



Community Partners in Action

Testimony to the Judiciary Committee on 3/20/2006 In Support of Bill Number 5700: An Act Concerning the Reduction of Disproportionate Minority Representation in the Juvenile Justice System

By Maureen Price-Boreland

Good afternoon. My name is Maureen Price-Boreland, Executive Director of Community Partners in Action. I also serve on the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System. I submit this written testimony in support of Bill 5700.

According to the Commission on Racial and Ethnic Disparity in the Criminal Justice System's annual report (2001-2002), "Minority Youth are over represented in every stage of the juvenile justice system.... Delinquency cases involving African American juveniles were more likely to be handled formally than were cases involving white youth or youth of other races Racial differences in the likelihood of formal handling were greatest for drug law violations cases" This extends to status offenses where again, African American youth are more likely to be detained over their white counterparts.

Interestingly, Connecticut has seen declining crime rates over the past 10 years, however we have the largest rate of incarceration in the Northeast, including New York.

- In 1997, minority youth comprised 83% of commitments to public facilities and 77% of detention placements in Connecticut (see www.buildingblocksforyouth.org.)
- Additionally, The 2002 Bridgeport Juvenile Justice Report noted that African American and Latino youth represent about 20% of the general population in Bridgeport. However, 66% of youth on probation and 79% of youth in detention in Bridgeport are African American or Latino.

It seems efforts to reduce racial disparity to date have been insufficient. We continue to hear so much about the horrid racial disparities in the adult system. Connecticut must take this problem even more seriously and remedy policies, practices and social norms at the root of the problem in order to break the cycle that will make today's minority juvenile offender tomorrow's DOC inmate.

In support of this bill to reduce disproportionate minority representation in the juvenile justice system, I would urge the committee to support the recommendations highlighted in the report, "A Reassessment of Minority Overrepresentation in Connecticut's Juvenile Justice System" produced by Spectrum Associates and submitted to the Office of Policy and Management, June 5, 2001 which, in summary, are as follows:

- 1. Overall Accountability - Juvenile Justice system agencies should establish clear guidelines for decision-making discretion**
- 2. Police Accountability – Police Officers should document all law enforcement contacts with juveniles including contacts not resulting in arrest.**
- 3. Detention Accountability – The Judicial Branch should train qualified detention staff to administer a validated and unbiased risk and assessment designed to determine suitability of the juvenile to be released that will be provided to the court at the initial detention hearing.**
- 4. Personnel - Staff should reflect the population being served.**
- 5. Program – Improvement in police community relationships, in home and community based services, empowering juveniles and parents.**

Additionally:

- That the Judicial Department, DCF, Division of Public Defender Services, Department of Public Safety and representatives from local education agency and the municipal police department should develop and implement race neutral criteria for decisions made at each stage in the juvenile justice system**
- That the Criteria are based solely on the risk the child poses to the community**
- That the criteria will be developed in accordance with the Annie E. Casey Foundation¹ Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative in order to:**
 - Evaluate detention admissions to assure race neutrality in decision making**
 - Evaluate whether the decisions are made ascertaining risk the to community**

Thank you for your time.
