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**LISTENING SESSION**  
**ON THE NEEDS OF YOUNG WOMEN OF COLOR**

A REPORT BY THE NATIONAL WOMEN'S LAW CENTER & GIRLS FOR GENDER EQUITY

NEW YORK CITY

## **Listening Session on the Needs of Young Women of Color | New York City**

*Hosted by the National Women's Law Center & Girls for Gender Equity*

**Moderated by** Joanne N. Smith, Girls for Gender Equity

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### **A special thank you to our guests, partners and sponsors!**

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# Introduction

**Too often, when we talk about issues facing girls, the discussion is limited.** The conversation fails to recognize that many girls encounter unique challenges and must deal with systems that are rooted in racism, sexism, and structural poverty—the un-level playing field that creates and maintains poverty for people in certain circumstances. These challenges and barriers can lead to strikingly different outcomes from girls without these barriers that have long-lasting effects on communities of color and the success of women in general. By listening to the stories of girls of color, we can start to understand these barriers and map out a fuller strategy to secure the success of *all* girls and women.

This report attempts to elevate the voices of girls and young women of color in New York City and propose solutions to the barriers they face. In June 2015, we gathered for seven hours in New York to hear directly from more than a dozen girls, who are experts of their own experiences, as well as from community advocates who work to support them. The powerful stories and recommendations shared were a stark reminder that if we don't listen to their voices, capture their solutions, and move forward with an agenda that centers their priorities, we will fail not only the girls and young women we heard from, but also entire communities.

**“We need to have young people at the table when doing education policy.”**

# School Discipline & Push Out

**“I’m a girl of color who is being punished for something that is exaggerated.”**

**Girls of color, particularly African American girls, are stereotyped, and they know it.** As loud.

Aggressive. Defiant. Hypersexual. These stereotypes contrast starkly with traditional upper-middle class notions of white femininity, which value being quiet and passive. Panelists noted that African American women’s willingness to speak out in the face of injustice has been instrumental in the struggle for civil rights. Yet, Black femininity is devalued in our culture, through negative media depictions as well as implicit biases that inform individual attitudes and institutional policies. These negative depictions and implicit biases serve as both a backlash against Black women who dare to affirm

their culture, speak out against injustice, and assert their humanity, as well as a plea to return to the historical status quo of subservience for women of color.

This attack on Black femininity is at play in the over-disciplining of girls of color in school. Nationally, African American girls are disciplined at six times the rate of white girls—higher than any other group of girls and white, Hispanic, and Asian American boys.<sup>1</sup> In New York City, Black girls were ten times more likely to be suspended than white girls and accounted for 90 percent of expulsions given to girls in the 2011-12 school year, even though they only made up 34 percent of girls enrolled.<sup>2</sup> Nationally, other girls of color are also disproportionately disciplined. Native American girls are suspended at 3.5 times the rate of white girls and more than even white boys.<sup>3</sup> And Latinas are suspended twice as much as white girls.<sup>4</sup> Not only do girls of color experience higher rates of discipline, but also much of this discipline is for offenses that are minor (e.g., chewing gum) or subjective (e.g., insubordination). As one advocate explained, “Much of this discipline flows from the perception that [girls’ of color] femininity is flawed. Discipline is used as a means to have Black girls conform to stereotypical forms of femininity.”

**“Our girls are being disciplined for existing.”**

One high school junior shared her story of receiving a suspension for the first time earlier that winter. Her offense? Wearing a cardigan that didn’t match the colors of the student uniform, or as the school put it, insubordination.

“I never really understood the reason the dean gave me a suspension,” she said. “I’m the type of person who would have taken off my sweater if I were asked to or told I could be suspended for it.” Advocates shared other stories of girls of color being disciplined for minor infractions—like one who received a week-long suspension for accidentally breaking a pencil sharpener and another who was forced to miss her first-period class for refusing to take bobby pins out of her hair after they set off the metal detector.



Increased suspensions can dramatically affect learning in school and stunt prospects for higher education. Most immediately, girls who are suspended miss classroom learning time—making it harder to succeed academically. But unfair discipline also makes girls feel unwelcome in school or causes them to associate other negative feelings with school attendance. Students who are suspended or expelled also are more likely to drop out, which increases their likelihood of becoming involved in the juvenile and criminal justice system.<sup>5</sup>

According to 2010 data, black girls make up only 17 percent of the student population nationally, but 31 percent of referrals to law enforcement, and 43 percent of girls who have school-related arrests.<sup>6</sup> But those who dodge the juvenile justice system still worry that even one dark spot on their record can affect their chances of pursuing post-secondary education.

