



**PLATFORM POSITION REGARDING
ADDRESSING RACISM AT THE FRONT END
OF THE YOUTH JUSTICE SYSTEM**

**As adopted by the Coalition for Juvenile
Justice, Council of State Advisory Groups**

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CJJ COUNCIL OF THE SAGS OUR SUCCESS, OUR AMBITION AND OUR CHARGE

When first enacted in 1974, the federal Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) set an ambitious agenda: to effect a partnership between the federal government and the States through which the States would be inspired to reform their juvenile justice systems and the federal government would commit itself to providing the guidance and resources necessary to make that happen; all with the goal of protecting our nation's children and youth and improving public safety. Thirty years later, the achievements of that statutory agenda are nothing less than remarkable. The JJDPA stands as one of the most successful standard-setting statutes at the federal level, and at its heart recognizes the value of citizen-driven efforts to prevent and stem delinquency.

We, the Chairs and voting representatives of the State Advisory Groups on Juvenile Justice (SAGs), who comprise the CJJ Council of SAGs, are engaged through the JJDPA, as citizen volunteers, working in partnership with government to develop and guide State and local efforts to prevent delinquency, protect youth, hold youth accountable in age-appropriate ways and ensure the fair and effective administration of juvenile justice.

By design, the JJDPA has allowed the Congress to engage SAG leaders, as citizen volunteers, from many disciplines and walks of life. Thereby, the JJDPA serves as a mechanism for citizens to partner with government and inform the best possible strategies for delinquency prevention. As such, our representative body of SAG members includes the views of youth and parents, judges, defenders and prosecutors, as well as law enforcement professionals, educators and human service providers.

Through our collaborative efforts with State, local and private actors, over the last 30 years we have demonstrated the effectiveness of timely, fair and productive prevention and intervention efforts and achieved near-historic lows in rates of juvenile offending. Moreover, the research, evaluation, oversight and technical assistance functions of the federal Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), chartered under the JJDPA under the U.S. Department of Justice, have contributed to the expertise in the field as well as the discovery and replication of evidence-based and promising practices across the nation.

While much has been accomplished, more needs to be done in order for us to sustain and fully accomplish our goals—based on research, empirically-supported practice and a growing body of knowledge in the field. Far too often, children and youth are still subjected to deplorable conditions of confinement and denied effective, age-appropriate responses. Children who may be better served outside of detention and corrections, such as children who are truant or who suffer with mental health problems, are still today needlessly placed in locked confinement. In addition, minority youth may not be guaranteed equitable treatment when they come into contact with the juvenile justice system.

In recent years, increasing disengagement by the federal government, as demonstrated by dramatically decreased funding and shrinking capacities at OJJDP to effectively perform its core functions of research, oversight and technical assistance to the field, have created barriers to the further advancement of effective and best practices under the JJDPA. Thus, our continuing success depends on Congress reaffirming and enhancing the provisions of the JJDPA, and providing the leadership and financial resources needed to fulfill such provisions to the greatest possible extent.

Therefore, CJJ urges the Congress to Reauthorize the JJDPA as soon as possible, with an eye toward improving upon an already successful federal law— which has at its core the safety and success of our nation’s children, youth and families.

Representing the SAGs nationwide is our representative body, the CJJ Council of State Advisory Groups (SAGs), comprising forty-eight (48) SAG Chairs/Chair designees from the States, Territories and District of Columbia.

On this 27th day of April, 2008, the Council has consented by a two-thirds majority of States present and voting to ratify this Platform of Position on the Reauthorization of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA).

The Coalition for Juvenile Justice is committed to taking a firm stance to boldly addressing racism within the youth justice system. CJJ was one of the first organizations to call attention at the federal level to the need to address disparities that exist within the youth justice system. The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act now serves as one of the only federal laws that directly require states to address racial and ethnic inequities within their systems.

