

¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?

A CALL TO ACTION ON BEHALF OF LATINO
AND LATINA YOUTH IN THE U.S. JUSTICE
SYSTEM

ACTION PACKET

Building Blocks for Youth
For a fair and effective youth justice system

July, 2002

Dear Youth Advocate:

According to a new Building Blocks for Youth report, "¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?" the justice system treats Latino and Latina youth more harshly than white youth, even when youth are charged for the same types of offenses!

By utilizing this Action Packet, you can take action to:

- **A**ddress the Disparity and Over-representation of Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System;
- **C**ollect Accurate and Separate Data on Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System;
- **T**ransfer Youth out of INS Detention Facilities and Create Appropriate INS Detention Policies;
- **I**gnore Immigration Status of Latino and Latina Youth in Detention Decisions;
- **O**ffer Bilingual Services to Latino and Latina Youth in the System;
- **N**urture Effective Cultural Competency Policies among Staff Working with Latino and Latina Youth.

We hope you find this Action Packet useful in taking action in your community. For additional information, materials, contacts or to get more free copies of this Action Packet, please call us at 202/637-0377, email us at: info.bby@erols.com, or visit our website at: www.buildingblocksforyouth.org. Together we can work to end the discrimination and racism against Latino and Latina youth in the justice system.

Sincerely,

The Building Blocks for Youth initiative

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Take Action!

Here are several information handouts with some ideas for taking action:

___Ideas on What You Can Do to Take Action!

___What Latino and Latina Youth Can Do

___What Latino and Latina Parents Can Do

___What Latino Communities Can Do

___What Advocates and Grassroots Organizers Can Do

Ideas on What You Can Do to Take Action!

Here are just a few ideas to get started in taking action now to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system:

Read this Action Packet

Get to know the facts on how Latino and Latina youth are treated by the justice system by reading this action packet.

Spread the Word

Share the fact sheets and information in this action packet with others in your community. Hand out the brochure at community events. Hang the poster at a community center, school or neighborhood space where people will see it!

Get Others Involved!

Tell others in your community about the injustices Latino and Latina youth are facing in the justice system. Ask them to join with you in taking action!

Reach out to other groups

Connect with groups in your area who may be interested in working with you.

Organize a meeting

Plan a meeting, invite others, give an update on how Latino and Latina youth are being treated, share the materials in this action packet, and talk about what you can do.

Plan a Direct Action Event

Plan a Workshop, "Speak Out Event", Protest or Rally to take action.

Speak Out

Start a "speaker's team" of Latino and Latina youth to provide facts.

Contact the Media

Ask your local media to do an investigative story on the unfair treatment of Latino and Latina youth. Issue a press statement. Host a news conference. Organize a direct action in the justice system and invite the media to cover your event.

Call Your Public Officials

Tell your public officials you want an end to racial and ethnic discrimination against Latino and Latina youth.

Start a Youth Justice Campaign

Activate your community by starting a youth justice campaign! Youth, parents of incarcerated youth, and community groups are leading justice campaigns around the country. You can make a difference in your community by initiating a campaign to address these issues.

What Can Latino and Latina youth do?

Here are a few ideas for Latino and Latina youth to take action now to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system:

Organize youth

Organize community meetings and forums to inform, educate, and distribute to the public informational materials on Latino and Latina youth in the justice system.

Need help getting organized? Attend youth organizing training

Attend training in youth organizing and activism; recruit other youth to do the same.

Start your own youth justice campaign

Youth are leading youth justice campaigns such as the Books Not Bars campaign (www.booksnotbars.org) in CA and the No More Youth Jails campaign in New York City (www.nomoreyouthjails.org) to end discrimination against youth of color in the justice system. Contact these campaigns and share ideas on how to take action.

Reach out to your community

Create support for the Latino and Latina youth in the system with your local churches, schools and community groups.

Speak Out

Start a "speakers team" of Latino and Latina youth who can present factual information and personal stories of experiences with the justice system and to speak out about the over-incarceration of youth of color.

Plan a Direct Action

Organize "speak-outs", protests and other direct action events for change.

Call on federal, state and local public officials

Contact public officials through a letter writing campaign or phone-a-thon and provide youths' perspective on how to end discrimination of Latino youth in the justice system. Request meetings with public officials to call for serious reform of the juvenile justice system to eliminate racial and ethnic bias and discrimination.

Participate in public hearings

Go to public hearings and organize others to attend; Request to give testimony on the impact on youth of state and local laws and policies before legislative committees charged with developing juvenile justice laws.

Contact the media

Call your local newspapers with letters to the editor, opinion articles, or stories on the issue of the unfair treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system.

What Latino and Latina Parents Can Do

Here are a few ideas for Latino and Latina parents to take action now to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system:

Find out what's happening to youth in the justice system

Become knowledgeable about the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system in your community.

Ask for information on parents' rights

Contact juvenile justice advocates, attorneys and justice system personnel to obtain information on the rights of parents' of youth in the justice system. Find out if a parents' rights manual is available in your community and if it is in Spanish. If a parents' rights manual doesn't exist or isn't available in Spanish, work with advocates, attorneys and justice system personnel to write and/or translate a manual.

Talk to other parents

Contact other parents and share what you've learned with other parents.

Organize parents to take action

Organize collectively through schools and faith-based organizations.

Reach out to your community

Hold neighborhood gatherings to discuss action plans for addressing the problems faced by Latino and Latina youth. Document progress as action plans are implemented.

Speak out

Become vocal advocates for Latino and Latina youth in the system.

Involve Latino-serving organizations

Contact local, regional, and national Latino-serving organizations to work with you.

Initiate parent support groups

Develop support groups for parents and families impacted by the juvenile justice system and workshops on topics such as how the system works, legal rights of youth and parents, and use of interpreters. Include parents and youth who have been impacted by the system. Develop public service announcements (PSAs) for Latino parents and air them on radio and television programs to encourage their participation.

Call on federal, state and local public officials

Call on the justice system for clear, complete and consistent information on referral, program and placement alternatives, legal proceedings, and agency procedures. Request that these materials be provided in the family's preferred language, or that a translator be made available, particularly at each court appearance.

What Latino Communities Can Do

Here are a few ideas for Latino Communities to take action now to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system:

Get organized at the local level

Youth, parents, and other concerned community members who come together to educate and organize themselves can more effectively pressure the justice system to be accountable to Latino communities for the way the system treats its youth. Include representatives of various community groups, including faith-based organizations and youth who have experience with the justice system. Involve the growing, youth-led grassroots movement to stop the incarceration of youth of color across the country.

Advocate for youth voices

Call for a real voice for youth in the area of policy development and implementation. Use the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child as a basis for including youth as active participants in the systems and decision processes that affect them.

Outreach to your community

- Host community meetings that present facts regarding the problem of disproportionate representation of Latino and Latina youth in the community and accounts of the experiences of Latino/a youth in the system. Help those who attend the meetings to develop action plans to address the problem and then to implement those plans;
- Encourage community members to become educated on how the criminal and juvenile justice systems work and on effective approaches that serve to reduce youth crime;
- Encourage community members to serve as cultural competence trainers, interpreters, and bilingual staff members in juvenile justice and law enforcement.

Reach out to schools

Work closely with schools to implement prevention programs, including structured out-of-school activities for youth both after school hours and during the summer.

Involve the legal community

Encourage culturally competent, bilingual attorneys to provide representation for Latino and Latina youth and their families.

Initiate a support hotline

Create a hotline for Latino and Latina youth and their families that provides information and referral services on juvenile justice issues in both Spanish and English.

Organize Latino advisory groups

Form Latino advisory groups to guide policy making and implementation in the law enforcement and justice systems.

Call on federal, state and local public officials to:

- Appoint Latinos and Latinas to state advisory bodies, such as the state advisory group required under the federal juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDP). Demand that public officials ensure Latino and Latina youth who have experience in the justice system be appointed to these advisory groups and provide support for their participation;
- Develop and use databases that include information on both race and ethnicity. Encourage community members to participate in research, increasing the likelihood that the data collected will be representative. Pursue collective understanding of the terms *Latino* and *Hispanic*. Suggest how definitions should be applied when data are collected;
- Expand and increase funding of community programs that provide alternatives to detention, alternatives that provide sufficient, high-quality, culturally competent in-home and community-based services for at-risk youth and for youth offenders, both pre- and post-disposition. Require that service delivery systems are held accountable for results through the use of performance-based outcomes;
- Implement non-cooperation agreements between the justice system and the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) to protect immigrant youth from being held in INS detention facilities, and from being deported and/or permanently separated from their families;
- End the widespread secure detention of immigrant youth in INS facilities;
- Conduct oversight hearings on how the state collects data on Latino and Latina youth in the justice system;
- Require by state law the use of certified interpreters/translators at all juvenile court proceedings;
- Implement a seamless delivery of services to youth who are at risk for involvement with the justice system.

What Advocates and Grassroots Organizers Can Do

Here are a few ideas for Advocates and Grassroots Organizers to take action now to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system:

Develop informational materials

Create users' guides and directories for individuals and groups working on issues of disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system.

Raise community awareness

Implement public education and media strategies to raise awareness of the issues discussed in this report. Include public service announcements (PSAs), web sites, and fact sheets. Speak out on radio and television programs.

Outreach and organize coalitions

Organize coalitions of advocacy groups nationally for the purpose of educating one another, sharing successful strategies, and collaborating on national campaigns.

Hold public meetings

Organize town hall meetings for legislators and other interested citizens that provide information on the problems associated with Latino and Latina youth in the justice system.

Call on federal, state and local public officials to:

- Require state justice system agencies, the Federal Bureau of Investigation and other agencies within the U.S. Department of Justice to keep accurate crime and court-related statistics regarding Latinos and Latinas, fully accounting for ethnic and racial distinctions in all information released by the agencies;
- Increase funding to ensure that law enforcement, justice system, education, and mental health professionals are adequately trained in the Spanish language and in cultural competence regarding specific Latino and Latina ethnic groups;
- Conduct more monitoring and oversight of INS practices by human rights organizations and governmental agencies;
- Ensure that constitutional due process applies to all youth, regardless of gang affiliation;
- Eliminate gang databases and "gang-injunction zones," which make certain areas off limits to youth who police believe are gang members;

- Significantly increase funding for decaying schools in urban centers, after-school youth programs and jobs to create more options for youth in their communities.

Call on justice system personnel to:

- Ensure that those impacted by the system (e.g., youth who have been in the system and their families) are included as integral parts of training programs for system personnel;
- Have certified interpreters available in all judicial proceedings involving Spanish-speaking or limited English proficiency (LEP) youth.

“How To” Action Steps:

Here are some 'how to' action steps for taking action now to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system:

Community Outreach:

- ___ Reaching Out to Your Community**
- ___ Organizing Tips for Starting Your Own Youth Justice Campaign**

Media:

- ___ “How To” Action Steps for Contacting the Media**
- ___ “Talking Points” for Press Interviews**

Direct Action:

- ___ “How To” Action Steps for Organizing a Protest**
- ___ Suggested Steps to Contacting Your Public Officials**
- ___ Action Steps on INS Detention Policies**
- ___ Using this Report to Fund Programs in Your Community**
- ___ Organizing a Juvenile Facility Visit**

Reaching Out to Your Community

To 'get the word out' about how Latino and Latina youth are treated by the justice system and publicize the latest research from the report, "¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?" that reveals that Latino and Latina youth are over-represented in the U.S. justice system, *and receive harsher treatment than White youth for the same types of offenses*, here are some ideas for you to consider:

Work with Faith-based Groups

Faith-based organizations are a great way to involve families and communities already organized around similar beliefs and values. Here are some ways to involve this already organized group.

- Identify a familiar congregation or group of congregations.
- Contact the leadership of the congregation and share information and reasons for why you want to involve them.
- Brainstorm on ways to use the congregation's ties to community involvement.
- Post flyers, posters and outreach information.
- Encourage the leadership to focus a message on juvenile justice issues and their affect on Latino and Latina youth in your community
- Request a small amount of time to speak on the issue during the announcements.
- Include information and resources in the weekly bulletin or handout.
- Reserve space in the lobby to offer information to families and other interested persons.
- Ask to present information at congregation sponsored classes (i.e. Bible study).