**“Now, this is on my record and I’m worried how colleges will look at me.”**

“I’m afraid the schools I apply to will look at this information and assume I’m the ‘typical, defiant black girl,’” said the teen who received a dress code-related suspension. Despite persistent efforts, she has not been able to get the suspension removed from her record.

## **POLICY SOLUTIONS**

- (1) Advocates and youth panelists agreed that teachers, principals and other school administrators should receive regular training to help them recognize their implicit biases. Schools should provide professional development that is ongoing and integrated into the fabric of the school, so teachers and administrators will be able to unpack their racial bias and improve their relationship with students.
- (2) Youth panelists suggested establishing youth advocates or a designated official in their school to help resolve conflicts, negotiate appropriate disciplinary actions, and work with students to clear minor infractions from their records. Having such an advocate would help improve transparency and cultivate a sense of fairness among students, and it would lower the risk of a single infraction negatively affecting a student’s chance to attend the college of her choice.
- (3) Panelists also highlighted the value of replacing harsh, inflexible, zero-tolerance policies with alternative discipline practices. These alternatives may include Restorative Justice practices—which allow all parties involved in an incident to determine a solution to stop the inappropriate behavior—or Positive Behavior Intervention and Support strategies that proactively encourage appropriate behavior in the classroom and broader school environment. These alternative forms of discipline reinforce behavior that is conducive to learning and are more likely to allow girls of color to speak truth to power, which will help them to feel not only welcome, but also valued, in school.

**“It’s instilled in students’ mind that if someone who works for the school tells you you’re wrong, then you’re wrong. No one even thinks to stand up and make a change.”**

# Policing & Juvenile Justice

## **Harsher treatment of girls and women of color is also borne out in the juvenile justice and criminal justice systems.**

Although overall rates of juvenile incarceration have declined nationally, rates for girls of color are either not decreasing at the same rate, or in some instances, are increasing. According to one advocate, referrals of African American girls to the juvenile justice system increased by 72 percent between 1992 and 2008. LGBT youth are over-represented in the juvenile justice system with Black and Latino youth making up 60 percent of detained LGBT youth.<sup>7</sup>

**“We confine girls for less serious offenses and for longer periods of time than we confine boys.”**

Similar to unfair discipline in schools, the juvenile justice system seems to punish girls more harshly for not conforming with stereotypical notions of femininity. Girls are often confined for non-serious or status offenses (activity that is only a crime when committed by a youth) like drinking or skipping school—which, one advocate noted, are typical adolescent behaviors—and they tend to be detained for longer periods than boys are detained.<sup>8</sup> In addition, advocates shared that girls of color are detained disproportionately for

crimes of survival (e.g., being involved in the sex trade), behaviors associated with trauma (e.g., running away from an abusive situation), and for having social issues and unaddressed mental health concerns. And girls who are involved in the juvenile justice system in adolescence are at an increased risk of being involved in the criminal justice system as an adult.

**“We don’t think about women when they leave the system.”**

Also, there are collateral consequences of criminal convictions that limit access to jobs, housing, and education for women reentering their communities after incarceration. For example, most states ban people with criminal convictions from working in certain fields, like nursing, child care, and home health care—all fields with high percentages of women of color.

Many cities also prohibit tenants with criminal convictions from living in public housing or receiving housing assistance.<sup>9</sup> According to advocates, this affects not only women with convictions themselves, but also mothers with children or relatives who have been involved in the criminal justice system. For example, in many public housing authorities, it is common practice to require tenants to permanently bar friends or family members with arrest records from living in or visiting their unit.<sup>10</sup> As a result, a mother must put out her son or daughter if s/he has drug-related arrests—no matter how minor or whether that arrest resulted in a conviction—or otherwise risk eviction for herself and the rest of her family.

