

**Commission on Racial & Ethnic Disparity in the  
Criminal Justice System  
October 22, 2008 Conference**

**Recommendations from Break-out Sessions**

<p><b>Session 1: The Media &amp; its Role in Shaping Perceptions of Race &amp; Ethnicity</b></p>
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**Key Issues Identified:**

1. Biased Reporting
  - Negative photographic images of minorities
  - Suburban coverage vs. urban coverage: crime is shocking vs. routine
  - Stories that foster an "us" vs. "them" mentality (suburbs vs. city)
2. Under-reporting of positive stories in minority communities/cities
  - What "sells" or is "sexy" vs. what's important
3. Failure of the media to examine underlying causes of crimes
  - Underreporting of the root causes of crime
  - Lack of analysis and context of crime
  - Lack of media coverage of cities as a dumping ground
4. Failure by the media to be accountable and admit there's a problem
  - Concentrated ownership of media outlets
  - Unwillingness to talk about the role of race

**Recommendations:**

1. **Establish an independent body to audit the news media**
  - **To look at things like the number of positive story press releases sent out vs. number of stories actually covered**
2. **Promote a consistent policy for the dissemination of mug shots**
3. **Media should work with community leaders to identify positive stories and get feedback on their coverage, with the Commission serving as facilitator**
  - **Start the dialogue to help minorities report positive stories to the mainstream media**
5. **Encourage schools to view news analytically**

## **6. Educate reporters on race and racial issues**

**Recommended Action Steps (from Break-out Sessions), cont'd**

<p><b>Session 2: Urban v. Suburban Policing</b></p>
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**Key Issues Identified:**

1. Race is an issue: people need to acknowledge the disparity that exists across the board
2. The need for uniformly available early intervention for young people
3. The need for diversity in all aspects of the Criminal Justice System

**Recommendations**

- 1. Promote equality in policing policies (free from cultural and institutional bias)**
- 2. Require/promote diversity training/education for police officers**
- 3. Work with grassroots agencies to build programs**
- 4. Invest in prevention and community-based services**

**Recommended Action Steps (from Break-out Sessions), cont'd**

<p><b>Session 3: The Effect of the War on Drugs and the Mental Health Care System on Minority Populations</b></p>
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**Key Issues Identified:**

1. The negative public perception of mental illness and substance abuse and addiction
2. Lack of funding for programs
3. Challenge of coordinating with multiple state agencies

**Recommendations:**

1. **Educate all players in the criminal justice system (judges, state's attorneys, public defenders, DOC personnel, police) about mental illness and addiction**
  - Remove the stigma
  - The cost-benefit of treatment over incarceration
  - The harm reduction model
2. **Hold people accountable, keep statistics, and get this information out to the public through the media**
3. **Repeal mandatory minimum sentence requirements**
4. **Address this issue with young people:**
  - Educate youth at an early age in school
  - Have counselors in school who can identify substance abuse, mental health issues and provide greater resources to the schools for obtaining treatment for students
5. **Reallocate resources from a punitive model to a model of hope, using evidence-based programs that have a demonstrated rate of success**
6. **Educate the Governor on the cost-saving potential of programs**

**Recommended Action Steps (from Break-out Sessions), cont'd**

**Session 4: Juvenile Justice: Comprehensive Strategies for Keeping  
Young People out of the Criminal Justice System and in School**

**Key Issues Identified:**

1. The racial disparity that exists in the Connecticut education and criminal justice systems
2. Parties on all sides must be held accountable, this includes, parents, educators, police, schools and youth. Concern was identified over a lack of information and/or processes to identify misconduct by persons in a position of authority such as police and/or prosecutors – additionally, it was expressed that complaints may result in retribution.
3. There is a need for coordination and communication between youth/families in need and service providers – kind of a gatekeeper organization. Early on needs may be identified through school, a municipal organization, or a direct service provider; responsibility may then be shifted to a state agency, and/or a contracted or alternative service provider. Ultimately the needs may be identified through a criminal justice organization – at a point when it may be too late.

