



Cradle to Prison Pipeline[®] Campaign

The Children's Defense Fund Cradle to Prison Pipeline[®] Campaign is a national call to action to stop the funneling of tens of thousands of youth, predominantly children of color, down life paths that often lead to arrest, conviction, incarceration and, in some cases, death. The Pipeline lies at the intersection of race and poverty. The chances children of color will go to prison in their lifetime are unacceptably high. The Pipeline is not inevitable; it is a series of human choices at each stage of our children's development. We created it and we have the power, knowledge and will to dismantle it. The need is urgent.

Key Facts

- **Pervasive Poverty** — In 2015, 14.5 million children in America – one in five – were living in poverty. Poverty is the largest driving force behind the Pipeline crisis, exacerbated by racism. Children of color comprise nearly 70 percent of poor children in America. One in six Black children and one in nine Hispanic children were living in extreme poverty compared to one in 17 White children.
- **Inadequate Access to Health Coverage** — Children of color are more likely to be uninsured than White children. Although the percent of children who lack health coverage is at an historic low, almost 3.9 million children under age 18 lack health coverage — one in 19. Over half of them, just more than 6 in 10, are eligible for health coverage under Medicaid or the Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP), but not enrolled.
- **Gaps in Early Childhood Development** — The earliest years of a child's life are a time of great opportunity and risk as children's brains are developing more rapidly than at any other point in their lives. Children are developing the social/emotional, cognitive and behavioral foundation for a lifetime of learning. The lack of quality early childhood services and unequal access to them prevents many children from reaching their full potential. Studies show low-income children and Black children in particular are less likely to have access to quality early childhood opportunities and more likely to experience toxic stress that can damage their brain development and put them behind before they even reach kindergarten. Research shows children who experience high-quality early childhood opportunities have lower rates of arrests as juveniles, are more likely to graduate from high school, and are less likely to drop out, fail a grade or be placed in special education classes.
- **Disparate Educational Opportunities** — In the U.S. more than 60 percent of all fourth and eighth grade public school students could not read or do math at grade level in 2015. For lower income students, more than 75 percent of fourth and eighth grade public school

students could not read or do math at grade level, compared to 53 percent or fewer of higher income students. And almost 75 percent of fourth and eighth grade Black and Hispanic public school students could not read or do math at grade level. Black students are more likely than other students to be in special education programs for children with mental retardation or emotional disturbance. The public school suspension rate among Black students is more than three times that of White students. Eighty-seven percent of White students graduate from high school in four years compared to only 75 percent of Black students, 78 percent of Hispanic students and 72 percent of American Indian students. When Black children graduate from high school, they have a greater chance of being unemployed and a lower chance of going to college full-time than White high school graduates.

- **Intolerable Abuse and Neglect** — A child is abused or neglected every 47 seconds. Nearly four in ten maltreated children do not receive any help. Twenty-four percent of children in foster care are Black, nearly double the 14 percent of all children who are Black.
- **Unmet Mental and Emotional Problems** — Approximately one in five children has had a mental health disorder at some point in their life, but less than 20 percent of children with a diagnosable mental health disorder receive the proper mental health care they need. Children with untreated emotional disorders are more likely to have problems in school, experience chronic absenteeism, receive poor grades, drop out of school and be suspended or expelled. Children of color often are the least likely to receive treatment, and often find themselves funneled into the juvenile justice system as a result. Mental health problems affect approximately 70 percent of youth in the juvenile detention system.
- **Rampant Substance Abuse** — Drugs, tobacco and alcohol lead our children down the wrong path. Disconnected youth, those lacking a decent education or high school degree, job training skills, and social support systems, often make bad choices and resort to self-destructive behaviors. Alcohol and other substance abuse treatments are lacking.
- **Overburdened, Ineffective Juvenile Justice and Criminal Justice Systems** — School discipline policies, including zero tolerance, are transforming schools into a major point of entry into the juvenile justice system. Authorities often arrest children on school grounds for subjective offenses and explainable behavior. In 2012, Black youths were more than twice as likely as White youths to be arrested, even though they represented a lower portion of the 1.3 million total arrests. Once arrested, children of color and those with special needs are more likely to be formally processed and locked in detention instead of connected to community-based programs. In 2013, children of color made up 68 percent of those in residential detention. The ratio of the residential placement rate for girls of color to that for White girls was 2 to 1 nationally. Although the total number of incarcerated youths has decreased, racial and ethnic disparities persist along with ineffective services and risk of abuse. These are compounded for children at the deepest end of the Pipeline in the criminal justice system (i.e., adult jails and prisons).

It's time to end the Cradle to Prison Pipeline[®] crisis and replace it with a pipeline to college and/or career and community. We must speak out against policies that contribute to criminalizing children and work for policies at the federal, state and local levels that help children thrive and keep them on track to a productive, healthy, and joyful adulthood.

We must:

- **End child poverty**
- **Ensure children access to affordable, comprehensive health and mental health coverage and services**
- **Provide high quality early childhood development and learning programs for all children**
- **Ensure every child can read at grade level by fourth grade and guarantee quality education through high school graduation**
- **Protect children from abuse and neglect and connect them to caring permanent families**
- **Stop the criminalization of children at increasingly younger ages and invest in prevention and early intervention**

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