Work with Schools

Schools are one of the best ways to contact children and families about issues in their communities. Schools contact parents everyday in a variety of ways and host several events providing information to groups of parents. Here are some ways to involve this already organized group.

- Contact local school leadership about the possibility of distributing information to children and families.
- Ask for time at PTA or staff meetings, student assemblies or other school organized events, to present information and resources about Latino and Latina youth in the justice system.
- Post flyers, posters, and resources where parents are accessible to them (hallways, main offices, nurses' office).
- Speak to team coaches about discussing juvenile justice issues and their impact on Latino and Latina youth, with their athletes.

Work with After School Programs

After school programs offer a wealth of opportunities for informing and organizing children and parents. Programs serve many families daily and have direct contact with communities and other community based programs. Here are some ways to involve this already organized group.

- Contact program director about sending home information.
- Set up a station in the building where parents can receive information and ask questions.
- Ask to speak at program sponsored events.
- Ask to use the site as a meeting place for parents and program directors to receive information about juvenile justice issues affecting Latino and Latina youth in your community.
- Post flyers and distribute handouts and other outreach materials.
- Encourage programs to organize their affiliates and ask to speak at their meetings.

Work with Local Colleges and Universities

College and University student organizations often look for community projects to become involved in. Students offer a lot of resources, organization, and ENERGY! Here are some ways to involve this already organized group.

- Contact the Office of Student Organizations at you local college or university.
- Acquire a mailing list of all Latino, Latina, and other community service based organizations at the school.
- Mail each organization out reach materials and encourage them to get involved in Latino and Latina juvenile justice issues.
- Invite each organization to all of the gatherings taking place.
- Maintain contact with the leadership of each organization.

Organizing Tips for Starting Your Own Youth Justice Campaign

Contact or Join a Local Organization

Contact or join a local organization in your community that is currently working on or has the potential to work on the issue of juvenile injustice. Information about several of these organizations is included in this packet.

Can't Find One? Start One

If you can't find an organization that suits your needs ideologically or structurally... **START YOUR OWN!** Leadership training may be regularly available in your area, and many activist organizations provide leadership training upon request.

Find Out How Others Have Done It

Talk to other groups who have put together a youth justice campaign. Look at their websites or visit their campaigns. This packet includes contact information on youth justice campaigns.

Become Knowledgeable About the Issues

If joining an organization or starting a new one will not fit into your schedule, attend as many informational forums on the criminal injustice system as you can.

Incite Awareness

Some possibilities include starting an informational email list, organizing an "interest" meeting, forums, workshops, panel discussion and speak-outs. Hosting a youth/student speak-out may provide a sorely needed opportunity for young people to speak about their personal experiences in the justice system.

Direct Action

Some examples include letter writing campaigns, lobbying, boycotts, and of course, protests. The best way to take direct action is with an organization, utilizing the collective power of the people.

Be Creative

Possibilities for organizing and effecting change are endless. Using hip-hop and other forms of cultural expression may be the best method for attracting youth and raising consciousness.

"How To" Action Steps for Contacting the Media

When contacting the media, remember that you have what they need: an interesting, pertinent and compelling story. The key to getting the media interested in covering your story is how you present it to them. "¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?" is your tool to bait the media and reel them in with new facts and figures about how Latino and Latina youth are negatively impacted by the justice system in your own community. Here are a few tips to help you get media coverage:

Plan ahead

Allow yourself sufficient time to write a media outreach plan, complete with dates and time frames—remember to stick to them.

Develop a clear message—and stay on it

Create a one sentence message that you want the media to use and people to remember. Use this message frequently in any materials you distribute and in all communications with the media. The talking points and fact sheets included in this action packet will be helpful.

Decide who to take your story to

You have many choices in media sources: national and local newspapers, magazines, radio, and TV. Identify sources that are sympathetic to your message and issues affecting children and which will provide the best coverage of your message.

Know your options in getting media coverage of your message

In addition to various media sources, you have various ways of getting your message media attention. Opinion Editorials (Op-EDS) and press releases are just a few methods. Strategies to make these methods effective are outlined below. A sample opinion editorial and a sample press release are included in this packet for your use.

Pitching Your Story to the Media

Sending a letter to your local newspaper will not ensure that your message receives attention. If you want the media to take an interest in and have the opportunity to accurately cover your story, you will need to "pitch" your story, effectively convincing the media to cover the issue.

- You will need to develop a good working relationship with a reporter.
- Know whom you want to contact. Choose a reporter who will be interested in what you have to say. Spin your message in a way that will make them interested.
- Rehearse your pitch with friends or colleagues before you start. Know what you want to say and say it well. Be prepared to address your topic from a variety of angles. Feel free to use the talking points included in this action packet to assist in creating your pitch.
- Pitch in the morning when reporters are at their desks and hungry for news stories. Reporters are searching for stories in the morning, it is best to get their attention before they start their day.
- Remember to introduce yourself and the purpose of the call.
- Be conversational but **GET TO THE POINT!** Media persons are strapped for time and there are other competing news stories out there. Make sure that you use the time you have secured to let the reporter know right away why you are calling and why your story is newsworthy.
- Be professional. Remember that you want the reporter to respond to you. Set and keep interview dates, follow up your phone calls to remind them, and always remember to say thank you
- Smile when you pitch. No reporter wants to cover a story that does not seem interesting. It is your job to convey that enthusiasm and passion for the story to the reporter.

Planning a Media Event

Another way to generate media coverage is to do a media event that generates interest in covering the issues you are raising.

- Pick a good time, date and place. Plan your event for the morning so that reporters have plenty of time to meet their deadlines. Also pick dates that do not conflict with other big events in the area that would draw media coverage.

- **Make sure the media knows about the event in advance.** The Associated Press runs a daybook which tells local media what is going on in their area. It is also a good idea to send media advisory notices to different media offices.
- **Send clear press materials.** When sending press releases and press packets to the media, make sure that your materials stand out. They should have big clear headlines that communicate why your event is the most newsworthy. Make sure to follow up on all materials sent to the media. Consider using the Basic fact sheets on the report and sample press releases included in this action packet.
- **Be available to the media.** Time is money! Make sure that when the media shows up, your spokesperson is available and ready to be interviewed without delay.
- **Make sure to follow up the event.** Do not just put on an event and leave it to the media to continue coverage. Be prepared to follow your event with other media strategies that will keep your message in the news and on people's minds!

Submitting an Opinion Editorial

Another way to get media attention is to write an opinion editorial.

- **Contact the editorial office of the chosen newspaper to inquire about their guidelines for op-eds, time frames etc.**
- **Draft an argument that is clear, provocative, passionate, to the point and about one page in length.** Use relevant personal stories, national and local facts and figures, and if you can, local information related to any other compelling information you can include. Feel free to use the sample provided in this action pack for guidance.
- **Submit your clear and concise op-ed without typos and grammatical errors.** Be sure to include contact information and to follow up a few days after submitting it.

“Talking Points” for Press Interviews

Here are a few key points to use when you are talking with the press about Latino and Latina youth in the justice system:

Latino and Latina youth are overrepresented in every stage of the juvenile justice system Latino youth receive harsher treatment and longer sentences than White youth charged with the same offense. For youth charged with drug offenses, the incarceration rate for Latino youth is 13 times the rate for White youth. Latino youth are overrepresented in the juvenile justice system.

The data on Latinos and Latinas in the juvenile justice system is inadequate and masks the full scope of the problem

Since there is undercounting and inaccuracy in reporting, it is difficult to begin addressing the disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino youth in the juvenile justice system.

The juvenile justice system does not provide uniform definitions for Latino and Hispanic and blurs the scale of disparity

In some states, Latinos are counted as White and in others, Latinos are counted as Black. As a result, the data erroneously undercounts the degree of overrepresentation of Latino youth and mistakenly overcounts the incarceration rates of White youth.

The juvenile justice system fails to provide bilingual services to Latino and Latina youth. As the Spanish-speaking population increases, the need for bilingual services does as well. Non-English speaking parents of detained youth need to have access to bilingual staff in order to advocate for their child's release. Communication barriers also cause problems with treatment, counseling and aftercare services.

Immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation, and permanent separation from families

On any given day, there are 5,000 Latino youth incarcerated for immigration issues and a vast majority are detained and have not been charged with any crime.

Unequal and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth can be reduced

Several communities have worked successfully to address problems facing Latino youth. In Santa Cruz, CA, juvenile justice officials worked hard to create a fairer and effective justice system. Also in Multnomah County, OR, juvenile justice officials succeeded in reducing racial disparities in their system and now detention rates of Latinos, Whites, and African-Americans are equal and overall detention rates have dropped.

"How To" Action Steps for Organizing a Direct Action: Protest

Identify the Issue(s) or Problem(s)

- Ask: Why are you protesting? For example, you want your public officials to end discrimination against Latino and Latina youth in the justice system.
- Make sure the issue is broad enough to attract a large audience, but distinct enough to address in one protest.

Identify the Pressure Point(s)

- Ask: Who has the power to affect change in this situation? For example, state legislators have the power to change your state laws on how Latino youth are treated by the justice system; your governor has the power to approve or disapprove funding increases for community-based youth services; and state officials who run your state's department of juvenile justice have the power to change how juvenile justice services and programs are run.
- Locate your protest at the office or headquarters of this person or organization.
- You will need a permit from local government officials to protest in most locations. Obtain your permit as early in the process as possible.
- Target as few people or organizations as possible, so that your collective energy is not spread thin.

Identify Your Allies and Your Opponents

- Ask: Who would be interested in participating in this campaign? Who could potentially discredit this campaign if they found out?
- Outreach only to those persons or organizations that have been identified as allies. Allies could include local civil and human rights activists, social justice groups in the faith community and local chapters of groups such as Amnesty International, the National Council of La

Raza and LULAC. Your opponents may have much greater access to media networks than your organization, so try not to tip them off if possible.

Outreach!

There are many different strategies for outreach in the community. Creativity, cultural and age sensitivity, and a general knowledge of your audience will increase the community's reception.

- **Flyers:** Distribute as many flyers as possible. When handing out flyers, talk to as many people as possible about your event. Leave flyers in businesses, restaurants, schools, on street lamps and in any public place that will not consider this vandalism or solicitation (No Malls!). Posting flyers in strategic locations will save energy and time, but personal contact and conversation is more effective. It is safe to expect a 3-5% return on your flyers: If you distribute 10,000 flyers, you can expect 300-500 people.
- **Email:** If you don't have your own email network, tap into networks of your allies. Through email, you can potentially reach thousands of people with the click of a mouse.
- **Interest Meeting:** If possible, organize an interest meeting to educate the public about the issue that you are protesting. A greater understanding can lead to greater involvement.
- **Media:** If you want the media to cover your protest, you will need to issue a press release and media advisory. Contact ALL the major and minor media networks. Contact both newspapers and TV stations.

The Message

- Be clear and direct with your message.
- Be sure to include specific demands and solutions to the issue.
- Identify a plan of action or a series of recommendations to accomplish these goals.

- The media will be most interested in your demands and proposed solutions.
- The media is also very skilled at identifying that person who doesn't know much, so designate two to three spokespeople.
- You should also distribute a leaflet with your demands and recommendations at the event. Media tips are included in this packet to help you get media coverage.

Suggested Tips for Contacting Your Public Officials

Here are a few ideas on contacting your public officials:

Phone Contacts:

- Phone calls are a great way to let your public officials know right away how you feel about an issue, especially on a time sensitive issue such as a bill under consideration in the legislature. To call the office of your local or state government official (ex: governor, mayor, city council members, congressman, senator, or state legislator), keep these tips in mind:
- Call during business hours (Monday-Friday between 9 am - 5 pm).
- For legislators, you may want to call them at their offices in your state capitol or in Congress on legislative days during the legislative session which are usually Tuesdays, Wednesdays, and Thursdays.
- You are not likely to reach these contacts directly as they may be in meetings, but be sure to leave a message with their staff. Ask for the staff's name, and write it down with the date and time you called.
- Be sure to give the staff person your name and address and ask for a written response to your call.
- If you don't receive a response within a week, contact the office again and ask to speak to that staff person. Let them know you are still expecting a written response.

