



## A Way Out

### *“Creating Partners For Our Nation’s Prosperity By Expanding Life Paths of Young Men of Color”*

#### Policy Recommendations

### Dellums Commission

*Health Policy Institute, Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies*

**The Dellums Commission**, chaired by former Congressman and Mayor-Elect Ronal V. Dellums, was formed by the Health Policy Institute of the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies to analyze policies that affect the physical, emotional and social health of young men of color and their communities and to develop an action plan to alter public policies that limit life paths for young men of color. To understand the issues more fully and to inform its deliberations in formulating an ambitious but realistic action plan, the Dellums Commission asked experts in various fields to prepare background papers on specific issues.

#### The Facts

- The mortality rate from homicide for African-American males ages 15-17 is 34.4 per 100,000, compared to a rate of 2.4 per 100,000 for non-hispanic whites.
- In 2000, African-American men represented 79 percent of the 18 - to -24- year-olds in the U.S., but in 2004, they made up only 2.8 percent of the undergraduates at 50 public flagship universities
- Youth of color are disproportionately represented in the juvenile justice systems: African-Americans (1,004 per 1000,000), American Indian (632 per 100,000), and Latinos (485 per 100,000), each had a higher custody rate than whites (212 per 100,000) in 1999.

#### *The Way Forward: The Dellums Policy Agenda*

*The Commission's recommendations are based on the view that systemic problems must be addressed with systemic solutions. During the past 12 months, the commission analyzed national, state, and local policies in the areas of health and mental health services, education, juvenile justice and criminal justice, family support and child welfare, and the media. The Commission's policy agenda and policy recommendations listed are designed to ignite reforms that would enhance the well-being of ailing American communities, and individuals can apply commitment and logic to solve even the most intractable social problems.*

#### HEALTH

The Commission recommends some policies targeted directly at health care access and delivery. There are racial disparities in health insurance coverage, use of health services, and availability of culturally competent medical services.

### Health Insurance Solutions

**Local:** Local governments should fund school-based health care and/or provide incentives for insurers, health care providers, and other businesses to participate in these programs at the K-12 level.

**State:** All states should extend health care coverage to all uninsured children through the age of 18 who are not covered by Medicaid or the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP).

**Federal:** Until universal coverage is established, the government should remove any restrictions that prevent some young men of color from receiving coverage under Medicaid.

### Adequate Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services Solutions

**Local and State:** State laws should require private insurers to provide coverage for mental health and substance abuse disorders

**Federal:** The federal government should include care for mental illness and substance abuse in any universal

### Culturally Competent Professionals

**Local and State:** Local city, county, and state policies should make medical institutions accountable for increasing workforce diversity, particularly with regard to young men of color. Officials can engage the community college system to recruit men of color into the growing health care professions.

**Federal:** The federal government should ensure that medical practices in underserved communities will be economically viable.

### Services for Health Promotion, Prevention, and Early Intervention

**State and Local:** Local governments should ensure that schools are appropriately staffed to provide health screening, brief intervention and referral (SBIR), and follow-up. States should make funding available for SBIR.

**Federal:** Establish a U.S. Office of Men's Health to develop programs to educate men on

healthy lifestyles practices and provide policy guidance on male health to government institutions.

### Incarceration and Illness

**Federal, State and Local:** To the maximum extent possible, without compromising public safety, treat disorders that have manifested in antisocial behaviors outside incarceration.

- Pre-trial diversion and treatment focused sentencing for adults and juveniles
- Establish mental health courts with trained judges or staff
- Accurately survey the health status of incarcerated youth and adults.

### Foster Care and Health

**State and Local:** Authorities should require that foster care caseworkers be trained to regularly monitor children's health status with public health nursing services available.

**Local, State and Federal:** All levels of government should finance programs that will ensure that children in foster care will receive early and periodic assessment of treatment of physical, mental and oral health.

## EDUCATION

**Local:** Schools must act aggressively and creatively to stem the high dropout rate among young men of color. The policy of zero tolerance for behavioral offenses in schools substitutes for teacher and administrative judgment should be eliminated.

**State:** States must guarantee fiscal equity in school funding, ending the common practice of shortchanging urban centers or rural communities where students of color lives.

**Federal:** The No Child Left Behind Act should be evaluated nationally to determine its fairness and equity in serving young men of color.

