

The Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Task Force on Racial Disparities

October 21, 2009

Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security
State House Room 167 (House)/Room 507 (Senate)
Boston, MA 02133

Dear Members of the Joint Committee on Public Safety and Homeland Security:

The Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Task Force on Racial Disparities, Citizens for Juvenile Justice, City School, Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, Project HIP-HOP, Reflect and Strengthen, and a broad spectrum of other organizations and individuals from across the Commonwealth urge you to support *An Act to Improve Juvenile Justice Data Collection* (Senate No. 940). Sponsored by Senators Creem, Spilka, and Tucker, and Representatives Campbell, Khan, Smizik, Story, and Walz, this bill would require all agencies involved in juvenile justice to report non-identifiable statistical information about the age, gender, race/ethnicity, and charging offense of juveniles with whom they have contact. This bill deserves your support for the following reasons:

1. **Complete and accurate data is necessary to ensure that the (ever-shrinking) public resources allocated to the juvenile justice system are invested wisely.** Right now, policy-makers, government agencies, service providers – and taxpayers – do not have the information about youth in the juvenile justice system that they need to determine if programs are working, target high priority needs, or spot trends in juvenile crime. Massachusetts does not collect data that would enable it to answer such fundamental questions as: How many youth are arrested each year? What types of crimes are youth committing? Which youths are placed on probation and what are their outcomes?
2. **Racial inequalities are a national issue in juvenile justice, yet Massachusetts lacks the information necessary to tackle this important problem.** We know that youth of color are disproportionately represented at all points of the juvenile justice system around the country, and the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP A) mandates that all states work to identify and address racial and ethnic disparities. Without statistical data, Massachusetts cannot even begin to identify problem areas or develop solutions to racial inequalities.
3. **Massachusetts' failure to collect comprehensive data at key decision points in the juvenile justice system risks the loss of federal funds.** The federal JJDP A mandates that states report information on Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC) and take steps to address it. By failing to collect and report data on the race and ethnicity of youth at each step in the system, Massachusetts risks losing important federal funds for juvenile crime prevention programs.
4. **The lack of data is hurting youth and the programs that serve them.** Providers who serve system-involved youth are unable to demonstrate the positive impact their programming has on young people or to make rational adjustments to those programs without data. Lack of data has become a barrier to attracting private foundation support for juvenile justice programming such as sustainable alternatives to detention in Massachusetts.

An Act to Improve Juvenile Justice Data Collection is essential to a fair and effective juvenile justice system – and will contribute to both public safety and fiscal responsibility.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

The Massachusetts Juvenile Justice Task Force on Racial Disparities

Organizations:

ACLU of Massachusetts
Adolescent Consultation Services
Alternatives for Community and Environment
American Friends Service Committee
Belmont Against Racism
Black Ministerial Alliance of Greater Boston
Boston Connects
Boston Mobilization
Boston Workers' Alliance
Cambridge Youth Peace and Justice Corps
Center for Constitutional Rights
Center for Public Representation
Charles Hamilton Houston Institute at Harvard Law School
Children's Law Center of Massachusetts
Children's League of Massachusetts
Children's Services of Roxbury
Citizens for Juvenile Justice
City Life/Vida Urbana
City School
Communities for People
Community Church of Boston
Community Justice Network for Youth
Community Resources for Justice
Criminal Justice Institute at Harvard Law School
D7Roundtable, Inc.
Education Development Center
End the Odds Coalition
Haymarket People's Fund
Hyde Square Task Force
Justice Resource Institute
Juvenile Bar Association
Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law of Boston Bar Association
Louis D. Brown Peace Institute
Massachusetts Appleseed Center
Massachusetts Communities Action Network
Massachusetts Correctional Legal Services
National Juvenile Justice Network
Partakers, Inc.
Phillips Brooks House Association, Inc.
Project HIP-HOP
Project RIGHT
Reflect and Strengthen
RESIST
Robert F. Kennedy Children's Action Corps
Roxbury Youthworks
Sociedad Latina
South Bay Mental Health Center
South End/Lower Roxbury Youth Workers' Alliance
Spectrum Health Systems
Spontaneous Celebrations

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Strategies for Youth
Sub/Urban Justice
Teen Empowerment
Teens Leading the Way
The KEY Program
Union of Minority Neighborhoods
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
W. Haywood Burns Institute
YouthBuild Boston
Youth Advocacy Foundation

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