Letters:

- Sending letters to your government officials is a good way to let your public officials know how you feel about an issue and ensures that there is a record of your contact.
- Sample letters are included in this packet to get you started.
- Public officials are more likely to respond to personal, hand-written letters than to form letters. Also, public officials may be more responsive if they receive a lot of letters.
- To effectively reach your public officials, host a letter-writing party at your house or neighborhood gathering and provide sample letters that people can use

to handwrite their own letter.

Additional Ideas:

Consider these additional ways to reach your public officials:

- Plan an event like a community forum or town hall meeting and invite your government officials to attend and learn more about the issue as well as interact with your community members;
- Call on your public officials to hold public hearings and then organize community members to attend;
- Attend regularly scheduled public hearings. Not sure when these are being held? Call your public officials and ask to be notified in writing about all upcoming public hearings.
- Be a resource by asking your government officials about how you can serve on your state's youth advisory board to provide a youth voice to policy discussions on juvenile justice.

Action Steps on INS Detention Policies

Among many of the findings reported in "¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?", the Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) received attention for their inappropriate policies and practices. Here are some ways that advocates can use the materials in this Action Pack to challenge the INS and public officials, such as your Members of Congress, who are involved in the development, implementation and oversight of federal immigration policies:

- Call your Members of Congress, especially if they are a member of the House or Senate Judiciary Committees or Subcommittees on Immigration.
- Send a letter to the INS Director of the Office of Internal Audit at 425 I St., NW Room 3260, Washington, DC 20536.
- Send a letter to INS District Directors of the field offices in your community or throughout the country.
- Send a letter to INS detention facilities in your community or around the country.
- Host a 'letter writing' party in your community.
- Create post cards to the INS asking for change, pass them out in your community and coordinate a mass mail in day.
- Create a petition demanding change and mail to INS related offices.
- Spread the word by sharing fact sheets and encouraging others to get involved.
- Contact your local media, asking them to run a copy of a letter calling for action by the INS.

Here are some resources available to you:

- To find information on your Members of Congress, log on to <http://thomas.loc.gov/>, click on House or Senate directory and find your state.
- To find information on members of the House and Senate Judiciary Committees and Subcommittees on Immigration, log on to <http://thomas.loc.gov/> and click on House Committees or Senate Committees.
- To find information on the INS District Field Office near you log on to www.ins.usdoj.gov and click on Field Office Addresses and Information. This will also lead you to a listing of INS detention facilities.
- Sample letters for contacting your Members of Congress and federal INS officials are included in this packet.

Using this Report to Fund Programs in Your Community

Here are some ideas for using this report to fund Latino youth serving programs in your community:

- Identify individuals and groups who could support your efforts financially.
- Send a letter to these individuals and groups with a copy of the executive summary of the report letting them know that their support would help your address some of the major issues outlined by the report. A sample letter to potential funders is included in this packet.
- Followup with these individuals and groups by phone or in person to obtain their financial support.
- Be sure to enclose a donor card and a return envelope with your program's address and be specific about the amount you are seeking. For example, your donor card could include donor amounts such as \$25, \$50, \$100 and \$500.
- Invite potential donors to visit your program and provide them with your program information and success stories.
- Include donor cards and envelopes in all your community outreach efforts to educate your community on the issues outlined in the report.
- If you receive any news coverage on the report, send a copy of the press clippings to all potential donors with a short cover note letting them know how your program is working to address the issues in the report.
- Ask community organizations to include a newsletter article about the report in their next edition, and be sure to include information about your program and how people can contribute financially. A sample newsletter article is included in this packet.
- Remember: The #1 reason people don't give funding support, is because nobody asked!

Organizing a Juvenile Facility Visit

A visit to a juvenile detention or corrections facility will provide your community an opportunity to understand how Latino youth are treated by the juvenile justice system, hear from Latino youth who have come in contact with the juvenile justice system and personally see and experience the juvenile justice system at work. Here are some suggestions in organizing a juvenile facility visit:

- Schedule the visit so that it does not interfere with school hours (9 am - 3 pm) for the youth at the facility, and also to ensure maximum participation of community leaders by allowing them a full-day at work so they do not have to take a half a day off to participate. After school hours and before evening functions, around 4pm - 6pm, is an ideal time frame for the visit.
- Make arrangements with the juvenile facility several months in advance. Send a letter to the facility director (sample enclosed.) Follow up with a phone call. Offer to meet with the director in advance of the community dialogue.
- Send out invitations (sample enclosed) to community leaders with plenty of advance notice to ensure maximum participation.
- Confirm their participation with a letter and include an agenda with starting and ending times, some brief background materials on juvenile justice issues such as an overview of current challenges facing the juvenile justice system in your state and brief essays from youth in detention on their experiences, a copy of the current state law on juvenile justice, and directions to the facility.
- 30 participants is an ideal number for a medium to large size facility. 15-20 is an ideal size for a smaller facility.
- Ask juvenile justice experts, such as a juvenile defender, community-based juvenile justice program director, or juvenile justice state advisory group chair to give an overview on juvenile justice issues, to lead the small group discussions with staff and youth or to help facilitate the participant discussion.
- Schedule in ample time for small group discussions with the children and youth during the visit and include an interactive activity, such as eating snacks or dinner in the dining hall. The activity will make it easier to engage youth in a dialogue, and will be a more comfortable setting for adults who are not working directly with youth on a regular basis.
- Be sure to include one or more individuals who are familiar with the facility, staff, and youth, to assist you, especially in leading small group discussions with staff and youth. This will make for a smoother dialogue.

- **Assign individuals for the small group discussions in advance, assign a small group 'leader' to guide the group, and include at least one adult in each group who works directly with youth to help ensure each group can easily talk with youth.**
- **Provide an overview of what participants will experience at the outset of the visit**
- **Include a short briefing on effective approaches to community partnerships serving children and youth in detention and corrections, such as mentoring programs**
- **Provide participants with suggestions on how to engage youth in discussion. You may want to send out these suggestions with the confirmation letter in advance as well.**
- **Ask small group leaders to talk to staff during the visit on the reason for the visit stressing the importance of the dialogue and building a stronger community partnership**
- **Set aside time for participant discussion and for followup feedback after the small group discussions with participants and staff.**
- **Important note: You will need to make arrangements well in advance with the director of the juvenile detention center to make the visit especially to ensure interactive opportunities to talk with youth in detention. A sample contact letter is enclosed. To also assist you in making arrangements with the juvenile detention or corrections facility director, please feel free to contact the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative at 202/637-0377.**
- **How to find out the location of the nearest facility: For your convenience, this packet contains several resource lists where you can obtain information on state juvenile justice contacts.**

Sample Materials:

Community Outreach:

Sample Community Outreach Letter

Sample Newsletter Article

Sample Website, Email and On-line Newsletter Announcement

Sample Outreach Flyers

Media:

Sample Press Release

Sample Opinion Editorial

Direct Action:

Sample Letters to Your Public Officials

Sample Letter to Funders

Sample Invitation Letter to Visit Your Program

Sample Juvenile Facility Visit Community Leader Invite Letter

Sample Juvenile Facility Visit Request Letter

Sample Community Outreach Letter

Dear Community Member:

I am writing to bring to your attention an issue of serious concern to me -- the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the juvenile justice.

According to a new report, "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" released by the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative, a national project led by the Youth Law Center to promote a fair and effective youth justice system, Latino and Latina youth are incarcerated at higher rates, receive longer sentences and harsher treatment than white youth even when charged with the same offenses. Current data means for collecting and assessing data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting and inaccuracies in reporting disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S justice system. The system fails to provide adequate bilingual services to Latino and Latina youth and fails to ensure cultural competency of staff working with Latino and Latina youth in the system. Consideration of the immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation and permanent separation from families. Anti-gang laws result in harsh and unfair consequences for Latino and Latina youth.

I've enclosed an executive summary of this report that contains recommendations for action which I hope you consider. In addition, I am including several outreach brochures which include a poster inside that I would appreciate your posting in a prominent location. Please let me know if you would like additional copies of any of these materials.

I will be in touch with you shortly to follow up on any questions that you may have and to discuss how we might work together to end the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth by the justice system in our community.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Sample Newsletter Article

Luis, a 15-year-old Latino with no previous record, was arrested for possessing less than half an ounce of marijuana. At his sentencing, the judge noticed Luis wasn't looking at him and ordered him to do so. Luis did, but later started looking down again. The lack of eye contact led the judge to believe that Luis was admitting guilt and being disrespectful, and he sentenced Luis to two years in a juvenile facility. However, in Luis' culture, looking down isn't an admission of guilt; it's a sign of respect. When he was growing up, Luis was taught that "staring down" authority figures was disrespectful.

According to a new report, Luis' situation is not unusual. Cultural misunderstandings and insensitivities can result in harsher sentences for Latino youth in the juvenile justice system. The report, by the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative, shows that Latino youth are over-represented and receive stiffer penalties than White youth. Disparities accumulate the deeper youth go into the juvenile justice system. In Los Angeles, for example, while Latino youth are arrested 2.3 times as often as White youth, Latinos are 12 times as likely to be confined as a White youth with a similar history who are charged with the same type of offense. Latino youth are also incarcerated longer than White youth. When it comes to drug offenses, Latino youth are incarcerated twice as long as White youth.

Disparities based on race or ethnicity may be the result of bias from judges and probation officers. More often, however, bias is built into the system through supposedly objective criteria. Parental participation, gang involvement, and immigration status are all "objective" standards that may fall more harshly on Latinos in the absence of cultural sensitivity. Thus, a court may not provide bilingual staff and services to an English-fluent youth, but that child's parents may need bilingual services to get involved in their child's case, rendering them unable to advocate for their child. Gang association may be inferred from tattoos and ethnicity, not actual behavior. Consideration of a youth's immigration status can also lead to harsher treatment.

The data collected by *Building Blocks* are disturbing, but they don't tell the whole story. Counties across the U.S. do not use uniform definitions of race and ethnicity. In many states, Latino youth are often lumped into the same category as White youth, masking the extent of disparity by over-counting Whites and under-counting Latinos.

Several counties have successfully addressed structural problems facing Latinos in the juvenile justice system. In Santa Cruz, California, Latino youth in juvenile detention declined by 22%. Similarly, after officials in Multnomah County, Oregon, focused for several years on reducing disparities in their juvenile detention system, the detention rates for youth of different races and ethnicities are now the same, and the overall detention rate dropped by two-thirds. Both counties built coalitions to address disparities in juvenile justice, and successfully worked to reduce systematic bias. These results show that built-in bias can change, if the political will exists. We need to stand up for our children to live up to the promise of equality under the law.

To obtain the executive summary, full report, press materials, and action packet, visit the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative website at:

www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

Sample website, email and on-line newsletter announcement

On July 18, the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative released "¿Dónde Está la Justicia?" A Call to Action on Behalf of Latino and Latina Youth in the U.S Justice System", a comprehensive new report which reveals that Latino and Latina youth are over-represented in the U.S. justice system, and receive harsher treatment than White youth for the same types of offenses. The report also demonstrates that the lack of adequate data nationwide masks the severity of the problem. The *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative is a national campaign to reduce racial disparities in the justice system and promote fair and effective justice policies.

Prepared by the Institute for Children, Youth and Families at Michigan State University, the report shows that Latino and Latina youth are significantly over-represented in the U.S. justice system and receive harsher treatment than White youth, even when charged with the same types of offenses and the current means for collecting and accessing data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting and inaccuracies in reporting disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S. justice system.

"¿Dónde Está la Justicia?" includes recommendations to public officials, policymakers and the justice system, such as eliminating racial profiling and other policies based explicitly or implicitly on racial or ethnic stereotypes; collecting data in a way that accurately counts Latino youth by separating them from White, African-American, and other youth; employing bilingual and culturally competent staff to ensure better services to the Latino community; and reducing subjective or biased decision making by creating objective risk assessment instruments.