And once a person is branded with a criminal conviction, they are no longer eligible for federal student loans or Pell grants, so college is no longer affordable or attainable.<sup>11</sup> Because of all of these policies, youth and adults with criminal convictions are isolated from family, friends, employment, housing, and pathways to economic stability.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

**“We need to stop incarcerating youth as a response. White youth get mental health treatment, counseling, and other supports. Youth of color end up being criminalized.”**

- (1) One solution is to reduce the number of school-related arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system, which would decrease vulnerable girls’ involvement in the juvenile justice system. This can be accomplished by implementing alternative school discipline policies, but also by training school personnel, including law enforcement officers in school, to recognize signs that behavior may be attributed to trauma youth have experienced in their homes or communities, such as being the victim of sexual or physical abuse, so the youth can get the help they need to heal, rather than further victimization by the system. School personnel also should be trained to recognize their own implicit racial biases and consider whether racial patterns emerge in the number of students referred to juvenile detention for similar offenses.
- (2) There needs to be community-based alternatives to the juvenile justice system that are culturally responsive to LGBT youth and girls and boys of color. For example, panelists expressed support for systems that allow mothers and caregivers convicted of non-violent offenses to live with or have regular contact with their children.
- (3) Along with juvenile justice reform, there must be greater oversight of youth facilities. One panelist suggested grading youth facilities on how effectively they prevent reentry or in terms of the supports offered to detainees. Juvenile detention facilities also should provide mental health services to help detainees deal with any mental health concerns.
- (4) Panelists advocated for implementing criminal justice reform to minimize the obstacles that arise from having a criminal conviction. In addition to repealing mandatory minimum laws that incarcerate non-violent offenders with unfairly long prison sentences, panelists also suggested state-level racial impact legislation. This type of legislation requires lawmakers to assess the potential racial impact of criminal justice bills, create racial impact statements for proposed laws that disproportionately affect certain communities, and allow people from those communities to weigh in on such legislation.

**“Force legislators to think about how laws affect people of different races or people in a certain economic bracket.”**

# Sexual Harassment, Violence, Abuse & Other Contextual Factors

**Girls experience harassment, violence, and trauma in their communities, schools, and homes.** Youth panelists explained that sexual harassment and sexual violence are expected experiences, and as such, the onus is on girls to avoid such situations or deal with the consequences on their own. As one 13-year-old panelist said, “As a Black girl in the Bronx,

everyone thinks that raping is something that always happens. So, if it were to happen to me, it’s like that’s normal.” Panelists voiced frustration about how this boys-will-be-boys attitude justifies sexually hostile attitudes and leaves girls vulnerable to sexual assault.

**“If you’re a girl,  
there are certain blocks  
you don’t take because  
there are boys over  
there—you know better.  
No one ever stops  
to think maybe these  
boys are out of control.”**

Living in conditions of poverty or economic insecurity also puts girls at risk of sexual or physical abuse or becoming sexually exploited.<sup>12</sup> As many as one in four girls will be sexually abused before age 18,<sup>13</sup> and as youth panelists shared, such abuse can have long-term emotional effects for victims. One panelist shared how being sexually abused at the age of nine led her to eventually be involved in the sex trade. Another noted that because of her childhood abuse she would later experience depression, start drinking and smoking at an early age, and later end up in unhealthy relationships that made her vulnerable to sexual violence.

Many of the girls reported that they did not trust the systems meant to respond to abusive environments. Several panelists talked about their hesitation to call family protective services and some recalled being coached by parents on what not to say to caseworkers. Much of this distrust stems from the frequency with which the child welfare system responds by removing children from the home without addressing the underlying cause of the abuse or neglect, and too often without even fully investigating to ensure that actual instances of abuse or neglect occurred.

Studies show that parents of color are over-reported to protective services for child abuse and neglect, but much of that reporting is caused by school personnel’s inability to differentiate signs of poverty from signs of neglect.<sup>14</sup> Once reported to protective services, children of color are more likely to be placed in foster care than white children, “even when they have the same problems and characteristics as white children.”<sup>15</sup>

**“One day, when I was playing outside by myself, I was sexually abused  
by a group of neighborhood teenagers. I was 6 years old.  
I didn’t tell anyone because I was afraid protective services  
would take me and my brother away.”**



One panelist shared her story of being moved from one environment to another—except in the last foster home she was also separated from two of her brothers as well as her mother and father, which made her even more upset.