CJJ is committed to moving to concrete action that will not just address but end these disparities. We are committed to advancing anti-racist work to end the current inequities in our system. We recognize the nationwide, historical compounding of trauma and oppression that contributes to racial and ethnic disparities in the juvenile justice system. While these recommendations don't address all of that, we are starting this work at the front end of the justice system, with a focus on law enforcement and schools, policies and practices, as well as the day-to-day decisions of professionals in these fields, and how they contribute to the ongoing criminalization of Black, Indigenous, Latino and other young people of color, as well as LGBTQA youth and youth with disabilities.

**Witnessed by: _____
Pastor Edward L. Palmer, Sr., CJJ National Chair**

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Reaffirm and Strengthen the commitment to train those working with youth and families

I. **Ensure teachers, school administrators, and other youth serving professionals adequately understand young people and the impacts of racial bias on youth of color.**

Whereas, young people are not merely miniature adults, but instead have been recognized both through science and by the U.S. Supreme Court to be still developing and more likely to engage in risky and impulsive decision making;

Whereas, only 20 percent of teachers in America's schools were people of color¹, and thus may not possess an understanding of the cultures and needs of their students; and

Whereas research has shown bias in school disciplinary practices, resulting in the disproportionate expulsion and discipline of students as young as preschool²;

We recommend providing federal funding to ensure that teachers, doctors, therapists, and other who come into contact with young people receive training on restorative practices, racial bias, cultural humility, culturally and linguistically responsive mental health, culturally and linguistically responsive adolescent brain development, culturally and linguistically responsive trauma, culturally and linguistically responsive ways to interact with young people with special needs, and culturally and linguistically responsive ways to interact with families. We further recommend that they receive training on adverse childhood experiences and culturally and linguistically competent restorative practices. We recommend that educators be required to receive these courses as part of their certification process.

We further recommend providing additional funding and training for attorneys who defend youth, particularly when the youth or parents are declared indigent. We recommend providing prosecutors specialized training on youth and implicit bias, providing judges similar training, as well as guidance on steps to take or policies to implement to help ensure youth understand their rights and responsibilities.

¹ <https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2018/08/27/americas-public-school-teachers-are-far-less-racially-and-ethnically-diverse-than-their-students/>

² <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/early-childhood/news/2017/03/30/429552/4-disturbing-facts-preschool-suspension/>

II. **Improve training for law enforcement regarding interactions with youth as a means of eliminating racial and ethnic disparities.**

Whereas, interactions with law enforcement are often the first contact that a young person has with the youth justice system;

Whereas, the nature of modern society is such that young people come into contact with law enforcement frequently throughout the day, at school, while in their neighborhoods, and while using public transportation and frequenting public spaces;

Whereas, research has shown that law enforcement, much like other decision makers, exhibit racial and ethnic bias in their decision making processes about when to approach and/or detain a young person³; and

Whereas, current requirements for law enforcement training rarely prioritize specialized, in-depth training on how to interact specifically with young people;

We recommend providing federal funding to ensure that law enforcement officers who come into contact with young people are trained annually on racial bias, cultural humility, mental health, adolescent brain development, trauma and adverse childhood experiences, as well as how to interact with young people with special needs, and how to interact with families. Training grants must include funding to measure evaluation and implementation so that departments that don't demonstrate a long-term change in behavior will lose future funding for such training. Training should be focused on positive interactions with youth and ways to avoid militarization of these interactions.

³ <https://www.njjn.org/our-work/creating-meaningful-police-and-youth-of-color-relationships---njn-policy-platform---oct--2017>

III. **Prioritize hiring of diverse trainers, including young people and families of color, and those with lived experience with the justice system.**

Whereas, budgets can be seen as both financial and moral documents, that reflect the values that we share in ending racism;

Whereas hiring decisions can serve as a way to hold entities and organizations accountable in their work to address inequities; and

Whereas young people and families of color, particularly those with lived experience in the justice system, bring important expertise in training others;

We recommend prioritizing federal funding for racial equity and related training related to young people and families that are led by and done in partnership with young people of color and their families.