

Facts Contributing to the CRADLE TO PRISON PIPELINESM

The Cradle to Prison Pipeline can be reduced to one simple fact: the United States of America is not a level playing field for all children.

The largest driving force of the pipeline is poverty, exacerbated by race. At critical points in their development, from birth through adulthood, poor children, and disproportionately poor children *of color*, face many critical risks and disadvantages. These multiple risks and disadvantages, when accumulated, make a successful transition to productive adulthood significantly less likely and involvement in the criminal justice system significantly more likely. They include lack of access to health and mental health care; lack of quality early education and enrichment; unstable parenting; child abuse and neglect; educational disadvantages resulting from failing schools; zero tolerance discipline policies; a culture which glorifies materialism and violence; unaddressed mental health problems; racial and economic disparities in child-serving systems; the criminalization of children at earlier ages; tougher sentencing guidelines; and too few positive alternatives to the streets and positive role models and mentors. Without significant interventions to prevent and remove these multiple, accumulated obstacles, poor and minority youths are too often trapped in a trajectory that leads to marginalized lives and premature death.

Research on these risks and disadvantages proves that the *Cradle to Prison Pipeline* is a tragic reality for far too many poor children and a disproportionately high number of poor children of color.

Our country's priorities and values need resetting. The only universal child policy we will guarantee all children is a detention or prison cell *after* they get into trouble. Why do we continue to lock children up rather than invest in their futures? We spend on average more than 3 times per prisoner as per public school pupil. Although we save over \$1.5 million for every child we divert from the criminal justice system. Why do we choose costlier punishment over cost effective prevention which prepares self sufficient citizens and productive workers in our competitive globalizing world? What are our values as a people that let's children be the poorest group of citizens in the richest nation on earth?

The Cradle to Prison Pipeline is neither inevitable nor necessary. We can create a roadmap for dismantling the pipeline – every *entrance into* the pipeline is also a potential *exit from* it, if only we have the political will to make it so.

Poverty

Poverty is the largest driving force of the Cradle to Prison Pipeline.

Although a majority of poor children live in working families, child poverty in America continues to grow.

- In 2004, 13 million American children (one in six) were poor, an increase of 12 percent since 2000.
- In 2004, child poverty rose for the third year in a row in working families. The number of poor children in working families increased to 8.9 million in 2004.
- The United States ranks *worst* in child poverty among 18 other wealthy industrialized nations.

Since 2000, extreme child poverty has increased nearly twice as fast as poverty.

- In 2004, 5.6 million children were living in extreme poverty (one in 13), an increase of 20 percent since 2000.
- The growth in extreme poverty is twice as fast as the overall growth rate of poverty overall (annual income below \$7,610 for a family of three).

A disproportionate number of minority children live in poverty and extreme poverty.

Poverty

- More than 1 in 3 Black children,
- Nearly 1 in 3 American Indian children,
- Nearly 1 in 3 Latino children,
- One in 10 Asian children, and
- Nearly 1 in 10 White, non-Latino children live in poverty.

Extreme Poverty

- More than 1 in 6 Black children,
- Nearly 1 in 7 American Indian children,
- More than 1 in 10 Latino children,
- Nearly 1 in 22 White, non-Latino children, and
- More than 1 in 25 Asian children live in extreme poverty.

Although the poverty rates for Black, Latino and Native American children are far higher, there are more poor White, non-Latino children.

- 4.5 million White non-Latino children,
- 4.1 million Latino children,
- 3.8 million Black children,
- 286,000 Asian children, and
- 207,000 American Indian children live in poverty.

The majority of poor children live in single parent families. A Black child is more than twice as likely to live with a single parent and is almost twice as likely to be born to a teenaged mother.

- In 2004, 7.9 million poor children lived in single parent families. Of these:
 - 3.1 million are Black (46.9%),
 - 2 million are Latino (45.6%),
 - 2.4 million are White, non-Hispanic (27.4%), and
 - 98,000 are Asian (20.9%).
- Since 1991, teen birth rates have steadily decreased from 61.8 to 41.6 in 2003 (births per 1000 females ages 15-19). The teen birth rate is:
 - 82.3 for Hispanic females,
 - 63.8 for Black females,
 - 53.1 for American Indian females,
 - 38.3 for White females, and
 - 17.4 for Asian, Pacific Islander females.

Research links poverty to multiple child risks and disadvantages including increased risks of abuse, neglect, academic failure, delinquency and violence.

