

DISMANTLING THE SEXUAL ABUSE TO PRISON PIPELINE: SCHOOLS AND JUSTICE CENTERS
2016

WHEREAS, the number of girls, especially girls of color, being pushed out of schools and into the juvenile justice system is increasing. Their involvement in juvenile justice is growing disproportionately at key points in the criminal justice process, particularly the decisions on behalf of school officials and law enforcement to suspend, expel, arrest and detain girls;

WHEREAS, evidence suggests that a leading cause is harsher discipline within schools and aggressive enforcement of non-violent offenses. In such cases, the decisions to suspend, expel, arrest and detain girls, particularly girls of color, are based in part on the perceptions of girls' having violated conventional norms of feminine behavior;

WHEREAS, research reveals that girls and young women who are sent into the juvenile justice system have typically experienced high rates of sexual violence, and many girls are routed into the juvenile justice system *because of* their victimization;

WHEREAS, when school officials and law enforcement treat victims of sexual violence as criminals, the trauma that underlies the behavior is not appropriately addressed. Disciplining, arresting and detaining survivors of abuse punishes girls for being victims and fails to provide the services necessary for recovery;

WHEREAS, once inside the juvenile justice system, girls encounter a system often ill-equipped to identify and treat trauma. Punitive environments may re-trigger girls' trauma and subject them to new incidents of sexual violence, which can compound the profound harms inflicted by the original abuse;

WHEREAS, the combination of re-triggering conditions and lack of appropriate care leads to a harmful cycle of trauma. Studies suggest that many characteristics of the detention environment (seclusion, staff insensitivity, loss of privacy) can exacerbate negative feelings and feelings of loss of control among girls, resulting in suicide attempts and self-harm;

WHEREAS, school systems that punish rather than provide trauma-informed services to girls and young women who have been sexually assaulted are failing to provide the equitable educational opportunity to which the girls are entitled under Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972;

WHEREAS, the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPAct) contains provisions aimed at ensuring that states comply with standards for gender-specific services, but needs to be re-authorized, strengthened and adequately implemented; and

WHEREAS, the Prison Rape Elimination Act (PREA) defines national standards to screen inmates for a history of sexual abuse and provide appropriate medical and mental health care, limit procedures that are likely trigger re-traumatization, and grant timely access to emergency medical and crisis intervention services for girls, young women, boys, and young men who experience victimization within the system;

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that NOW will include as part of its 2016-2017 Strategic Action Program a national action campaign to end the sexual abuse to prison pipeline, including reauthorization and improvement of the JJDPAct, full enforcement and improvement of PREA provisions, ensuring that every school at all levels has a Title IX coordinator whose work includes equal educational opportunities for girls who have been sexually traumatized, trauma informed counselors for victims of sexual abuse and exploitation, raising awareness about how school policies disproportionately affect victims of sexual violence, and nation-wide revisions of school disciplinary codes to eliminate zero-tolerance policies and other extreme measures that unfairly target girls of color.