## FAMILY SUPPORT AND CHILD WELFARE

**Local:** Create partnerships among agencies, nonprofits, faith-based organizations, and other entities to create neighborhood-based resources for family support such as the “Healthy Families/ Thriving Community collaborative.

**Federal Solutions:** The federal government can play a leadership role by doing more to promote needed legal reform and education to increase the number of stable foster homes and appropriate permanency options and clear barriers to the adoption of children of color.

## WORKFORCE AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

**State and Local:** Absent a raise at the federal level, local and state governments should raise their own minimum wages and index them to inflation. Governments should identify, fund and promote both micro- and macro-economic development opportunities in distressed communities by providing access to capital to establish viable business initiatives.

**Federal:** The federal government should increase the minimum wage and provide more funding for proven job training programs. In addition, the federal government should more vigorously enforce existing anti-discrimination laws in the areas of employment, housing, and credit markets to ensure that practices such as redlining and predatory lending do not prevent people of color from acquiring property and building wealth.

## JUVENILE AND CRIMINAL JUSTICE

The Dellums Commission background papers document the policy choices and practices that have resulted in the mass incarceration of the nation’s young men of color. To restore a semblance of justice to the juvenile justice

systems, the Dellums Commission proposes the following recommendations.

### Reducing Incarceration

- State legislatures and criminal justice authorities should expand the use of youth courts, drug courts, and community-based counseling as alternatives to incarceration for youth, the majority of whom are low-risk, non-violent offenders.
- States should mandate standards for legal counsel for young men of color, who are often represented by counsel or provided no counsel in the juvenile justice system.

### Rehabilitation and Re-entry

- Local authorities state legislators, and correctional authorities should provide a continuum of interventions- such as alcohol and drug treatment, education, and vocational program - that begins in detention and continues in the community as part of the re-entry process.
- Legislators should adequately fund proven re-entry programs
- Businesses can create employment pipelines by partnering with re-entry program to identify promising candidates.

### Models of Reform and Innovation

- Disproportionate Minority Confinement Committee: the use of objective data-driven models to achieve racial parity in treatment of youth of color
- Youth advocacy and intervention initiatives, ex: Youth Advocacy Project in Massachusetts
- Community court, ex: Red Hook Community Justice Center in Brooklyn.

## THE MEDIA

**State and Local Solutions:** State, county and city governments should make state-owned buildings and other facilities available to facilitate engagement-including discussions of news coverage- between media outlets and community groups.

**Federal:** The Federal Communications Commission (FCC) should oppose current proposals to further loosen ownership restrictions that would allow media conglomerates to acquire even more broadcasting properties.

**Industry Reform:** Media organizations should provide more air time to the subjective voices and perspectives of young men of color.

## CONCLUSION

The policy recommendations for education, child welfare, economic, justice, and health care systems are directed to policymakers, legislators, public administrators, and key influential leaders within communities. This effort focuses on the male population, not to diminish the crisis of women, but to recognize the disproportionate and unfair burden that young men carry and its far-reaching implications for family and community health.

While elected officials at all levels of government can create policies and direct and redirect resources, the impetus, indeed the pressure, for such decisions must come from informed and galvanized constituencies.

The Commission strongly believes that just as failed policies led us here, a thoughtful policy agenda can light the way forward. American

must now decide that the society we desire is one in which children of color, no less than others, are expecting life, enjoying liberty and pursuing the happiness promised to us all. Ultimately, it is in our nation's best interest to intervene on behalf of young men of color and embrace them as true partners for our nation's security and prosperity. We cannot give up on your youth and we must ask that they not give up on us.

### About the Joint Center Health Policy Institute:

HPI was launched six years ago to play a role in reframing debates on health and refocusing attention on dangerous health disparities. Our research and analysis is helping generate new policy recommendations and provide solutions for longstanding health equity concerns.

### Focus Areas Include:

- Identifying and addressing many determinants that can improve health outcomes.
- Increasing resources for prevention
- Informing policy and practices aimed at reducing infant mortality and improving maternal and child health
- Reducing risk factors and supporting healthy behaviors among children and youth
- Improving mental health and reducing factors that promote violence
- Optimizing health care access and quality
- Creating conditions for healthy aging