“My brothers were in a place where they were getting beat by their foster father, but that was the same reason we had to leave our father,” she said. “I was furious. I saw how my brothers were changing from sweet and shy to cold and brooding.”

Another panelist recounted spending nearly two years in foster care starting at age eight while her mother sought treatment for substance abuse. When the panelist was 17 years old, she suspected her mother might be relapsing and told her caseworker with the hopes of getting help for her mom. The response was disappointing.

“The caseworker told me to just sit tight and move out when I turned 18,” she said. “How was that supposed to help my mom?”

In addition to noting that separation rarely addresses the root cause of the abusive environments, many panelists characterized being in foster care as a time of great stress, instability, and mental anxiety. According to panelists, depression and anxiety often manifested in defiant behavior, which they took into other spheres, such as school.

In addition, racial stereotypes and implicit biases often prevented administrators from recognizing underlying signs of trauma. One panelist who was sexually abused as a child said her trauma manifested itself in adolescence as “weeks of euphoria followed by weeks of depression.” Despite this manic behavior and her reporting suicidal thoughts, school administrators failed to recognize the signs of trauma she exhibited, and instead rationalized her behavior by defaulting to racial stereotypes.

“My counselor assumed I was overworked at school. The model minority stereotype was at play. To my counselor, I was another Asian girl who studied rigorously and overworked herself to meet the high expectations of her parents,” the panelist said. In contrast, an African American youth panelist relayed how administrators regularly dismiss her feelings of anxiety, despite her diagnosis of bipolar II disorder.

“My English teacher saw me go from an 85 to a 55, but she doesn’t bat an eye,” she said. “She thinks I’m just another stereotypical Black girl working through excuses and expecting everything to be handed to her. ‘Everybody has anxiety,’ she says.”

**“In my romantic relationships, I had no perception of what was healthy or about boundaries—especially around sex. This would make me vulnerable to sexual violence later in life.”**

**“I wondered what would happen next and who would take care of me. I was scared so I started to act out. I was depressed, so I became sarcastic and smart-mouthed.”**

Some of the girls described how the normalization of violence and abuse can lead to unhealthy relationships and an increased risk of being sexually assaulted in the future. Unaddressed sexual trauma also can increase the risk of doing sex work as a means of survival. One 21-year-old panelist shared her story of how being abused at nine, struggling with her sexual identity, and being kicked out of her home made her susceptible to exploitation.

“Survival sex is real,” she said. “Someone I considered a friend recruited me into the sex trade. She presented it as a way to make fast money, but I didn’t know it was ‘exploitation.’” Even after leaving the sex trade, the panelist says she fights the temptation to re-enter—especially in difficult financial times.

Advocates also noted with dismay that the justice system views victims of human trafficking as criminals—leaving many who wish to leave the sex trade with criminal records that are difficult to expunge and limit their opportunities for employment, education, and economic stability.

## POLICY SOLUTIONS

Panelists agreed that girls should not have to deal with sexually hostile environments on their own. Suggested steps to change sexual attitudes included:

- (1) Form partnerships with schools and community-based social service organizations to create safe spaces to talk about how attitudes and harassment affect girls and boys in the community. More targeted forums can focus on preventing youth from entering the sex trade and be inclusive of LGB cisgender and transgender youth.
- (2) Create innovative programs that empower parents, schools, and other community members to create safe spaces everywhere and use culturally sensitive, affirmative models to prevent sexual violence and child sexual abuse, including culturally specific bystander intervention.
- (3) Establish a national policy that requires schools to provide dating violence education and prevention starting in third grade. Such programs should engage boys, girls, LGBT and gender non-conforming youth and emphasize respect, reconciliation, and human rights.

**“We always say ‘boys will be boys.’ Do we ever stop and think why?  
We give them the control to act like that when we justify their  
behavior, but together we can stop that.”**

## “Nobody wakes up wanting to trade sex for money.”

- (4) Offer tailored services to victims of human trafficking that mirror the type provided to victims of domestic violence. That may include shelters for sex trafficking victims as well as legal services to help victims expunge their records.

Youth panelists were adamant about the need to reform the foster care system and child protective services.