To obtain the executive summary, full report, press materials, and action packet, visit the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative website at:

www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

JUVENILE JUSTICE - COME LEARN ABOUT YOUR POWER

*Misconception and deception, hard
Affection and rejection play a role
In my life as I try to live right.
Illusions and delusions, racism
And confusion constantly surround
Me as a try to succeed.*

TAMEKA from Artshare

Do you have something to say?

WHAT:

WHEN:

WHERE:

SPONSORED BY

Sample Press Release

Embargoed for Release

Embargoed until:

12:01 am

July 18, 2002

Contact:

New Report Exposes Disparities in Treatment of Latino and Latina Youth In Justice System; System Plagued by Inadequate Data, Absence of Bi-Lingual Services

(City, State) -- Latino and Latina youth receive disparate and more punitive treatment than their White peers charged with the same types of offenses, according to a new report, "¿Dónde Está la Justicia?" commissioned by the *Building Blocks for Youth* Initiative. Available data actually under-count disparities because most states and the federal government fail to identify Latino youth in data collection, usually counting them as White.

Latino youth are more likely to be incarcerated than White youth charged with the same types of offenses. For youth charged with drug offenses, the incarceration rate for Latino youth was 13 times the rate for White youth. Latino youth charged with violent offenses were five times as likely to be incarcerated as White youth similarly charged. According to Human Rights Watch research, Latino youth are incarcerated at higher rates than Whites in 46 of the 50 states.

The report, "¿Dónde Está la Justicia? A Call to Action on Behalf of Latino and Latina Youth in the U.S. Justice System," was commissioned by the *Building Blocks for Youth* Initiative, a national campaign to promote a fair and effective youth justice system and was prepared by the Institute for Children, Youth and Families at Michigan State University, in consultation with a number of national and grassroots Latino groups.

(insert quote from local leader here)

Initial disparities that occur at arrest are compounded by later disparities, resulting in a "cumulative disadvantage" for Latino youth. For example, in Los Angeles in 1996-1998, Latino youth were arrested 2.3 times as often as White youth; prosecuted 2.4 times as often as White youth, and imprisoned 7.3 times as often as White youth. Consequently, the average length of incarceration is much longer for Latino youth than White youth, even when charged with the same offense. Latino youth charged with drug offenses were incarcerated for more than 5 months longer than White youth, almost 5 months longer for violent offenses, 1 month longer for property offenses.

In addition to suffering higher rates of confinement and longer periods of incarceration, Latino youth face specific barriers in the justice system. Lack of bilingual and culturally competent staff can result in harsher treatment, and profound confusion and frustration for youth and families who speak only Spanish or who have

limited English proficiency. The Immigration and Naturalization Service incarcerates many Latino youth, often under punitive conditions, though in most instances they are not charged with any crime other than being in the United States without proper documentation. Anti-gang statutes in many states impose dramatically higher penalties on youth who police or courts believe are gang members, although such beliefs are often based on stereotypes about Latino youth.

While available data show that Latino youth receive harsher treatment than White youth, current data collection methods mask the full magnitude of the problem. Many states and the federal government ask only one question about race and ethnicity of youth in the system, and the choices are "White," "African-American," "and "Other" (or "Asian" and "Native American"). When ethnicity is not an available category, more than 95% of Latinos report their race as White.

(insert second quote from local leader here)

The study makes several recommendations for Latino communities, youth and families, law enforcement; advocates; researchers; public officials and policy-makers; and the juvenile justice system:

Public officials, policy-makers, and the justice system should:

- Eliminate racial profiling and other policies based explicitly or implicitly on racial or ethnic stereotypes.
- Collect data in a way that accurately counts Latino youth by separating them from White, African-American, and other youth
- Employ bilingual and culturally competent staff to ensure better services to the Latino community
- Reduce subjective or biased decision making by creating objective risk assessment instruments

Latino communities, youth and families should:

- Get organized at a local level to pressure the justice system to be accountable to Latino communities and youth.
- Call for the active inclusion of youth voices in policy development and implementation.
- Form Latino advisory groups to guide policy making and implementation in the law enforcement and justice systems.

The *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative (www.buildingblocksforyouth.org) is a national campaign to reduce over-representation and racial and ethnic disparities affecting youth of color in the justice system. The Institute for Children, Youth and Families at Michigan State University, a multidisciplinary institute supporting university-community collaborations in research, policy engagement, and outreach regarding children, youth and families from diverse communities (www.icyf.msu.edu).

Sample Opinion Editorial

If sins were ranked, failing to keep a promise to a child would appear high on the list. But according to a new report, the promise of "equal justice under the law" is yet to be fulfilled for American's Latino youth.

The report, "¿Dónde Está la Justicia?" by the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative, shows that Latino youth receive stiffer penalties than White youth charged with similar offenses and similar histories. These disparities accumulate the deeper youth go into the juvenile justice system, with stunning results. For example, in Los Angeles, while Latino youth were arrested 2.3 times as often as White youth, Latinos were 12 times as likely to be confined as a White youth charged with the same type of offense. Latino youth are also incarcerated longer than White youth. When it comes to drug offenses, Latino youth are incarcerated for more than twice as long as White youth.

Disparities based on race or ethnicity may be the result of bias from judges and probation officers. More often, bias is built into the system through supposedly objective criteria. Parental participation, gang involvement, and immigration status are all considered "objective" standards and may fall more harshly on Latino youth. Thus, a court may not provide bilingual staff and services to an English-fluent youth, but that child's parents may need bilingual services to get involved in their child's case, rendering them unable to advocate for their child.

In addition, most systems fail to assure cultural competence of those dealing with youth. For example, the report cites the case of a judge who demanded that an accused Latino youth make eye contact with him. The youth kept looking down, implying disrespect to the judge. Instead, in that child's culture, "staring down" - making direct eye contact with - authority figures is considered disrespectful.

While the data are disturbing, they don't tell the whole story. States and counties across the U.S. do not use uniform definitions - Hispanic denotes only Spanish-speaking nations, while Latino describes people with ties to Latin America and the Caribbean, including recent and distant immigrants - and governments almost never separate race and identity. The results can be arbitrary; for example, California sometimes classifies youth in the justice system according to "the darkest skin group of [the youth's] racial heritage." In many states, Latino youth are often lumped into the same category as White youth. Classification problems thus mask the extent of disparity by over-counting Whites and under-counting Latinos. The numbers we do have may not be an accurate representation of Latinos' status: it is probably far worse.

It doesn't have to be this way. Several counties have successfully addressed structural problems facing Latino youth in their juvenile detention facilities. In Santa Cruz, California, juvenile justice officials worked hard to create a fairer and more effective system with the result that Latino youth in detention declined by 22%.

Similarly, after officials in Multnomah County, Oregon focused for several years on reducing disparities in their juvenile detention system, the detention rates for youth of different races and ethnicities are now the same, and the overall detention rate dropped by two-thirds. Both counties built coalitions to address disparities in juvenile justice, and successfully worked together to reduce systematic bias.

These results show that built-in bias can be changed, if the political will exists. We need to stand up for our children to live up to the promise of equality under the law.

Sample Individual Letter to Your Governor, State Legislator, or State Official

Dear Governor/State Legislator/State Official:

I am writing to bring your attention to an issue of serious concern to me -- the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the juvenile justice system. Latino and Latina youth receive disparate and more punitive treatment than their White peers charged with the same types of offenses, according to a new report, "¿Dónde Está la Justicia?" commissioned by the *Building Blocks for Youth* Initiative. Available data actually under-count disparities because most states and the federal government fail to identify Latino youth in data collection, usually counting them as White.

The goal of the juvenile justice system since the beginning has been the recovery and rehabilitation of children and youth. Unfortunately, today's juvenile justice system is under attack with increasingly punitive policies that focus on punishment and incarceration, rather than the rehabilitation of youth. Key findings of "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" show that Latino and Latina youth are incarcerated at higher rates, receive longer sentences, and receive harsher treatment than white youth even when charged with the same types of offenses. Current data means for collecting and assessing data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting and inaccuracies in reporting disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S justice system. The system fails to provide adequate bilingual services to Latino and Latina youth and fails to ensure cultural competency of staff working with Latino and Latina youth in the system. Consideration of the immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation and permanent separation from families. Anti-gang laws result in harsh and unfair consequences for Latino and Latina youth.

I urge your serious consideration of my concerns and would appreciate a written response on the specific steps you will be taking to respond to my concerns. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

[Insert your name and address]

Sample Sign-On Letter/Petition to Your Governor, State Legislator, or State Official

Dear Governor/State Legislator/State Official:

In response to the recent findings of disparity and inadequate data collection of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system, as reported in “¿Dónde Está la Justicia?” — a new report released by the *Building Blocks for Youth* Initiative— we are writing to call your attention to and express our concerns about current policies resulting in the inappropriate treatment of children, especially Latino and Latina children, in the justice system.

We urge you to take action by:

- **A**ddressing the Disparity and Over-representation of Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System;
- **C**ollecting Accurate and Separate Data on Latino Youth in the Justice System;
- **T**ransferring Youth out of INS Detention Facilities and Create Appropriate INS Detention Policies;
- **I**gnoring Immigration Status of Latino and Latina Youth in Detention Decisions;
- **O**ffering Bilingual Services to Latino and Latina Youth in the System;
- **N**urturing Effective Cultural Competency Policies among Staff Working with Latino and Latina Youth.

We have enclosed a copy of the executive summary of the report, “¿Dónde Está la Justicia?” and we urge your serious consideration of our concerns and the issues affecting Latino and Latina children in the justice system.

Sincerely,

Sample Letter to the Federal INS Commissioner and Your Member of Congress

Dear INS Commissioner/ Member of House or Senate Judiciary Committee/ Member of House or Senate Subcommittee on Immigration,

In response to the recent findings of disparity and inadequate data collection of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system, as reported in "¿Dónde Está la Justicia?" a new report released by the *Building Blocks for Youth* Initiative—I am writing to call your attention to and express my concern about current INS detention policies resulting in the inappropriate treatment of immigrant Latino and Latina children. These concerns require you to take action by:

1) **Adopting Policies that Protect the Legal and Human Rights of Immigrant Children:** Latino and Latina youth taken into the custody of the INS often are denied a hearing, access to legal representation, contact with relatives, information about their legal rights and about whether, or when, they will be deported. They are also regularly handcuffed, strip searched and subject to other degrading treatment.

2) **Canceling Contracts with Detention Facilities Housing Immigrant Persons:** INS compensation contracts with detention facilities create a financial incentive for many under-funded institutions to inquire into and report the immigrant status of children in their care.

3) **Transferring Youth out of INS Detention Facilities and Creating Appropriate INS Detention Policies:** Many immigrant youth are detained for months, and sometimes years, in secure juvenile detention centers and, in some cases, in adult jails and prisons, after which they may be deported. While detained, they may be commingled with delinquent youth, even if they have not been charged with a crime themselves.

4) **Ignoring Reports of Immigration Status of Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System:** In some situations, Latino and Latina youth who have already completed serving time are transferred to INS detention, where they oftentimes sit for months in secure facilities and eventually are deported (Human Rights Watch, 1997, 1998). Immigrant Latino and Latina youth transferred to and convicted in the adult court face deportation consequences.

5) **Offering Bilingual Services to Latino and Latina Youth in the System:** Detention facilities have few employees who are bilingual and knowledgeable about various Latino cultures. Providing services and documents only in English compromises the constitutional right to due process of youth who are not predominantly English speaking and who have encounters with the justice system

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6) Nurturing Policies Preserving and Protecting Immigrant Families: Immigrant youth in INS custody may be purposefully transferred by the INS to detention facilities located in different states than those where their parents are detained. The U.S. government makes little or no effort to reunite children with family members when they are deported.

I urge your serious consideration of my concerns and the issues affecting Latino and Latina children in INS custody.