- Poverty is the largest predictor of child abuse and neglect. Children in families with annual incomes below \$15,000 are 22 times more likely to be abused or neglected than children in families with annual incomes \$30,000 or more.
- Family relationships suffer stress and breakdown from the pressures of economic hardship and persistent poverty.
- Even mild undernourishment, the kind most frequently found in the United States, impairs cognitive function and can do so throughout the life of a child.
- In 2004, 28.5 percent of Black and 28.1 percent of Latino children lived in families that were hungry or at-risk of hunger.
- Fourth-graders in U.S. public elementary schools with the highest poverty levels have significantly lower reading scores compared to their counterparts in schools with lower poverty levels.
- Children living in extreme persistent poverty are more involved in delinquency, especially serious delinquency.
- Social disorganization and concentrated poverty within the community lead to residents' decreased willingness to intervene when children are engaging in antisocial/ unlawful acts.
- Low family income has repeatedly been associated with self-reported teen violence and convictions for violence offenses.

Prenatal and Health Care

Poor children of color are less likely to have access to health care.

- In the United States, 9 million children (one out of nine) are uninsured.
- Of the 9 million uninsured children, 87 percent have a working parent.
- Of uninsured children:
 - 40% are White (3.6 million),
 - 36% are Hispanic (3.3 million),
 - 17% are Black, (1.5 million), and
 - 1% are American Indian (101,000).
- Black children are nearly twice as likely as White children to be uninsured.
- Latino children are almost three times as likely as White children to be uninsured.
- Black and Latino women are almost three times as likely as White women to have late or no prenatal care.

Disadvantages in health care increase the risk that poor children and particularly poor children of color will be trapped in the pipeline.

- A low birth-weight child is 50 percent more likely to score below average on measures of both reading and mathematics. A low birth-weight child is more likely to experience educational disadvantages that can persist into early adulthood.
- The percentage of Black babies born at low birth weight, putting them at risk for a range of postnatal complications, is twice that for White babies.
- Adolescents with childhood elevated blood lead levels report higher levels of delinquency and anti-social behavior.
- Black children and children from poor families are not only more likely to have had asthma than White or Latino children and children from higher income families. They also are more likely to suffer from *disabling* asthma. Children with disabling asthma have almost twice as many restricted activity days and lost school days as children with impairments, due to other types of chronic conditions.

Early Childhood

Poor children of color are less likely to enter elementary school prepared.

- Head Start serves only 50 percent of eligible children, approximately 1 million children.
- Early Head Start serves less than 3 percent of eligible children.
- Only one in 7 eligible children receives federal child care subsidies.
- Children who have graduated from quality early education programs like Head Start are less likely to repeat a grade, less likely to need special education, and more likely to graduate from high school.
- Forty-eight percent of Black and 42 percent of Latino three-to-five year olds are read to every day compared to 64 percent of White children.
- Only 1/3 of Black and 2/5 of Latino kindergarteners have home computers.

- Only 25 percent of Latino and 35 percent of Black three to five year olds are able to perform three out of four basic reading and math skills. Forty-two percent of White children can complete three out of four of these tasks.
- Children participating in high quality early education had lower rates of juvenile delinquency, fewer arrests and fewer juvenile court petitions.
- At-risk toddlers not enrolled in a quality childcare and early development program like Head Start were five times more likely to become chronic law breakers as adults.

Child Abuse and Neglect

Children in foster care or with a history of abuse and neglect are at higher risk of being trapped in the pipeline.

- Children in foster care have higher rates of grade retention, lower scores on standardized tests and higher absenteeism, tardiness, truancy and drop out rates.
- Youths in foster care with unmet education needs are at a higher risk for homelessness, poverty, public assistance, and juvenile or adult court involvement.
- Abused and neglected children are far more likely to be delinquent and arrested as adults.
- Children involved in the juvenile justice system are more likely to have a history of child abuse and neglect than children outside the system. Abuse rates ranging from 25 to 31 percent were reported consistently in various studies of youths in the juvenile justice system.

Poor children of color are more likely to be involved in substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect and are more likely to be placed in foster care.

- Black children make up 15 percent of the child population, but 25 percent of substantiated cases of child abuse and neglect and 40 percent of children in foster care.
- Native American children represent 1 percent of the child population and 2 percent of children in foster care.
- Children of color enter foster care at higher rates even when their families have the same characteristics as comparable White children and families.
- Children of color remain in foster care for longer periods of time – a median stay of 17 months for Black children versus 9 months for white children.
- Black children in foster care have been found to have a much lower probability than White children for reunification and adoption. Analyses of national data show that White children were four times more likely than Black children to be reunified and twice as likely to be adopted.

Mental Health Care

There is an enormous unmet need for mental health treatment for children in the United States. Lack of access to and availability of community-based mental health services is causing thousands of poor children to be sucked into the Cradle to Prison Pipeline every year.

