** During tough economic times, community programs for youth often need additional support as traditional funding decreases.
- **Talk to youth who have been detained or incarcerated.** It is important to be informed about the conditions of confinement for youth.
- **Organize a forum on incarcerated youth.** We must hold policymakers accountable for abuse in centers, poor conditions of confinement and the funding disparities between prisons and education in our nation.

Policymakers

- **Increase investment in prevention and intervention.** Enact the Youth PROMISE Act which would authorize \$733 million over 5 years to develop and implement comprehensive, evidence-based prevention and intervention strategies to make communities safer, reduce victimization, and help at-risk youth lead productive lives.
- **Reject policies that emphasize punishment and incarceration.** Oppose the Gang Abatement and Prevention Act of 2009 which, among other things, federalizes certain gang crimes so perpetrators would face punishment under tougher federal laws and significantly broadens the definition of a gang. These kinds of policies will likely lead to an increase in the racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile and adult criminal justice system.
- **Strengthen existing protections and federal support for youth in the justice system.** Support improvements to the reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act that would keep youth out of adult jails and prisons, reduce the disproportionate number of minorities that come into contact with the juvenile justice system, and keep youth charged with offenses that only apply to minors (i.e. truancy, running away) out of secure detention or confinement.
- **Promote reform of juvenile justice systems that focus on ensuring rehabilitation of youth.** End reliance on punitive juvenile incarceration models.
- **Increase employment opportunities.** Expand job training programs targeted at low-income youth and disconnected youth and make college affordable for every student.
- **Increase the minimum wage.** Increase wages to a livable amount and index it to inflation.

Step by step, we can and will make a difference. Today. Tomorrow. Together.

For more information on the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline*, please visit www.childrensdefense.org or contact us at 800-CDF-1200 (800-233-1200).