Sincerely,

[Insert your name and address]

Sample Letter to State/Local Law Enforcement Agency

Dear State/Local Law Enforcement Agency,

As Latino populations grow in the United States, it is important to address the overrepresentation and unequal treatment of Latino children in the justice system. Law enforcement agencies are most frequently the first point of contact for many youth in the justice system. Therefore, change at this level would have the greatest impact on changes to the entire system and the well being of children—especially Latino children. On behalf of the growing population of Latino and Latina youth and their families, I urge you to support juvenile justice reform in this jurisdiction by:

1) Eliminating policies and practices dependant on racially, ethnically and stereotypically driven risk assessment tools. While some racial/ ethnic differences in delinquent behavior for some types of offenses exist, those differences do not explain the overrepresentation of children of color in the justice system. The practices and policies of law enforcement agencies directly impact this problem. Practices directing attention to low income communities where youth of color live, racial profiling, and succumbing to media stereotypes of urban culture directly impact the number of racial minority children entering the justice system. As children of color pass through the system, they experience a cumulative disadvantage compared to White children. Latino children are arrested, detained, transferred to the adult courts, and incarcerated more often than White children. Latino youth are sent to correctional facilities more often and for longer periods of time than White children who commit the same offenses. Law enforcement agencies are the catalysts of change in the way minority, and specifically Latino and Latina youth are treated in the justice system. Agencies must develop new policies—with the assistance of all stakeholders— reflecting a set of risk assessment factors free of criteria that creates racial bias.

2) Documenting all law enforcement interaction with Latino and Latina youth. In order to effectively address overrepresentation and disparate treatment of Latino children in the justice system, states must first identify the magnitude of the problem. Successful programs around the country addressing disproportionate minority confinement begin with creating a system to accurately record the interaction of minority children with the justice system. Law enforcement agencies are the starting point for recording this information. Accurate information regarding the ethnicity/ race of the child, nature of the interaction, and the decisions following the initial interaction should be recorded. This information would assist in assessing where disparities occur, addressing the problems Latino and Latina youth face in the justice system, and would serve as an indicator of how policies and practices need to be changed.

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3) Developing and using policies that increase awareness and understanding of cultural, linguistic and social differences in Latino populations. As the population of Latinos in the United States continues to grow, it is important to acknowledge the many differences within the several groups comprising the Latino culture. Differences in languages, customs, and understandings of the justice system impact a Latino child's interaction with the justice system. Law enforcement agencies often lack adequate representation and training of bilingual and culturally competent staff. This very often impacts the overrepresentation and inappropriate or harsh treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system. Law enforcement agencies must create policies which recruit and hire more bilingual and culturally aware people. They must also provide proper and on-going training to their staff, so that they may better understand, communicate and assist Latino and Latina youth in the system.

I urge your consideration of my concerns and recommendations. I would appreciate a written response on what steps your office will be taking to address these and other issues in the justice system, to better and equally serve the needs of our youth.

Sincerely,

[Insert your name and address]

Sample Letter to Funders

Date

[Local Foundation Name

Address]

Dear *[insert name]*,

On behalf of *[your organization name]*, I am writing to let you know about a new *Building Blocks for Youth* report, "Dónde Está La Justicia" ("Where Is the Justice"). This report, prepared by Francisco Villarruel and Nancy Walker of Michigan State University, documents disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the juvenile justice system.

As you know, *[your organization name]* serves *[at-risk youth, including Latino/a children]*. *[Summarize your organization's work in one or two sentences.]* In light of our work, we found the *Building Blocks for Youth* report useful at highlighting the needs of Latino and Latina youth. We would like to share the findings of the report with you, and invite you to visit our program to see the day-to-day implications of the report in practice.

The report's major finding is that Latino/a youth are significantly over-represented in the U.S. justice system and receive harsher treatment than White youth, even when charged with similar offenses. The report also finds:

- Failures in data collection. Current means for collecting data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S. justice system. No uniform definitions for the terms Latino and Hispanic, and ethnicity is never separated from race.
- Failure in responding to Latinos' needs. The juvenile justice system fails to provide adequate bilingual services, and it fails to ensure cultural competency of staff working with Latino and Latina youth.
- Bias in "objective" criteria. Consideration of the immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation, and permanent separation from families. Anti-gang laws result in harsh and unfair consequences for Latino and Latina youth, and gang classifications may be made on the basis of stereotypes.

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The report urges Latino communities to: (a) get organized at a local level to pressure the justice system to be accountable to Latino communities and youth; (b) call for the inclusion of youths in policy development and implementation; and (c) form Latino advisory groups to guide policy-making and implementation in the law enforcement and justice systems.

The *Building Blocks for Youth* report offers several recommendations of particular importance to [your organization name]. [Add one of the following sentences.]

→ *is your organization prevention-focused?* Add this sentence: Because the report documents the cumulative effect of discrimination in the juvenile justice system, it is more imperative than ever that we keep our youth from coming into contact with the system. Our program has been effectively diverting children from delinquency by doing X, Y, and Z.

→ *is your organization educational?* Add this sentence: In the documented absence of bilingual services for Latino and Latina youth, [organization name] serves a vital need by educating Latino and Latina youth and increasing their English language abilities.

→ *is your organization youth-led?* Add this sentence: As a youth-led organization, [organization name] seeks to empower young voices. We strongly agree with the report's recommendation of including youth in policy development and implementation. This is a model that we've adopted and that's worked well for us. We believe it would also be successful to incorporate youth voices into juvenile justice policy.

→ *Tailor a sentence specific to your organization.*

We continue to serve our community at a time of increased demand and need for our services. [Organization name] invites you to visit our program and witness our activities firsthand as we seek to remedy the problems identified by the *Building Blocks for Youth* report. Please contact me at [contact information] for more information.

I look forward to meeting you and acquainting you with our work.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]
Your Organization]

Sample Invitation Letter to Visit Your Program

Dear Community Leader,

As a key leader in our community, we are inviting you to participate in a community dialogue on [insert date, time, and location] about how Latino and Latina youth are treated in the juvenile justice system.

This dialogue is part of a national effort to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system. According to a new report, "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" released by the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative, a national project led by the Youth Law Center to promote a fair and effective youth justice system, Latino and Latina youth are incarcerated at higher rates, receive longer sentences and harsher treatment than white youth even when charged with the same types of offenses. Current data means for collecting and assessing data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting and inaccuracies in reporting disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S justice system. The system fails to provide adequate bilingual services to Latino and Latina youth and fails to ensure cultural competency of staff working with Latino and Latina youth in the system. Consideration of the immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation and permanent separation from families. Anti-gang laws result in harsh and unfair consequences for Latino and Latina youth.

As you may be aware, our program provides critical services and support to Latino and Latina youth in our community and assists them in achieving their goals. To increase our capacity to address the needs of Latino and Latina youth outlined in this report, we would like to invite you to meet and talk with the youth we serve and to dialogue with us on how we can work together to eliminate disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system; to improve services to Latino and Latina youth; and to increase our community's involvement, resources, and assets to support Latino and Latina youth in the juvenile justice system.

In preparation for this event, we've enclosed a copy of the report, "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" and a brochure about our program for your consideration. We will be in touch with you shortly to follow-up on any questions that you may have and to confirm your participation. In the meantime, we can be reached at [insert your phone number].

Thank you for your time and attention. Together, we can end the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth by the justice system in our community.

Sincerely,

Sample Juvenile Facility Visit Community Leader Invite Letter

Dear Community Leader,

As a key leader in our community, you are invited to participate in a community dialogue on [insert date, time, and location] about how Latino and Latina youth are treated in the juvenile justice system.

This dialogue is part of a national effort to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system. According to a new report, "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" released by the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative, a national project led by the Youth Law Center to promote a fair and effective youth justice system, Latino and Latina youth are incarcerated at higher rates, receive longer sentences and harsher treatment than white youth even when charged with the same types of offenses. Current data means for collecting and assessing data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting and inaccuracies in reporting disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S justice system. The system fails to provide adequate bilingual services to Latino and Latina youth and fails to ensure cultural competency of staff working with Latino and Latina youth in the system. Consideration of the immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation and permanent separation from families. Anti-gang laws result in harsh and unfair consequences for Latino and Latina youth.

The community dialogue will begin at [insert time] with opening remarks from [insert staff contact name and title]. At [insert time], we will walk through the facility and talk with facility staff and the youth who reside at the facility. We will wrap up the afternoon's activities at approximately [insert time].

Your participation is essential to this dialogue, especially as we consider how to eliminate disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system; improve services to Latino and Latina youth; and increase our community's involvement, resources, and assets to support Latino and Latina youth in the juvenile justice system.

In preparation for this event, I've enclosed a copy of the report, "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" for your consideration. I will be in touch with you shortly to followup on any questions that you may have and to confirm your participation. In the meantime, I can be reached at [insert your phone number].

Thank you for your time and attention. Together, we can end the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth by the justice system in our community.

Sincerely,

Sample Juvenile Facility Visit Request Letter

Dear Juvenile Facility Director,

We are writing to request your participation in a community dialogue about how Latino and Latina youth are treated in the juvenile justice system.

This dialogue is part of a national effort to eliminate the disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system. According to a new report, "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" released by the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative, a national project led by the Youth Law Center to promote a fair and effective youth justice system, Latino youth are and Latina youth are incarcerated at higher rates, receive longer sentences and harsher treatment than white youth even when charged with the same types of offenses. Current data means for collecting and assessing data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting and inaccuracies in reporting disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S justice system. The system fails to provide adequate bilingual services to Latino and Latina youth and fails to ensure cultural competency of staff working with Latino and Latina youth in the system. Consideration of the immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation and permanent separation from families. Anti-gang laws result in harsh and unfair consequences for Latino and Latina youth.

We would like to bring a small group of 20-30 community leaders to the facility to talk with your staff, and the youth residents at the facility on [insert date] from [insert time]. We are especially interested in talking with you, your staff, and youth residents about how we can increase our community's involvement, resources, and assets to support Latino and Latina youth at your facility. For the visit, we would like to briefly walk through the facility as a young person enters starting at the intake area, screening, medical, and orientation, and then to the living quarters, recreation, school and other program areas, and then to observe any disciplinary areas or isolation rooms. To facilitate our dialogue with your staff and the youth residents, we would suggest sharing a light snack in the dining hall as part of the agenda. We will not ask youth information about their identities or the charges against them.

Your participation is essential to this dialogue, especially as we consider how to eliminate disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the justice system; improve services to Latino and Latina youth; and increase our community's involvement, resources, and assets to support Latino and Latina youth in the juvenile justice system.

Page Two

In preparation for this dialogue, we've enclosed a copy of the executive summary of the report, "¿Dónde Está La Justicia?" We are available at your convenience to talk with you in advance of the visit, and will follow-up with you to confirm our plans. In the meantime, we can be contacted at [insert phone numbers]. We look forward to talking with you.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Facts Sheets

Fact Sheet: Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System

Fact Sheet: Remembering Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System

Fact Sheet: Punitive Policies Hit Youth of Color the Hardest

Fact Sheet: Transfer of Youth to the Adult Criminal Court

Fact Sheet: Juvenile Injustice

Fact Sheet: Reducing Inequality in Juvenile Justice

Fact Sheet: Latino and Latina youth in the justice system

“¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?” a comprehensive new report reveals that Latino and Latina youth are over-represented in the U.S. justice system, *and* receive harsher treatment than White youth *for the same types of offenses*, while the lack of *adequate data nationwide* masks the severity of the problem.

Key Findings:

- Latino and Latina youth are significantly over-represented in the U.S. justice system and receive harsher treatment than White youth, even when charged with the same types of offenses;
- Current means for collecting and accessing data are inadequate, resulting in under-counting and inaccuracies in reporting disproportionate representation and disparate treatment of Latino and Latina youth in the U.S. justice system;
- The system fails to provide adequate bilingual services to Latino and Latina youth;
- The system fails to ensure cultural competency of staff working with Latino and Latina youth;
- Consideration of the immigration status of Latino and Latina youth results in incarceration, deportation, and permanent separation from families;
- Anti-gang laws result in harsh and unfair consequences for Latino and Latina youth.

