



STOP LOCKING UP OUR FUTURE

End the School-to-Prison Pipeline



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"Really I am doing time here for nothing." —S.I., age 15

The perversity of the criminal justice system is perhaps most apparent in the way the U.S. has created a "school-to-prison pipeline."

The criminalization of blackness, deeply rooted in U.S. history and culture, is being reproduced at the earliest stages of socialization, including the elementary and secondary school systems. The school-to-prison pipeline encompasses a wide range of punitive practices, including so-called "zero-tolerance" discipline, inserting police into schools, creating alternative disciplinary schools, and building secured juvenile detention centers.

As the United States leads all nations in the rate at which it incarcerates its citizens and disproportionately incarcerates citizens of color, it also arrests more children under the age of 18 than any other nation. Whereas the U.S. arrests 336 per 100,000 children, the second-highest arresting nation, South Africa, arrests 69 per 100,000.

The Center for Public Integrity (CPI) ranked states by their rate of referral to police per 1,000 students (elementary and high school students under age 18). Nationally, 5.8 per 1,000 students are referred to police. While 15.9 percent of all students nationally are black, 26.9 percent of all referrals to law enforcement are black. Although whites are nearly 52 percent of all students, only 40.7 percent of all referrals are white. The rate of referrals to law enforcement per 1,000 students nationally is 9.8 for blacks, 5.9 for Hispanics, 4.6 for whites, and 10.9 for youth with disabilities.

Florida is ranked third, Mississippi 25th, Louisiana 28th, Texas 31st, and Alabama 38th in the CPI state rankings of students referred to law enforcement.¹ Florida's juvenile arrest rate is 40 percent above the national average. Although black students comprise about 23 percent of all students in Florida, they are 36 percent of all students arrested. Hispanic students comprise 28.5 percent of all Florida students and 24.2 percent of all students arrested. White students comprise 42.4 percent of all Florida students and 34.1 percent of all arrested students. The Florida rate of arrests per 1,000 students was 19.4 for blacks, 10.5 for Hispanics, and 9.9 for whites.

Whereas 44.9 percent of all Louisiana students are black, 62.3 percent of all referrals are black. Conversely, while 47.5 percent of all students are white, 24.8 percent of all referrals are white. Although

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Hispanic students constitute 4 percent of all students, they were referred to law enforcement at the rate of 6.7 per thousand. Students who are disabled comprise 14.1 percent of all pupils, yet they comprise 34 percent of all referrals. Thus the respective rate of referral per 1,000 students is 7 for blacks, 6.7 for hispanics, 2.6 for whites, and 12.1 for students with disabilities in Louisiana.

It costs significantly more to incarcerate youth than to educate them. The national cost of incarcerating one young person for 12 months is approximately \$88,000.² Tuition for one year at Harvard University—nearly \$60,000—is far less expensive than incarceration!

The cost of incarcerating youth in Louisiana is significantly higher. According to Louisiana's legislative auditor, it costs \$454 per day and \$154,760 per year to imprison a juvenile.³ In 2014, Louisiana spent less than \$4,000 per student per year for public education.⁴

Imagine: Louisiana could spend \$22,000 per student per year, the cost of attending the most expensive private school in Orleans Parish, Isidore Newman School, and save \$132,760 over the cost of incarceration. That would likely end the school-to-prison pipeline by providing a quality education that every family and child deserves. The opportunity cost or value lost by excluding youth from quality education is detrimental to our entire society because it prevents youth from achieving anything close to their full potential.

Gulf South states can take steps to end the school-to-prison pipeline. One such step is ending referrals to the adult criminal justice system. A Florida House Justice Appropriations Subcommittee killed House Bill 783 in April, a measure that would have prohibited prosecutors from transferring children under 16 to the adult system.

Louisiana is one of nine states that automatically transfers a 17-year-old to the adult criminal justice system. And sadly, 14- to 16-year-olds are too frequently transferred to the adult system in Louisiana. Representative Walt Leger Jr. presented a concurrent resolution (73) in March that would charge the state Institute of Public Health and Justice to study the question of raising the age of juvenile jurisdiction to 17. This resolution passed and the study will be conducted over the next seven months.⁵

Research is clear that referring children to the adult criminal justice system ruins young lives, leads to more crime, and increases costs to the state. We know that too often youth in the system have already experienced serious trauma, including violence, and that incarceration only re-traumatizes youth as it exposes them to further abuse and neglect.

A recent study in Texas found that outcomes are better for youth kept under supervision closer to home rather than in secure state-run facilities.⁶ It shows that youth locked up in juvenile detention facilities are 21 percent more likely to be arrested again than those monitored close to home. Those who committed another offense after time in a detention facility are three times as likely to carry out more crimes later on.

As Tania Galloni of the Southern Poverty Law Center puts it: "We must stop locking up our future and throwing away the key."⁷

Special thanks to Rachel Gassert, policy director of the Juvenile Justice Project, for her assistance in preparing this essay.

ENDNOTES

- 1 Chris Zubak-Skees and Ben Wieder, "A state-by-state look at students referred to law enforcement," Center for Public Integrity, (April 10, 2015), available online at <http://www.publicintegrity.org/2015/04/10/17089/virginia-tops-nation-sending-students-cops-courts-where-does-your-state-rank> Data in this essay regarding student referrals is from this source unless otherwise stated.
- 2 Danya Contractor, "The Devastating, Long-Lasting Costs of Juvenile Incarceration," Kirwan Institute Analysis, February 2014, available online at <http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/ki-implicit-bias-discipline-dc.pdf>
- 3 "Decarceration and Reinvestment," Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana, available online at http://www.laccr.org/jjpl/?jjpl_program=1818
- 4 Jessica Williams, "Louisiana public school spending would rise to \$4,070 per student under task force recommendations," December 16, 2014, online at http://www.nola.com/education/index.ssf/2014/12/louisiana_public_school_spending_would_rise_to_4070_per_student_under_task_force_recommendations.html
- 5 House Concurrent Resolution 73, original text online at <https://www.legis.la.gov/Legis/ViewDocument.aspx?d=940926>
- 6 Tony Fabelo, Nancy Arrigona, Michael D. Thompson, Austin Clemens, and Miner P. Marchbanks III, "Closer to Home: An Analysis of State and Local Impact of Texas Juvenile Justice Reforms," Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Public Policy Research Institute, Texas A & M University, January 29, 2015, available online at <http://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/texas-JJ-reform-closer-to-home.pdf>
- 7 Tania Galloni, "End state policy that ruins young lives and leads to more crime," *The Tampa Tribune*, March 11, 2015, available online at <http://tbo.com/list/news-opinion-commentary/end-state-policy-that-ruins-young-lives-and-leads-to-more-crime-20150311/>