- The U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO) reported thousands of families relinquishing custody of their children to the child welfare or juvenile justice systems so they could get treatment.
- A recent congressional report commissioned by Rep. Henry Waxman (CA) showed that two thirds of the detention facilities in 47 states hold children who do not need to be in detention as they wait for mental health services. Over a six-month period in 2003, nearly 15,000 incarcerated children waited for community mental health services in the states, some as young as 7 years of age.
- A national study of children ages 2-14 involved in the child welfare system, either at home or in foster care, found that nearly half had clinically significant emotional or behavioral problems and only about 25 percent received mental health treatment.
- African American children are less likely than other children in foster care to receive mental health services to address their special treatment needs.
- Studies have reported that as many as three-fourths of incarcerated youths have mental health disorders and about one in five has a severe disorder.
- Studies show that, given the same behavioral symptoms, more Black youths than White youths are incarcerated, and more White youths than Black youths are placed in mental health institutions.
- The 1999 Surgeon General's Report on Mental Health noted that poor people have reduced access to mental health services and this unmet need is especially significant for minority children and families.

Education

Children of color are less likely to succeed in school.

- Of fourth graders reading at grade level:
 - 41 percent are White,
 - 15 percent are Latino, and
 - 13 percent are Black.
- Of eighth graders performing at grade level in math:
 - 37 percent are White,
 - 12 percent are Latinos, and
 - 7 percent are Black.
- Schools with the highest percentages of minority, limited English proficient and low-income students are more likely to employ beginning teachers, teachers who are less educated, and teachers who teach subjects in which they are not certified or in which they did not major in college.

- Schools whose students are 50 percent or more minorities are nearly twice as likely as schools whose students are less than 20 percent minorities to be overcrowded.
- In 29 states, Black students are more than twice as likely as White students to be labeled with an emotional and behavioral disorder.
- In 39 states, Black students are more than twice as likely to be labeled as mentally retarded.
- Ten states have mental retardation identification rates for Native American children that are twice those of White children.
- In 2002, 85 percent of Blacks and 65 percent of Hispanic young adults completed high school or GED programs compared to 92 percent of Whites.

Educational disadvantages make it more likely that children of color will enter the juvenile justice system.

- Academic failure in the elementary grades increases risk for later violent behavior.
- Numerous studies demonstrate that students who are suspended or expelled are more likely than their peers to drop out of school altogether. One study found that being suspended or expelled is one of the top three school-related reasons for dropping out.
- Of students retained in grade at least once,
 - 18 percent are Native American,
 - 17.5 percent are Black,
 - 13 percent are Latino, and
 - 9 percent are White.
- Of students suspended or expelled in grades seven through 12:
 - 38 percent are Native American,
 - 35 percent are Black,
 - 20 percent are Latino, and
 - 15 percent are White.
- High school dropouts are almost 3 times as likely to be incarcerated as youths who have graduated from high school.
- Where Black youths represent a disproportionate percent of the suspended, they are also disproportionately incarcerated.
- In 1999, 52 percent of Black men who had dropped out of high school had prison records by their early thirties.

Juvenile Justice System and Incarceration

Children of color are more likely to be incarcerated in both the juvenile and criminal justice systems.

- One in three Black boys born in 2001 will spend time in prison at some point in their lives.
- Although they represent just 34 percent of the U.S. adolescent population, minority youths represent 62 percent of the youths in detention.

- Although minority females represent only 34 percent of the U.S. adolescent population, they represent 52 percent of youths in detention.
- For those charged with drug offenses, Black youths are 48 times more likely to be incarcerated than White youths. For those charged with violent offenses, Blacks are nine times more likely than Whites to be incarcerated.
- Among youths with no prior admissions, Latinos are 13 times more likely to be incarcerated for drug offenses than Whites. For violent offenses, Latinos are five times more likely than Whites to be incarcerated.
- Boys adjudicated delinquent for a violent offense between ages 10 and 16 were more than 6 times as likely to be convicted of a violent crime by age 24.
- In 1999, the most recent year for which data exists, 1.5 million children had an incarcerated parent.
- Black children are nearly nine times more likely and Latino children are three times more likely than White children to have a parent in prison.
- The likelihood that children of incarcerated parents will someday become incarcerated themselves is five to six times higher than for their peers.

Community Violence

In 2003, 2,827 children and teenagers in the United States died of firearm injuries including: 1822 homicides, 810 suicides, and 195 unintentional and undetermined shootings.

- Of children and teens who died by gunfire:
 - 1,554 were White,
 - 1,172 were Black,
 - 553 were Hispanic,
 - 51 were Asian, Pacific Islander, and
 - 50 were American Indian/Alaska Native.

Children of color are more likely to be killed by gunfire in the United States. Between 1979 and 2003, gunfire killed 98,588 children and teens in America, destroying countless families and communities.

- In 2003, 1,822 children and teens were murdered by firearms in the United States.
- The firearm death rate for Black males ages 15 to 19 is more than four times that of White males ages 15 to 19.
- Of children and teens murdered by gunfire in America:
 - 1,052 were Black,
 - 707 were White,
 - 427 were Hispanic,
 - 39 were Asian, Pacific Islander, and
 - 24 were American Indian/Alaska Native.