**Recommendations:**

1. **Improve Communication/Collaboration -- Build Bridges:**
  - **Engage parents and families in addressing the problems**
  - **Provide continuity of service. No matter how effective the solution may be – if it stops when the child leaves the school or the provider – it loses effectiveness**
  - **Establish collaboration teams of students and parents, local community organizations, non-profits, schools and youth service officers**
  - **A connection to state agencies, Juvenile Review Boards, Youth Service Bureaus, must be established for continuity in services/practices**
  - **Due to financial constraints there may need to be compensation for individuals (parents and community members) participating in boards, panels, commissions (a per diem, travel expense and/or day care)**
  - **Integrated intervention must occur before law enforcement and/or courts become involved formally**

## **2. Improve School Climate/A Positive Place to Learn:**

- **Provide schools with the tools (funds, staff, legislation, guidelines) to change the climate**
- **No excuses – raise the level of expectation**
- **Don't jump to expel or suspend troubled youth. Look for alternative means to address conduct before it becomes violent and/or disruptive**
- **Start programs earlier – before problems begin**
- **Partner and collaborate with child advocacy agencies such as DCF and Juvenile Justice System.**

## **3. Start with the Kids:**

- **Positive programming for children and youth – enhance self-worth and self-image**
- **Identify learning disabilities and mental health issues and work to resolve**
- **Faith-based programs may be an under-used resource**
- **Sports programs, music programs, general youth support programs affiliated with school and/or community provide positive options to an empty home**
- **After-school programming must be enhanced/increased even during budget cuts**
- **Use of ex-convicts who are paid to mentor and bring a dose of "reality" instead of "glamour" would help both the youth and the convict**

## **4. Accountability:**

- **Make all parties accountable through an inclusive plan and system**
- **Ensure clear public complaint process when the system fails – complaints may be against: police, prosecutors; court employees and judges.**

**Recommended Action Steps (from Break-out Sessions), cont'd**

**Breakout Session 5: The Impact of Underlying Social Issues  
on the Criminal Justice System**

**Key Issues Identified:**

1. Children are entering the Juvenile Justice System at too young an age
2. Fault of system is that the only way to get services is entrance in Juvenile System
3. Lack of appropriate and adequate resources and funding
4. Not enough strategies proposed to address the problems
5. Not enough collective work among departments and agencies to work together
6. The need to share information among all agencies
7. The need to identify the appropriate services early
8. Structural racism

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Educate the community regarding issues and outcomes**
- 2. Address the need to bring all interested parties to the table, regardless of point of view**
- 3. Collaboration of services – bridging gap between non-profits and government**
- 4. Get business owners to provide job opportunities and to be mentors to young people**

**Recommended Action Steps (from Break-out Sessions), cont'd**

**Break-out Session 6: Perception vs. Reality – Youth Violence**

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Be preemptive and focus more on prevention and early intervention to keep children/youth out of the courts/the criminal justice system:**
  - **Set children/youth up with a vision for success early**
  - **Establish and promote programs that provide children/youth with positive role models, mentors and influences within their community**
  - **Support youth centers and community programs that provide children/youth with a safe place to learn, achieve and have fun**
  - **Communities must be the foundation of these efforts – neighborhoods, schools and local organizations working together**
  
- 2. Address shortcomings in our education system:**
  - **Revise education laws to promote incentives for children/youth staying in school and/or earning a diploma/degree**
  - **Incentives can be financial, or alternatively court-involved youth can be part of early releases from court-ordered programs or commitment facilities (CJTS)**
  - **Broaden educational opportunities to include non-traditional subjects like vocational programs, art, music, media, etc. Provide children/youth with support to participate (transportation, safe environments, peer support, etc.)**
  - **Teacher training that focuses on today's needs, not that of 20 years ago**
  
- 3. Integrate children/youth into the decision- and rule-making so they have a voice. Children and youth will be more likely to embrace rules and ideas that they are a part of**



**Recommended Action Steps (from Break-out Sessions), cont'd**

**Session 7: The Impact of Politics on the Criminal Justice System**

**Key Issues Identified:**

1. Need for victim representation on panels and commissions
2. Problem of mandatory minimum sentences
3. PA 93-263, *AAC Improving Educational Quality and Diversity*, encourages discussion at local level & should be implemented
4. Barriers to employment (felonies) - need education for inmates beyond GED
5. Need for prevention
6. CGS 10-233d(h), re: expulsion from school, is unjustified and harshly applied in urban areas
7. Children in DV homes – often overlooked for services, leads to developmental problems
8. Legislation re: suspension of arrestees

