

Statement of Strategies for Youth

## **Don't be Distracted! While All Eyes are on the Border, DOJ Dismantles Protections for Youth of Color**

July 10, 2018

**The recent announcement by Caren Harp, Administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP), that this agency plans to “simplify” enforcement of the core protections of the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act (JJDPA) occurred while all eyes were on the Border. (“OJJDP Administrator’s Words on Racial Disparities Shock Us,” July 6, *Juvenile Justice Information Exchange*).**

That's right, the U.S. Department of Justice has decided to “simplify” enforcement of one of 4 core protections of youth. It is revealing that the Trump Administration chose this particular core protection of youth in the juvenile justice system to ignore. We notice that keeping youth separate from adults remains in tact; the Department of Justice is intentionally turning its back on 30 years of efforts to reduce the number of youth of color in the system.

“Simplify” may seem like an innocuous enough term, but in this instance it is anything but. In fact, it signifies an ominous development—OJJDP intends to stop enforcing requirements that states address Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC).

Anyone working in or near the field knows how much racial disparities are a defining quality of our juvenile justice system. Moreover, the largest racial disparities can be found in arrests for those subjective offenses, such as “contempt of cop,” or “disorderly conduct” where discretion allows bias to easily seep in, and where alternatives to arrest can most easily be used.

It is in the category of unnecessary arrests for minor offenses, borne disproportionately by black and brown youth, where we have opportunities to halt the pipeline to prison in its track, and to make real inroads in DMC.

This “simplification” by the Trump Administration means leaders across the country working to make the juvenile justice systems equitable—often in the face of incredible challenges—puts racial equity of reach. **Caren Harp’s decision should be called by its true name: a willingness to subjugate youth of color to systemic bias...again.**

It is critical that eliminating these racial disparities be front and center of all juvenile justice reform efforts. Now is when we must accelerate, not slow down, efforts to remove racial bias from our justice system.