Major Recommendations:

Public officials, policy makers, and the justice system should:

- Eliminate racial profiling and policies based on racial or ethnic stereotypes;
- Collect data in a way that accurately counts Latino and Latina youth by separating them from White, African-American, and other youth;
- Employ bilingual and culturally competent staff to ensure better services to the Latino community;
- Reduce subjective or biased decision making by creating objective risk assessment instruments.

Latino communities, youth and families should:

- Get organized at a local level to pressure the justice system to be accountable to Latino communities and youth;
- Call for the active inclusion of youth voices in policy development and implementation;
- Form Latino advisory groups to guide policy making and implementation in the law enforcement and justice systems.

For more information and a copy of the executive summary and full report visit: www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

Fact Sheet:

Case Examples of Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System

These case examples illustrated below represent just a fraction of the thousands of Latino and Latina youth impacted by the justice system every day. Each of these cases relates to one of the key findings in the report, "¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?" that reveals that Latino and Latina youth are over-represented in the U.S. justice system, and receive harsher treatment than White youth for the same types of offenses, while the lack of adequate data nationwide masks the severity of the problem. The youth's real names have been changed to protect their confidentiality.

Remember Noemi: Address the Disparity and Over-representation of Latino and Latina Youth in the Justice System:

Seventeen-year-old Noemi, a Latina, is serving time in jail in Los Angeles, California. With her 18-year-old sister and a friend, Noemi robbed a woman. Noemi was armed with a screwdriver. The woman was unhurt and ultimately nothing was stolen. The presiding judge transferred Noemi's case to adult criminal court, despite the facts that transfers in Los Angeles County for this type of crime are relatively rare and that Noemi had no previous juvenile or criminal record.

Like many adult prisons, the jail in which Noemi was held is completely unequipped to deal with adolescents, particularly girls. While the number of boys is large enough to warrant a separate cell block, no such accommodations exist for girls. Therefore, facility administrators placed Noemi in solitary confinement.

Noemi spends 23 hours of every day in solitary confinement, locked in her cell. In other ways, she has been treated inhumanely as well. She was not allowed to shower for long periods of time. She was not provided with basic medication, such as aspirin, nor was she provided with psychological treatment, even though she exhibited signs of severe depression. Her complaints about being touched and harassed by some of the adult inmates went completely unheeded.

Remember Juanita: Collect Accurate Data Using a Uniform Definition of Latino and Latina

Juanita Turner-Garcia is a biracial child who has just been arrested and detained for questioning. Her father is Puerto Rican, and her mother is African American. How should the justice system categorize Juanita's race/ethnicity? The answer to that question depends upon Juanita's state of residence. For example, in Arizona, Juanita would define her own race/ethnicity; In California, she would be assigned to the category of "African American;" In Michigan, she would be classified as "Hispanic" as well as being assigned to a specific racial group; and in Ohio, she would be listed as "biracial."

Remember Alfredo: Transfer to Appropriate INS Detention Policies

The U.S. government locked 16-year-old Alfredo Lopez Sanchez alone in a hotel room for five weeks with nothing to read, no one to talk to, and no change of clothes while the INS worked to deport him. "Each day the maid comes in and changes the sheets. The bed gets clean clothes, but I don't," Alfredo told his lawyer.

Alfredo has been held by the INS in at least four locations, including a Florida county jail, a juvenile detention center in Pennsylvania, and the hotel room. He has been moved 8 times without prior notification of his lawyer, despite the fact that the boy suffers from posttraumatic stress disorder. Alfredo ran away from home after seeing his alcoholic father beat his mother so severely that she fell on top of her youngest baby, who died.

Alfredo, a Mayan boy from Guatemala, speaks a rare dialect called Southern Low Mam; he understands little Spanish and almost no English. A woman who speaks his language is ready to offer him a home in Miami, but the INS refuses to release Alfredo, saying he is a flight risk. A U.S. District Court Judge in Miami disagreed with the INS determination, but noted that the Court cannot "dictate to the INS where to place a juvenile alien." Alfredo was dragged away in shackles, weeping. He was transferred to Berks County Youth Center in Leesport, Pennsylvania - 1,200 miles from his lawyer, who was informed after the fact.

Remember Ramon: Ignore Immigration Status of Latino and Latina Youth in Detention Decisions

Ramon is a 15-year-old boy from Honduras. Ramon became a "street child" in his native country after his alcoholic and abusive father died. Like the other estimated 35,000 street children in Central America, Ramon was homeless and his life frequently was threatened by police and government officials, whose routine torture and murder of street children has been internationally documented. Ramon walked 2,500 miles to the United States in order to preserve his life.

When he arrived in the U.S., Ramon found a job selling corn out of the back of a pickup truck. During a delivery, he was stopped on the freeway for allegedly speeding. The police officer proceeded to notify INS about Ramon, who has been locked up for several months because he is considered a "flight risk." Ramon has yet to be charged with any crime—the speeding ticket and the civil offense of entering the country without documentation are his only violations of the law. Ramon has no access to a lawyer, and he has not been offered political asylum, though many other Honduran street children have been offered asylum based on their "well-founded fear of persecution" should they be returned to their native country.

Ramon has been given no timeline as to when he might be deported, so he could remain in detention indefinitely.

Remember Juanito: Offer Bilingual Services to Latino and Latina Youth in the System:

Juanito was committed to a secure institution for 12-18 months for assault and battery. At his hearing, he had to convey this information to his mother because she understood very little English.

At the institution, when Juanito tried to speak with his mother by telephone, staff did not let him speak in Spanish, often cutting him off while still on the phone. Juanito also was not allowed to speak in Spanish with other Mexican youth at the facility.

A youth advocate learned that the institutional policy prohibited youth from communicating with their friends and family only in cases involving a security breach, which did not apply in Juanito's case. The advocate counseled Juanito to file a grievance about the policy, and conducted his own investigation, which took nearly six months to complete. The advocate's report concluded that Juanito should be allowed to speak in Spanish at the institution and to his mother and other family members. Nevertheless, the institution did not change its procedures.

Remember Luis: Nurture Effective Cultural Competency Policies Among Staff Working with Latino and Latina Youth

Luis, a 15-year-old Latino, was arrested for possessing less than $\frac{1}{2}$ ounce of marijuana. He had no previous record of misdemeanors or felonies. He did, however, have a record of truancies and was stopped several times by police while hanging out with his friends.

During Luis' disposition hearing, the judge ordered him and his caseworker into chambers. As the judge talked to Luis, he noticed that the youth was not looking directly at him. The judge ordered the youth to look at him, which Luis did. But, as time progressed, Luis looked down again. The loss of eye contact infuriated the judge, whose words and tone of voice became harsher. The caseworker attempted to explain that Luis' downcast eyes were a sign of respect in his culture—youth who are being reprimanded in Luis' culture bow their heads in respect to show their embarrassment at their actions. He explained that "staring down" authority figures is considered to be highly disrespectful. The judge, however, took Luis' downcast eyes as an admission of guilt, because he believed that individuals who fail to maintain eye contact nonverbally convey their guilt. The judge felt that Luis' unwillingness to maintain eye contact signified not only guilt, but also disrespect for authority.

The judge sentenced Luis to two years in a juvenile facility.

Fact Sheet:

Punitive Policies Hit Youth of Color Hardest

In virtually every state, the great weight of punitive justice policies falls disproportionately on youth of color, who are overrepresented and receive disparate treatment at every stage of the juvenile justice system, particularly in secure confinement.

These discrepancies are not the result of young people of different racial groups committing different types of crimes. A nationwide study found that African-American and Latino youths are treated more severely than white teenagers charged with comparable crime at every step of the juvenile justice system. For example, in "And Justice For Some" by the Building Blocks for Youth initiative, the study showed that for youths charged with violent offenses, the average length of incarceration is 193 days for whites, 254 for African-Americans, and 305 for Latino youth.

The disparities are even more apparent among various states across the country, especially when particular states are isolated and highlighted. For example, in Arizona in 1997, 244 white youth were in custody in Maricopa and Pima counties. At the same time, 975 African-American youths, 515 Latino youths, 215 Native American youths and 74 Asian youths were incarcerated. In Colorado, the 1997 custody rate for African-American youths was five times the rate for white youths. For Latino youths, the custody rate was more than 2.5 times the rate for whites; for Native Americans, twice the rate.

Sources:

- Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Uniform Crime Reports for the United States 1999*.
- Males, M., and Macallair, D. 2000. *Color of Justice: An analysis of Juvenile Adult Court Transfers in California*. Published by Building Blocks for Youth.
- Porter, G. 2000. *Detention in Delinquency Cases, 1988-1997*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Sickmund, M. 2000. *Offenders in Juvenile Court, 1997*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Snyder, H. 2000. *Juvenile Arrests 1999*. Washington, DC: Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.
- Poe-Yamagata, E., and Jones, M. 2000. *And Justice for Some*. Oakland, CA: National Council on Crime and Delinquency.

Fact Sheet: Transfer of Youth to the Adult Criminal Justice System

What is "transfer?"

Over the last ten years, nearly every state has changed its laws to make it easier to prosecute youth as adults. Traditionally, since a separate court for young people was created in Chicago in 1899, young people who broke the law were brought before the juvenile court. In rare cases, judges decided which youth were so violent or such chronic offenders that they were "not amenable to treatment" in the juvenile court. In such cases the jurisdiction of the juvenile court was "waived" and the youth were sent or "transferred" to the adult criminal court. In addition to this "judicial waiver" mechanism, some states had legislation that automatically excluded youth charged with the most serious offenses, notably murder, from juvenile court jurisdiction. Recently, however, states throughout the country have passed a variety of "transfer" measures to send more youth to the adult criminal court.

The principal ways in which youth are prosecuted in the adult criminal court:

- ◆ Judicial Waiver: State law that allows the juvenile court judge the discretion to have the youth's case tried in the adult criminal court.
- ◆ Direct File or "Prosecutorial Discretion": State law that allows the prosecutor the discretion to have the youth's case tried in the adult criminal court.
- ◆ Statutory Exclusion: State law that automatically requires a youth's case - usually based on the age of the youth or the alleged crime or both - to be tried in the adult criminal court.

How does "transfer" impact youth?

Significantly more youth are tried as adults in the adult criminal court today as a result of either Direct File/Prosecutorial Discretion or Statutory Exclusion. Youth tried in the adult criminal court face the same penalties as adults, including the death penalty or life without parole; will receive little or no education, mental health treatment, or rehabilitative programming; will obtain an adult criminal record which may significantly limit their future education and employment opportunities; and are at greater risk of rape, assault and death in adult jails and prisons with adult inmates. The negative impact of these expanded state transfer law changes has most seriously affected African American, Latino and Native American youth.

Recent Studies

In the *Building Blocks for Youth* report, *Youth Crime/Adult Time: Is Justice Served?* key findings reveal disturbing aspects in the transfer of youth, especially youth of color, to the adult criminal court. The findings show over-representation and disparate treatment of youth of color, and raise serious questions about the fairness and appropriateness of prosecuting youth in the adult criminal system. For example, the report's major findings show that:

- Most determinations to prosecute juveniles as adults were not made by judges (15%), but instead by prosecutors or legislatures (85%).
- Overall, 82% of youth charged in adult courts were youth of color.
- Youth of color were disproportionately charged in adult court.
- Nearly two-thirds of all youth who were detained pretrial were held in adult jails where previous research shows that youth are at serious risk of rape, assault, death, and suicide.
- African-American (43%) and Latino (37%) youth were more likely than White youth (26%) to receive a sentence of incarceration (as opposed to a split sentence or probation).

For more information, visit the *Building Blocks for Youth* website at:
www.buildingblocksforyouth.org or call 202/637-0377

Juvenile Injustice

- ◆ If you are a young person, a youth organizer, or concerned with the problems faced by people of color in this nation, you should care about juvenile justice.
- ◆ Have you ever been wrongfully accused of a crime just for being a person of color? Have you ever been followed in a store or pulled over by the police just because of the color of your skin?
- ◆ You should know the issues and how some laws unfairly impact youth of color. You never know when you or someone you know may have to deal with the system.

