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**DELLUMS COMMISSION CITES ‘CRISIS’ AMONG YOUNG
BLACK MALES; CALLS FOR NEW POLICY DIRECTION**

Commission Examines Impact of Mandatory Sentencing and Zero Tolerance Programs
WASHINGTON-The Dellums Commission, a group of scholars and public officials, declared today that “a crisis” exist for young African American males in the United States and called upon the public and private sectors to step up efforts to provide better healthcare, more job training and counseling aimed at stemming youth violence.

The Commission, which was appointed last year by the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies Health Policy Institute, is in the final stages of preparing recommendations to address the problems faced by young African Americans. A recent article in the New York Times detailed the plight of African American males, noting that in 2004 50 percent of Black men in their 20s were jobless and 21 percent of those in that age group who didn’t attend college were incarcerated.

“The statistics document the problem that we have been studying for a year,” said Ronald Dellums, the former California congressman. “The challenges that young African American men face today will only be resolved by a concentrated effort by government and the private sector to address the causes, which range from discrimination to poor schooling to unsettled family environments to the decline in blue collar jobs.”

Moreover, Rep. Dellums said “there needs to be strong intervention” when many teenagers and young adults glorify drug dealing and street violence over college degrees and good jobs. “We must reach these kids at an early age, and help them set the right priorities for their lives,” Rep. Dellums said. “There are too many youths and young adults who haven’t grasped that the path to success usually does not include jail, crack houses and children out of wedlock.”

Dr. Gail Christopher, Director of the Health Policy Institute, said the Dellums Commission will play a crucial role in setting the public policy debate on how to improve the environment for Black males.

“The Commission will release a blueprint for fundamental reform of the policies that have been barriers to positive development for Black males,” Dr. Christopher said. “We will critique current policies, including zero tolerance programs and mandatory sentencing, and demonstrate how they have contributed to the overall problems.”

For instance, Dr. Christopher said the Commission is examining the impact of high stake testing on students in struggling schools as well as the exclusionary practices under zero tolerance policies. “Too often,” she said, “federal and state laws and local educational policies use high stake testing to penalize students by reducing resources for their schools instead of investing in better educational programs in those schools.”

Furthermore, Dr. Christopher said that zero tolerance policies that were intended to prevent weapons in classrooms now exclude students, including preschoolers, for minor behavior problems. “The result is increasing numbers of Black youths are on the streets without guidance or educational support for their development,” she said. “Increasing juvenile detention rates are a result of policies that have weakened the role of schools in helping our young people who need assistance.”

The Dellums Commission will issue its formal recommendations in July.