**Recommendations:**

**1. Address Disparity in Educational Opportunities:**

- **Public School**
- **Educational Opportunities for Supervised Persons (secondary, GED, trades, college)**
- **Educational Resources for Inmates (secondary, GED, trades, college)**

**2. Address Disparity in the Intent and Application of Criminal Sanctions:**

- **CGS § 10-233c to § 10-233k, re: suspension, expulsion from school and notification of school officials, impact urban communities and minorities**
- **Felony convictions are more common in urban courts and for minorities**
- **Repeal mandatory minimum sentences**
- **Provide equal access to pardons and/or automatic expungements**

**3. Commission's Authority over the Criminal Justice System:**

- **Conference participants recommend on-going assistance to the Commission**

- **Distribute Commission findings at the local level and require some local action**
- **Commission should review all criminal justice legislation**

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**Recommended Action Steps (from Breakout Sessions), cont'd**

**Session 8: The Perception of the Criminal Justice System by the Latino  
Community**

**Key Issues Identified:**

1. State's role in enforcing immigration laws (policy) – civil vs. criminal
2. Bilingual vs. bicultural
3. Under-representation of Latino community within the Judicial Branch and community agencies
4. Limits placed upon Judicial Branch employees (either by the job itself or by code of ethics)
5. Lack of Advocacy
6. Language barrier/cultural competency/degree
7. Lack of (community) programs
8. Literal interpretation/legal information/terminology
9. Youth – what are we doing to change their negative perception?

**Recommendations:**

- 1. Language barrier – bilingual / bicultural**
  - **Better use of technology within the Judicial Branch. Use videoconferencing for using interpreters or speakerphone technology**
  - **Have advocates at time of arrest (at police department level) to identify quickly the language need**
  - **Utilize resources currently available – technology**
- 2. State role in enforcement of immigration law – policy change**
  - **“Don't ask, don't tell” policy. Don't inquire about legal status**
- 3. Latino youth**
  - **Create community outreach programs to change the perception**
  - **Use Human Rights Commission at local and State levels to get groups together to work as liaisons within the community**

- **Hire more bilingual and bicultural staff to provide services and to serve as role models**

**4. Be proactive not reactive.**

Recommended Action Steps (from Breakout Sessions), cont'd

**Session 9: From Destruction to Construction:  
Mentoring Young Men of Color**

**Recommendations:**

1. **Issue #1:** *Preservation*

**Challenge:** Continue to sustain achievements without regression. Continue to make positive gains.

**Strategies:** **Paradigm shift in funding to put more into prevention and preservation. Point of stability: terminate from program makers.**

2. **Issue #2:** *Prevention*

**Challenge:** Parental involvement, in-home services, and family mentors. Remove barriers in transportation. Improve communication and language.

**Strategies:** **Paradigm shift for funding. Stress media coverage for community outreach.**

3. **Issue #3:** *Intervention*

**Challenge:** Recruit working class males who are currently systematically excluded. Include males with out degrees and with felonies who are reformed. Give credit for redemption.

**Strategies:** **Paradigm shift: from funding to long-term investment. Train mentors to establish intervention response.**

**Operate using a prevention model.**

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**Recommended Action Steps (from Breakout Sessions), cont'd**

**Breakout Session 10: The Power of Choice**

**Top Issues Identified:**

1. Need for family services (entire family and child)
2. Gap in services for non-court involved youth
3. Lack of programs to keep kids active (fewer opportunities for trouble)
4. Kids having kids
5. Lack of education
6. Homelessness
7. Basic needs left unfulfilled
8. Not enough programs for girls
9. Lack of services for homeless
10. Lack of coordination of services
11. Lack of continuity of services
12. Need to connect life skills more closely to traditional academics
13. No services for 18-23 year olds
14. Not enough deterrent-based services

**Recommendations:**

1. **Examination, expansion and retention of effective programs**
2. **Increase coordination with volunteer organizations (particularly retired citizens, organizations)**
3. **Increase coordination of services (particularly with education)**
  - **Increase youth involvement advisory boards and commissions**