- (5) Panelists suggested that caseworkers specialize in certain age or grade spans, so they can form best practices for how to address issues for children of certain ages. “Teenagers in the foster care system should have caseworkers that only work with teenagers,” said one panelist. “That way our cases would be just as important as the younger children they are assigned to protect.”
- (6) Family supportive services should also prioritize connecting parents with services to help families heal and cope with substance abuse and other issues rather than defaulting to removing children from the home.
- (7) Another panelist stressed the importance of counseling while lamenting that now that she and her brothers have been reunited with their mother, family protective services “isn’t really helping us bond as a family. They’re just sitting there waiting for you to make the same mistake all over again.” Her story highlights the need to provide counseling for families—particularly post-reunion since children have experienced significant trauma just by being involved in the foster care system.

**“I wish the systems that are supposed to help us didn’t disproportionately target our communities, so that rather than doing everything to avoid them, people would turn to these systems for support.”**

**“My mom is trying so hard, but other people don’t see that.”**

# Stigmatizing Pregnant And Parenting Students

**According to panelists, living in isolated communities of poverty, as well as our nation's lack of comprehensive, medically accurate, age appropriate, culturally sensitive sex education** contributes to high rates of teen pregnancy for girls of color. For example, one panelist said she believed rumors that condoms did not prevent pregnancy, and her sex education class emphasizing abstinence did not debunk that myth for her. One panelist

**“When we talk about teen pregnancy, we start the story right when the girl got pregnant—which erases the person and experiences that came before and led to the pregnancy.”**

also noted the disconnect between claims that sex is “only for married couples” with her own reality of growing up in a single-parent household where her parents were never married. Because of this, youth panelists were skeptical of their school's sex education curriculum and gave more weight to misinformation they got from their peers.

Schools and communities treat teen parents as failures, regardless of their ambitions and accomplishments.

“My sister is a teen mother and a lot of times I hear, ‘Don't end up like her,’” one youth panelist said. “What are they telling me? My sister finished school. She has a job and her own apartment. She's an amazing person and she's being painted as something she's not.” Too often, these negative attitudes marginalize teen mothers at school and at home, causing them to drop out and become alienated from their families.

**“Once I became pregnant, my academic advisor stopped wanting to meet with me.”**

## **“You can’t claim to be a feminist or womanist and demonize teen moms.”**

### **POLICY SOLUTIONS**

- (1) Panelists agreed that sex and health education in schools should be culturally competent and LGBTQ-affirming. To be effective, sexual education should acknowledge that many people engage in premarital sexual activity, encourage healthy relationships, and aim to prevent unplanned pregnancies. However, panelists cautioned that such programs should not stigmatize teen parenthood, a tactic that has roots in racist and sexist stereotypes of the “welfare queen.” Stigmatizing teen parents also devalues the experience and accomplishments of those who either have or are young parents.
- (2) Along with training staff so that they don’t discriminate against pregnant or parenting students, schools should also implement programs that provide flexibility and support to teen parents, so that they stay on track to graduate high school and thrive in the college or career they choose.



# School Quality And Resources

## **Schools often fail to address the myriad and diverse needs girls of color face.**

Assumptions that certain programs or resources are not for girls of color underlie the lack of access to mental health counseling and resources. One 16-year-old panelist who suffers from anxiety and bipolar disorder noted the differential treatment she receives compared to Caucasian students.

**“They just expect Black girls to sit back and be okay.”**

“Where is my help?” she asked. “I see so many white girls with mental illnesses get help. Us girls of color with mental diseases sit in the closet waiting for someone to let the light in and say it’s okay not to be okay.”

One advocate noted that the lack of access to mental health services may be because limited resources are being used for responses to behavior that contribute to the over-policing of schools. For example, New York City Public Schools employs 5,400 school police officers, but only 3,000 guidance counselors and 1,500 social workers.<sup>16</sup>

“We value what we pay for,” the advocate noted. “How is that playing out for our youth?”

Racial and gender stereotypes keep girls of color from accessing and participating in activities that emphasize science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM). One panelist said teachers are often the gatekeepers to extracurricular activities in STEM.

“The teacher will tell a certain student to stay after class, like ‘I need to talk about your grade,’ and during that conversation tell him about this other opportunity,” the panelist said. Youth panelists said they would take more advantage of STEM activities if given the opportunity to participate. Some even noted that participation in programs could help them thrive in those subjects. According to another youth panelist, stereotypes and an “expectation for girls to just cheer on boys from the sideline” also prevent girls from participating in sports and other physical activities.

