

Connecticut Sentencing Task Force
Subcommittee-Disparity
Hartford Public High School
September 18, 2007
Meeting Summary

Attendees: Eric Coleman (CGA), Kevin Kane (CSA), John Kissel (CGA), Andrew Moseley (BOPP), Hilda Nieves (CSSD), Lori Ricks (DOC), Joseph Rubin (Attorney General), Preston Tisdale (OCPD) Alyse Chin (OPM), Andrew Clark (CCSU) Deborah Fuller (Judicial); Frank Sykes (African-American Commission), Kenneth Geene (CGA), Brenda Milner (NAACP), Scot X. Esdaile (NAACP) and Marian Howard.

I Opening Remarks – Senator John A. Kissel, Subcommittee Co-chair

- Meeting Commenced at 2:45 p.m.

II Member Introductions and short speeches

III Questions to students

- Do you know anyone who has been involved in the Criminal Justice System (CJS) and do you think it is fair?

Collective “no”, anecdotal stories:

- One student observed that the CJS takes advantage of the ignorance that people (especially from lower income segments of the population) have about the legal system because they don't know their rights. Another student offered an anecdotal story about the unfairness of the CJS, stating that his father was sentenced to life for drug charges and that it took nine years to sentence him.

- Do you think Latinos and African-Americans are treated fairly by the police?

Collective “no”, anecdotal stories:

- Students offered numerous stories in which they believed that either they or their family members were discriminated against by the police. One young man told a story of his Bible being searched for drugs on the way to church. A young woman said that her fair-skinned Latino mother was pulled over for a tail light being out, but the police let her go. The tail light worked. The same thing happened at the same street corner to her dark-skinned father and he was searched by police. There were many stories similar to this one.

- One young man pointed out that bad test scores in Hartford indicated that the kids must be dumb, but bad test scores in Simsbury mean that something must be wrong with the school system.
- How can we make the system better?
 - Discussion about prison programs, sentences, three-strikes law
 - Many students echoed the thought there are not enough programs for prisoner when they are released from jail. There are “not any services of options for them after they get out of jail” and they just “go back to what they know better”. Another student added that maybe there should be more programs before they go to jail.
 - One young woman brought up the three-strikes rule saying she felt it was a good idea because it should not take three times to learn from a mistake. She compared it to a child touching something hot. Another young woman disagreed saying that prisons are already over-populated, while a young man explained that he felt three strikes should be reserved for violent crimes.
 - Many students also shared the view that prison feels like home to many people and that they like it. They felt that jail was not a punishment if it’s supposed to teach them not to do what they do, why make it like it is? As one young woman put it, “prison should be life in hell”.
 - When asked by Hilda Nieves what the students felt could be done better, they wanted the state to make sure the underlying sentence was fair.
 - One student felt that the police force should hire more women because they follow the rules more.
 - At the conclusion, one student thought we should ask these questions to inmates who are leaving jail.

IV Open Discussion with students about Criminal Justice System

V Conclusion – Senator Eric Coleman, Subcommittee Co-chair

- Senator Coleman made closing remarks and encouraged the students to get involved. He also invited them to come to the Capitol/Legislative Office Building.
- Representative Greene, an alumna of Hartford Public High School, also gave some closing remarks, and encouraged the students to get politically involved and especially to finish high school.
- Meeting adjourned at 4:50 p.m.