[The] disparate treatment that minority youth are receiving throughout the juvenile justice system leaves no doubt that we are faced with a very serious national civil rights issue, virtually making our system juvenile injustice.

-Hugh Price, National Urban League

Why should you care about juvenile justice?

Disproportionate Minority Confinement (DMC):

- Latino and Latina youth and African American youth are more likely than white youth to be sent to a secure public facility for drug offenses. They are also more likely to stay for longer periods of time, from 90 up to 160 days more than white youth.

Misrepresentation in the Media:

- The media associates violence with youth of color more often than with white youth. A study of Time and Newsweek stories found that the term "young black males" became synonymous with the word "criminal" in coverage. Studies found that crimes by adults against youth are underreported, and the public thinks youth commit more crime than they actually do.

Girls in the system:

- Overall delinquency cases involving girls increased by 83% between 1988 and 1997, with an increase in all racial groups: white, 74%; black, 106%, and other races, 102%.

Trying Kids as Adults and Children in Adult Jails:

- Youth tried in the adult criminal court face the same penalties as adults, including the death penalty or life without parole; will receive little or no education, mental health treatment or rehabilitative programming, will obtain an adult criminal record which may significantly limit their future education and employment opportunities and are at greater risk of rape, assault and death in adult jails and prisons with adult inmates.

Conditions in facilities:

- More than 75% of youth incarcerated nationwide are housed in detention and corrections facilities that violate standards relating to living space.

Mental Health Services:

- There are few programs specifically targeting the needs of youth in the juvenile justice system with cultural, racial, gender, sexual orientation or developmental issues. Youth of color are frequently misdiagnosed or not diagnosed at all.

Zero Tolerance

- New school policies targeted towards suspending and expelling kids from the system for minor circumstances have a negative affect on minority youth. More often than not, the students of color are kicked out of school, making it more likely for them to end up in trouble and in the juvenile justice system.

Educate and Motivate! Now is the Time!

For more information: www.buildingblocksforyouth.org

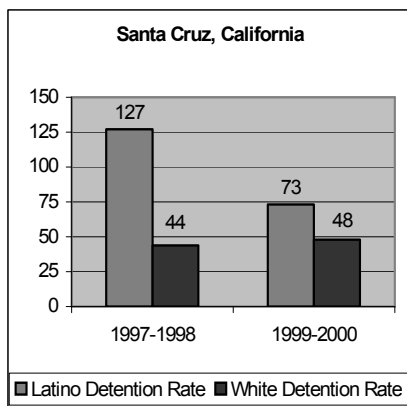
Reducing Inequality in Juvenile Justice

Latino and Latina youth are significantly over-represented in the U.S. justice system and receive harsher treatment than White youth, even when charged with the same types of offenses. In every offense category, the average length of stay in detention is longer for Latino youth than for any other racial or ethnic group. (*¿Dónde Está la Justicia?*. Prepared for the *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative by Francisco Villaruel and Nancy Walker, July 2000.) Racial and ethnic disparities increase at every stage of the juvenile justice process. Detention is the door into the juvenile justice system, so if disparities in detention could be reduced, subsequent disparities should also decline. Eliminating disparities makes our juvenile justice system more fair and effective.

We can reduce Latinos' disparity in juvenile justice. How to do it:

1. **BUILD A COALITION.** Effective coalitions include community-based organizations, as well as local government officials and the leaders of agencies like the probation office. Most importantly, in other communities, only those coalitions that included the police were successful, because working with the police to get information and change systems is a fundamental part of reform.
2. **SET GOALS.** Success is more likely to be achieved when goals seek both to reduce the overall use of detention and to reduce racial disparities. Do not make goals too broad - define the problems in terms that can be changed. Results should emphasize action, not only discussion or training.
3. **GET RESEARCH.** Record where and how decisions are made in the juvenile justice system. If data is not available by race and ethnicity, create a research agenda. Research-collection can also highlight problems like barriers to family involvement or bias in probation criteria.
4. **REALIZE THAT YOUR GOALS ARE ACHIEVABLE.** You *can* reduce disparities - it's been done by communities across the country. By using a model that's been successful in other towns and cities, you can create a more just system in your community.

Reducing disparity has worked in other communities...



· **COOK COUNTY, ILLINOIS:** The number of minority youth in detention dropped 31% between 1996 and 2000.

· **SANTA CRUZ, CALIFORNIA:** Between 1997 and 1999, Latino youth in juvenile detention declined by 22%.

· **MULTNOMAH COUNTY, OREGON:** In 2000, only 12% of African-Americans, and 11% of Latinos with court referrals were detained, and the average daily population in secure custody dropped from 92 in 1993 to 33 in 2000.

(Data from "Pathways to Juvenile Detention Reform: Reducing Racial Disparities in Juvenile Detention" -- A project of the Annie E. Casey Foundation.)

Resource Listing

How to find juvenile justice contacts in your state:

Resources: Youth Justice Campaigns

Resources: National, State and Local Latino Serving Organizations

Resources: State and Local Juvenile Justice Reform Collaborations, Coalitions, Networks and Juvenile Justice Reform Campaigns and National Resources

Resources for Parents with Children in the Juvenile Justice System

Information on Youth Justice Campaigns

CALIFORNIA

Bay Area

Books Not Bars Campaign
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
1230 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
Phone: 415/951-4844
Website: <http://www.ellabakercenter.org/bnb.html>

Los Angeles

Youth Justice Partnership
8419 South Vermont
Los Angeles, CA 90044
Phone: 323/240-1449
Email: caspr99@hotmail.com

ILLINOIS

Youth First! Campaign and the Community Justice Initiative
South West Youth Collaborative
6400 S. Kedzie Ave
Chicago, IL 60629
Phone: 773/476-3534
www.cjiyouthfirst.org/

NEW YORK CITY

No More Youth Jails Campaign
c/o Prison Moratorium Project
388 Atlantic Ave
3rd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
Phone: 718/260-8805
www.nomoreyouthjails.org

For information on youth organizing, contact Melissa Mitchell, Youth Outreach Coordinator, *Building Blocks for Youth* initiative, by phone at 202/637-0377 ext. 117 or by email at: Melissa.bby@erols.com

Resource List: National Latino Serving Organizations

ASPIRA Association, Inc.
1444 Eye Street, NW
Suite 800
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: (202) 835-3600
Fax: (202) 835-3613
info@aspira.org
www.aspira.org

**Chicano / Latino Youth
Leadership Project P.O.**
Box 161566
Sacramento, CA 95816
Phone: (916) 446-1640
www.clylp.com

Hispanic Federation
130 William Street,
9th Floor
New York, New York
10038
Phone: (212) 233-8955
Fax: (212) 233-8996
www.hispanicfederation.org

**Hispanic National Bar
Association (HNBA)**
820 Greensboro Drive
Suite 300
MacLean, VA 22102
Phone: (703) 610-9038
Fax: (703) 610-9005
www.hnba.com

JobLatino
3218 March Lane
Garland, TX 75042
info@joblatino.com
www.joblatino.com

**Latino Issues Forum: A
Public Policy and
Advocacy Institute**
785 Market Street, Third
Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: (415) 284-7220
Fax: (415) 284-7222
www.lif.org

**Latino Social Workers
Organization (LSWO)**
lswo@aol.com
www.lsw.org

**League of United Latin
American Citizens
(LULAC)**
2000 L Street, NW
Suite 610
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 833-6130
www.lulac.org

**Mexican American Legal
Defense and Educational
Fund (MALDEF)**
1717 K Street, NW
Suite 311
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 293-2828
Fax: (202) 293-2849
www.maldef.org

**National Alliance for
Hispanic Health**
1501 16th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 387-5000
Fax: (202) 797-4353
www.hispanichealth.org

**National Association for
the Advancement of
Hispanic People (NAAHP)**
info@naahpmember.org
www.naahpmember.org

**National Community for
Latino Leadership, Inc.
(NCLL)**
1701 K Street
Suite 301
Washington, DC 20009
Phone: (202) 721-8296
ncll@latinoleadership.org
www.latinoleadership.org

**National Council of La
Raza (NCLR)**
1111 19th Street, NW
Suite 1000
Washington, DC 20036
Phone: (202) 785-1670
www.nclr.org

**National Hispanic
Institute**
P.O. Box 220
Maxwell, TX 78656
Phone: (512) 357-6137
Fax: (512) 357-2206
nhi@nhi-net.org
www.nhi-net.org

**National Latino Children's
Institute**
320 El Paso Street
San Antonio, TX 78207
Phone: (210) 228-9997
Fax: (210) 228-9972
nlci@nlci.org
www.nlci.org

**Prison Moratorium Project
(PMP)**
180 Varick Street
12th Floor
New York, NY 10014
Phone: (646) 486-6715
Fax: (212) 727-8616
pmp@nomoreprisons.org
www.nomoreprisons.org

Puerto Rican Legal Defense and Educational Fund (PRLDEF)

99 Hudson Street

14th Floor

New York, NY 10013

Phone: (800) 328-2322

Fax: (212) 431-4276

www.charities.org/prldef

Resource List: State and Local Juvenile Justice Reform Collaborations, Coalitions, Networks and Juvenile Justice Reform Campaigns

Arizona

Children's Action Alliance
4001 North 3rd Street, Suite 160
Phoenix, AZ 85012
Phone: 602/266-0707
Fax: 602/263-8792
www.azchildren.org/caa/welcome.asp

California

Books Not Bars Campaign
Ella Baker Center for Human Rights
1230 Market Street
San Francisco, CA 94102
Phone: 415/951-4844
Fax: 415/951-4813
www.ellabakercenter.org/bnb.html

Let's Get Free
1357 5th Street
Oakland, CA 94607
Phone: 510/451-5466 x311
Fax: 510/451-5866

San Francisco Coalition for Juvenile Justice Reform
Youth Making a Change (Y-MAC)
Coleman Advocates for Children & Youth
459 Vienna St.
San Francisco, CA 94112
Phone: 415/239-0161
www.colemanadvocates.org

Center for Community Learning & Development
4715 Viewridge Avenue, Suite 170
San Diego, CA 92123
Phone: 858/277-7155
Fax: 858/277-7194

Youth Law Center
417 Montgomery Street
Suite 900
San Francisco, CA 94104
Phone: 415/543-3379
Fax: 415/ 956-9022
www.youthlawcenter.com

Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice
1622 Folsom Street-2nd Floor
San Francisco, CA 94103
Phone: 415/621-5661
Fax: 415/621-5466
www.cjcj.org/

Youth Justice Partnership
8419 South Vermont
Los Angeles, CA 90044
Phone: 323/240-1449
Email: caspr99@hotmail.com

Connecticut

Connecticut Juvenile Justice Alliance
2470 Fairfield Ave
Bridgeport, CT 06605
Phone: 203/ 579-2727
Fax: 203/333-9118

Delaware

Delaware Collaboration for Youth
Co-Conveners:

Delaware Center for Justice
100 West 10th Street, Suite 905
Wilmington, DE 19801
Phone: 302/658-7174
Fax: 302/658-7170

Child, Inc.
507 Philadelphia Pike
Wilmington, DE 19809
Phone: 302/762-8989
Fax: 302/762-8983

District of Columbia

Justice For DC Youth! Coalition
c/o Youth Law Center
1010 Vermont Ave., NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/637-0377 ext. 112
Fax: 202/379-1600
nomoreoakhills.org

Florida

Children's Campaign, Inc.
P.O. Box 1718
Tallahassee FL, 32302
Phone: 850/425-2600
Fax: 850/425-2620
www.IamforKids.org

Center for Florida's Children
The Center for Florida's Children
P.O. Box 6646
Tallahassee, Florida 32314
Phone: 850/ 222-7140
Fax: 850/ 224-6490
www.floridakids.com/