**“At our school, STEM programs are one of those hush-hush things.”**

**“I’ve tried to get into different programs, but I’ve been told,  
‘You’re just a girl, so that’s not for you.’”**

## **POLICY SOLUTIONS**

- (1) Schools should ensure that counselors, social workers, and other paraprofessionals in school are culturally competent to recognize the signs of mental illness and can refer students to services that can address their mental health needs.
- (2) Along with implementing implicit bias training, schools must engage in outreach to encourage girls of color to participate in sports, STEM, and other extracurricular activities in which they are under-represented. Community groups can also provide programs that can fill this role in cash-strapped schools.

# Barriers To Success In College And Beyond

**Colleges, which many panelist saw as an escape from poverty, are not always set up to address the specific needs of students who come from economically disadvantaged families.** The increasing amount of debt students must borrow and enrollment policies that make assumptions about the home life of students place an often-unexpected burden on low-income students.

**“I didn’t know that when you break barriers you only move forward to break more and they would be more challenging.”**

For example, one panelist grew up in kinship care and thought college would be her “escape from poverty and violence-stricken neighborhoods.” However, her college plans were complicated when she aged out of receiving kinship care benefits and the upstate New York university in which she enrolled took family safety nets for granted.

“I had a 3.8 GPA at the end of my freshman year. But at the beginning of my sophomore year, I was diagnosed with epilepsy and began to miss a lot of classes because of uncontrollable and violent seizures,” she said. “The administration kept telling me to take a leave of absence and go home. They had no idea what going home meant to a student like me.” For her, it meant possible homelessness or a return to never-ending poverty and violence. Summer and other extended breaks present similar challenges to students who come from economically unstable communities.

**“We felt like we were entering a world where we did not belong.”**

In addition, college can be an isolating experience for students from economically disadvantaged families. Another panelist said she felt “uncomfortable, embarrassed, and lonely” living among more affluent students in the “trust fund baby dorm,” seeing students and parents driving luxury cars, and regularly having to turn down invitations to go into town for dinner or to go to formal functions. Meanwhile, many young women from economically disadvantaged families have the additional expectation of supporting their families back home. One panelist recalled getting calls from younger siblings asking if she could send money home for necessities like rent or food.

“It’s not uncommon to graduate, find a job, but with student loans and taking care of your family, you’re lucky to be able to afford rent.”

The young women emphasized that they are supporting their families even after they graduate from college and enter the workforce. In addition, the wage gap is even wider for women of color, who are paid less than their white female and male counterparts are paid. These factors, combined with large student debt loads, explain why even with a college degree almost ten percent of Black women live in poverty.<sup>17</sup>

**“As a low-income woman of color, you often don’t realize what you need because you don’t understand where you are in the system.”**

## **POLICY SOLUTIONS**

- (1) Panelists agreed that public schools should provide financial literacy to college-bound students or students considering a post-secondary education. Such curriculum should not only advise on how to secure debt-free financial aid or low-interest federal loans, but also prepare low-income students to navigate more affluent campuses to dull the shock of being in an unfamiliar environment and allow them to adapt more easily.

**“We need to learn how to fight for money that’s on the table.”**

- (2) Panelists also suggested building up mentoring programs in college to reduce students’ feelings of isolation. Mentors could provide the encouragement and advice that women of color need to value their work, negotiate higher salaries, and possibly enter higher-paying, male-dominated fields.
- (3) States and colleges should also invest in programs that provide housing and other supports for students who grew up in foster care or otherwise do not have a familial safety net.