Juvenile Welfare Board of Pinellas County
6698 68th Avenue N. Suite A
Pinellas Park, FL 33781-5060
Phone: 727/547-5633
Fax: 727/547-5610
www.jwbpinellas.org/

Georgia

Southern Center for Human Rights
83 Poplar Street, NW
Atlanta, GA 30303
Phone: 404/688-1202
Fax: 404/688-9440
www.schr.org

Illinois

Illinois Juvenile Justice Initiative
P.O. Box 1833
Evanston, IL 60204
Phone: 847/864-1567
Fax: 847/570-0749
www.jjustice.org/
Campaign website:
www.jjustice.org/Campaign/

Children and Family Justice
Center:
Northwestern Univ. School of Law
357 E. Chicago Ave.
Chicago, IL 60611-3069
Phone: 312/503-6608
Fax: 312/503-8977
www.law.northwestern.edu/depts/clinic/cfjc/index.htm

Youth First! Campaign and the
Community Justice Initiative:
South West Youth
Collaborative
6400 S. Kedzie Ave
Chicago, IL 60629
Phone: 773/476-3534
www.cjyouthfirst.org/

Indiana

Indiana Juvenile Justice Task
Force, Inc.
1800 N. Meridian St. Suite 402
Indianapolis, IN 46202
Phone: 317/926-6100
Fax: 317/926-6165

Kentucky

Children's Law Center, Inc.
104 East 7th Street
Covington, KY 41011
Phone: 859/431-3313
Fax: 859/655-7553

Louisiana

Juvenile Justice Project of
Louisiana
1600 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.
New Orleans, LA 70113
Phone: 504/522-5437
Fax: 504/522-5430

Friends and Families of Louisiana's
Incarcerated Youth
c/o Juvenile Justice Project of
Louisiana
1600 Oretha Castle Haley Blvd.
New Orleans, LA 70113
Phone: 504/522-5437
Fax: 504/522-5430

Maine

Maine Juvenile Justice Coalition:

Chris Northrop
Moulton, Forte & Northrop
PO Box 1830
Wells, ME 04090
Phone: 207/646-1440
Email: olo@ghi.net

Edwin (Ned) Chester
Chester & Vestal
107 Congress Street
Portland, ME 04101
Phone: 207/772-7426
Email: nchester@maine.rr.com

Maryland

Maryland Juvenile Justice
Coalition
Advocates for Children and Youth
8 Market Place, Fifth Floor
Baltimore, MD 21202
Phone: 410/547-9200x3012
Fax: 410/547-8690
Website:
www.acy.org/cgi/load_policy.pl?policy_number=5

Massachusetts

Citizens for Juvenile Justice (MA)
101 Tremont Street, Suite 705,
Boston, MA 02108
Phone: 617/338-1050
Fax: 617/338-6617
Website: www.cfjj.org

Juvenile Justice Center
Suffolk University Law School
350 Broadway
Chelsea, MA 02150
Phone: 617/305-3200
Fax: 617/451-2641
www.law.suffolk.edu/academic/jjc/index.html

Michigan

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice
Reform:

Michigan Council on Crime &
Delinquency
1115 Pennsylvania Avenue
Suite 201
Lansing, MI 48912
Phone: 517/482-4161
Fax: 517/482-0020

Missouri

Missouri Juvenile Justice
Association
P.O. Box 1332
Jefferson City, MO 65102
Phone: 573/636-6101
Fax: 573/635-5159

Nebraska

Voices for Children in Nebraska
7521 Main Street, Suite 103
Omaha, NE 68127
Phone: 402/597-3100
Fax: 402/597-2705

New York

No More Youth Jails Campaign
c/o Prison Moratorium Project
388 Atlantic Ave
3rd Floor
Brooklyn, NY 11217
Phone: 718/260-8805
www.nomoreyouthjails.org

Juvenile Justice Project
Correctional Association of
New York
135 East 15th Street
New York, NY 10003-3596
Phone: 212/254-5700
Fax: 212/473-2807
www.correctionalassociation.org
Campaign website:
www.nomoreyouthjails.org

The Valley
1047 Amsterdam Avenue
New York, NY 10025
Phone: 212/222-2110
Fax: 212/222-4671
www.valleyNYC.org

Ohio

Ohio Juvenile Justice Coalition
2031 Concord Road
Columbus, OH 43212
Phone: 614/488-6284
Fax: 614/487-1963
www.juvenilecoalition.org/

Juvenile Advocacy Network
11470 Euclid Avenue, Mailbox 259
Cleveland, OH 44106
Phone: 216/229-4642
Fax: 216/229-4642

Oregon

Juvenile Rights Project
123 NE 3rd, #310
Portland, OR 97232
Phone: 503/232-2540 ext. 269

Pennsylvania

Pennsylvania Collaboration for
Youth:

Juvenile Law Center
The Philadelphia Building
1315 Walnut Street, 4th Floor
Philadelphia, PA 19107
Phone: 215/625-0551
Fax: 215/625-2808
www.jlc.org

Center for the Study of Youth
Policy
University of Pennsylvania
4200 Pine St.
Philadelphia, PA 19104
Phone: 215/898-5177
Fax: 215/573-2791

Alternative Rehabilitation
Communities
2743 N. Front Street, P.O. Box
2131
Harrisburg, PA 17105-2131
Phone: 717/235-7101
Fax: 717/238-6392

South Dakota

Parents Who Care Coalition
P.O. Box 455
Whitewood, South Dakota 57793

Texas

Youth Advocate Programs, Inc.
1705 Martin Luther King Blvd
Suite D
Dallas, TX 75215
Phone: 214/426-1557
Fax: 214/428-4360

Southwest Key Program
3000 South IH-35 Suite 410
Austin, TX 78704
Phone: 512/462-2181
Fax: 512/462-2028
www.swkey.org

Virginia

Virginia Juvenile Justice Coalition:

Andy Block
Director
Just Children Project
617 West Main Street, 3rd Floor
Charlottesville, VA 22903
Phone: 434/977-0553
Fax: 434/977-0558
Email: andy@justice4all.org

Adrienne Volenik
Mental Disabilities Law Clinic
T.C. Williams School of Law
University of Richmond
Richmond, VA 23173
Phone: 804/289-8921
Fax: 804/287-6489
Email:
volenik@uoflaw.richmond.edu

Wisconsin

Wisconsin Council on Children and
Families
16 N. Carroll St. Suite 600
Madison, WI 53703
Phone: 608/284-0580
Fax: 608/284-0583
www.wccf.org/budget.html

RESOURCES FOR PARENTS WITH CHILDREN IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM

Having a child in the juvenile justice system can be a frightening and difficult experience. A number of resources exist to guide parents through the system. Some guides just define terms and outline the process. Others suggest ways that parents can help their children. National guides exist for children with disabilities or mental health problems.

If a guide is not listed for your state, or your state's guide is too broad, we recommend that you take a look at some of the others that are available.

Arizona

Publication: Making a Positive Difference in the Lives of Families

Author: Maricopa County Juvenile Court Center

Contact: (602) 506-2638

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: Yes

Florida

Publication: Juvenile Information

Author: Miami Public Defender's Office

Contact: (305) 545-1600

Website: <http://www.pdmiami.com/juvenile.htm>

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: No

California

Publication: Juvenile Court Information for Parents

Author: Center for Families, Children & the Courts

Contact: (415) 865-7739

Website: <http://www.courtinfo.ca.gov/forms/documents/jv060.pdf>

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: No

Publication: Your Child and the Juvenile Justice System: How to Advocate for Your Child at Every Stage of the Juvenile Justice System

Author: Books Not Bars

Contact: (415) 951-4844

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: In Progress

Publication: Know Justice Handbook

Author: Center for Young Women's Development

Contact: (415) 543-0260

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: No

Louisiana

Publication: Making Your Voice Heard

Author: Juvenile Justice Project of Louisiana

Contact: (504) 522-5437

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: No

Publication: Color Me Able to Speak

Author: Protection & Advocacy Center

Contact: (504) 522-2337

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: No

Maryland

Publication: All About Your Rights

Author: Baltimore City Public Defender

Contact: (410) 333-4900

Cost: Free

Translated in Spanish: No

Massachusetts

Publication: From A Parent's Perspective
Author: Citizens for Juvenile Justice
Contact: (617) 338-1050
Website: <http://www.cfjj.org/toppage3.htm>
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

Michigan

Publication: Guide to the Juvenile Justice System for Parents of Children with Mental Health Needs
Author: Association for Children's Mental Health
Contact: (800) 782-0883
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

New York

Publication: Your Guide to the Court System
Author: Youth Force
Contact: (718) 665-4268
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

Pennsylvania

Publication: FAQs about Children's Rights
Author: Juvenile Law Center
Contact: (215) 625-0551
Website: <http://www.jlc.org/home/info/FAQ/FAQ.PAJJ.html>
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

South Dakota

Publication: The South Dakota Juvenile Justice System
Author: South Dakota Coalition for Children
Contact: (605) 367-9667
Website: <http://www.sdcchildren.org/JJGuidBk.pdf>
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

Virginia

Publication: JustChildren's Parents Manual
Author: JustChildren Project
Contact: (800) 578-8111
Website: <http://www.abanet.org/crimjust/juvjus/manual.html>
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: In Progress

Wisconsin

Publication: Juvenile Justice System
Author: NAMI Wisconsin
Contact: (800) 236-2988
Website: <http://www.namiwisconsin.org/library/children/juvenilejustice.cfm>
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

National

Publication: When Your Child Is Behind Bars
Author: National Mental Health Association
Contact: (800) 969-6642
Website: <http://www.nmha.org/children/justjuv/bars/pdf>
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

Publication: What Parents Need to Know About Children with Disabilities & the Delinquency System
Author: National Center on Education, Disability & Juvenile Justice
Contact: (301) 405-6462
Website: <http://www.edjj.org/parent.html>
Cost: Free
Translated in Spanish: No

Building Blocks for Youth

For a fair and effective youth justice system

The *Building Blocks for Youth initiative* is an alliance of children's advocates, researchers, law enforcement professionals and community organizers working to reduce the overrepresentation and disparate treatment of youth of color in the justice system and promote fair, rational and effective juvenile justice policies. The *Building Blocks for Youth initiative* published *¿DÓNDE ESTÁ LA JUSTICIA?* in July, 2002. This report was prepared by Francisco A. Villarruel and Nancy E. Walker with Pamela Miniffee, Omara Rivera-Vázquez, Susan Peterson, and Kristen Perry of the Institute for Children, Youth, and Families at Michigan State University. The partners in the initiative are the Youth Law Center, American Bar Association Juvenile Justice Center/National Juvenile Defender Center, Juvenile Law Center, Justice Policy Institute, Minorities in Law Enforcement, and Pretrial Services Resource Center.

The *Building Blocks for Youth initiative* has developed a national campaign that includes 5 major components: Research, Analysis, Advocacy, Outreach, and Media Advocacy. The *Building Blocks for Youth initiative* provides juvenile justice advocacy, assistance, and materials to constituency groups promoting juvenile justice reform, with a particular emphasis on addressing racial disparities in the justice system. The initiative provides materials such as talking points on current juvenile justice issues for use with the media, a media advocacy tool kit on juvenile justice, and hosts conference call briefings on juvenile justice issues. If you represent a national, state or local organization involved in promoting juvenile justice reform and are interested in participating in the *Building Blocks for Youth Network*, fill out the participation form on the initiative's website at: www.buildingblocksforyouth.org.

The *Building Blocks for Youth initiative* is supported by grants from the Annie E. Casey, Ford, John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur, William T. Grant, Charles Stewart Mott, and Rockefeller Foundations, the Criminal Justice Initiative of the Open Society Institute, and the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention of the U.S. Department of Justice. Points of view or opinions in this brochure are those of the authors and do not represent the official position or policies of the U.S. Department of Justice or of the supporting foundations.

Building Blocks for Youth initiative
Youth Law Center
1010 Vermont Avenue, NW, Suite 310
Washington, DC 20005
Phone: 202/637-0377
Email: info.bby@erols.com
Website: www.buildingblocksforyouth.org