**“Safety nets are important at every stage of life. The need for support doesn’t magically end when you turn 18.”**

# Conclusion

Girls of color need targeted support. There are key investments the philanthropic community can make and steps that policymakers should prioritize. Some broad based recommendations that would make the greatest impact include:

**“Caring for and caring about girls of color has to be directed. Measures for girls generally overlook the specific needs of girls of color, and measures for boys of color ignore or distort the gender differences.”**

- Train school leaders and staff on recognizing and addressing their implicit biases and ensure that schools are culturally competent, can recognize signs of trauma, and are inclusive of pregnant and parenting teens as well as LGBT and gender nonconforming students;
- Support youth advocates in schools to help students and administrators navigate and resolve disputes, with an emphasis on limiting disciplinary practices that exclude students from school and reducing the number of school-based arrests and referrals to the juvenile justice system;
- Reform the foster care system and family protective services to assign caseworkers by age or grade spans and prioritize addressing the underlying causes for unhealthy environments and helping reunited families heal;
- Establish safe spaces in schools and communities where girls and boys can talk openly and reconsider attitudes about sex, gender, and gender identity, and focus on preventing sexual harassment, violence, and exploitation;
- Support comprehensive culturally competent, LGBTQ-affirming sex education in schools that does not stigmatize teen parents and teaches students how to engage in healthy relationships;
- Provide elementary and secondary students with financial literacy training that gives low-income students the tools to not only make college affordable, but also navigate environments where their peers are more economically advantaged; and
- Create mentoring programs in college to encourage women of color to enter their careers with confidence and negotiating skills, as well as to provide a source of emotional support and professional and personal guidance to first-generation college students.



## Endnotes

- 1 CIVIL RIGHTS DATA COLLECTION, U.S. DEP'T OF EDUC. OFFICE FOR CIVIL RIGHTS, ISSUE BRIEF No. 1, DATA SNAPSHOT: SCHOOL DISCIPLINE 3 (2014) [hereinafter CRDC SNAPSHOT], available at <http://ocrdata.ed.gov/Downloads/CRDC-School-Discipline-Snapshot.pdf>.
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- 3 CRDC SNAPSHOT *supra* note 1, at 3.
- 4 *Id.*
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- 7 JEROME HUN & AISHA MOODIE-MILLS, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS, THE UNFAIR CRIMINALIZATION OF GAY AND TRANSGENDER YOUTH: AN OVERVIEW OF THE EXPERIENCES OF LGBT YOUTH IN THE JUVENILE JUSTICE SYSTEM 1 (2012) available at [https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/06/pdf/juvenile\\_justice.pdf](https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2012/06/pdf/juvenile_justice.pdf).
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- 9 See *generally* REBECCA VALLAS & SHARON DIETRICH, CTR. FOR AM. PROGRESS, ONE STRIKE AND YOU'RE OUT: HOW WE CAN ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO ECONOMIC SECURITY AND MOBILITY FOR PEOPLE WITH CRIMINAL RECORDS (2014) available at <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/12/VallasCriminalRecordsReport.pdf>.
- 10 *Id.* at 16-17.
- 11 *Id.* at 27.
- 12 DONNA GRECO & SARAH DAWGERT, PA. COAL. AGAINST RAPE, POVERTY AND SEXUAL VIOLENCE: BUILDING PREVENTION AND INTERVENTION RESPONSES 1, 7-8 (2007) available at [http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/pages-pdf/poverty\\_and\\_sexual\\_violence.pdf](http://www.pcar.org/sites/default/files/pages-pdf/poverty_and_sexual_violence.pdf); see RACHEL MARCUS, OVERSEAS DEV. INST., POVERTY AND VIOLATIONS OF CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO PROTECTION IN LOW- AND MIDDLE-INCOME COUNTRIES: A REVIEW OF THE EVIDENCE 29 (2014) available at <http://www.odi.org/sites/odi.org.uk/files/odi-assets/publications-opinion-files/9309.pdf> ("qualitative studies examined for this report indicate that poverty may increase vulnerability to sexual abuse and sexual exploitation in several ways").
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- 17 UNLOCKING OPPORTUNITY *supra* note 8, at 36.



## **Girls for Gender Equity**

is an intergenerational organization committed to the physical, psychological, social and economic development of girls and women. Through education, organizing and physical fitness, Girls for Gender Equity encourages communities to remove barriers and create opportunities for girls and women to live self-determined lives.

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## **The National Women's Law Center**

has been expanding the possibilities for women and their families for over 40 years, yet the Center's mission is far from complete. Many women don't get equal pay for equal work. High-quality affordable child care remains beyond the reach of millions of families. Title IX's promise of educational opportunity has not been realized for every girl and woman. Reproductive health care is at great risk. And women of all ages are more likely than men to be poor. The Center is committed to taking on the toughest challenges ahead, to secure past gains and to advance equality and opportunity for women and their families.

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