

# Claiming the Promise of Health and Success for Boys and Men of Color:

## A Brief of the Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color (BMOC) in California



### Vision for Change

Our state's future prosperity and health depend on all Californians having a fair chance to thrive and succeed. One of the best investments we can make is to be certain we do everything possible to help young people become healthy, productive adults. As California becomes more diverse, we must nurture and harness the talents, skills, and hopes of young people of color—boys and young men in particular.

As the proportion of Californians over 65 grows and fertility rates decline, a greater share of the population will depend on fewer working adults.<sup>1</sup> And the state population, once mostly non-Hispanic

White, is now a majority of people of color, with the young population changing fastest. More than 70 percent of Californians under 19 identify as people of color, according to the 2010 Census. Amid these demographic shifts, improving opportunities for all young adults, particularly those of color, is a state imperative.

Most adolescents successfully move to adulthood, but some young people, a disproportionate number of whom are African American, Latino, Native American, and Southeast Asian males, are trapped in a cycle of prison, poverty, and disadvantage. Deteriorated schools and neighborhoods, poor health, dysfunctional social support, and limited job opportunities hamper their progress. This dynamic not only puts them at risk for long-term disconnection, but it also jeopardizes California's future.

The California State Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color is working to create a policy approach to fundamentally change the way education, health care, employment, and public safety are delivered, financed, and imagined for boys and men of color. The Select Committee is pursuing opportunities to align public and private resources to ensure more boys and men of color:

- Are physically and mentally healthy;
- Succeed in school and work; and
- Possess the knowledge, skills, and leadership capacity to contribute to their families, communities, and the state's social and economic well-being.

<sup>1</sup>Passel, Jeffrey S., and D'Vera Cohn. 2008. *U.S. Population Projections: 2005 – 2050*, Washington, D.C.: Pew Hispanic Center.



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There is good reason for optimism. Promising programs, strategies, and system reforms led by youth, community, and institutional leaders are reducing harms and improving social and economic outcomes among even our most vulnerable boys and men of color. Opportunity-enhancing strategies and institutional practices are proving to be far less expensive than maintaining punitive opportunity-limiting systems. An ambitious package of policy and system reforms will save precious public resources at a time of fiscal crisis and make California more competitive and prosperous in the years ahead.

## Why Boys and Men of Color?

Young people are one of our greatest assets and the best indicator of the vitality of our economy and the well-being of all residents. Yet too many children grow up without a fair shot to be healthy and successful. This is especially true for boys and young men of color, who confront enormous barriers all along the road to adulthood and worse outcomes on every critical indicator of quality of life. Below are just a few examples.

### Education

**Achievement gaps.** Evident as early as third grade, where 30 percent of California's Latino students and 32 percent of African American students score proficient or advanced on STAR English Language Arts, compared with 61 percent of White students and 67 percent of Asian students.<sup>2</sup> Gender widens the gap: Black and Latino females score significantly higher on Grade 4 reading exams than Black and Latino males; disparities persist and grow through middle and high school.

**Inequitable resources.** The California middle schools serving more than 90 percent Latino, African American, and Native American students in 2008–2009 were almost 10 times more likely than majority White and Asian schools to suffer severe shortages of qualified teachers.

**Punitive discipline.** California schools suspend and expel students at an annual rate of 12.75 percent or nearly 800,000 times a year. African American students represent 8 percent of the state's public school enrollment but 19 percent of suspensions. This can have lifelong implications: Nationally, among 16- to 24-year-old males of color not enrolled in school, fewer than half have jobs and about a third are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole.<sup>3</sup> In California, African American and Latino males are vastly overrepresented in juvenile facilities and prisons.

**Pushed out and poorly prepared.** Almost one in two Black and Latino males did not graduate from high school in California from 2006–2007, more than double the rate for White males.<sup>4</sup> Among those who graduate, only 14 percent of Latino students and 15 percent of African American students have completed the courses required for admission to California's four-year colleges and universities.

### Health

**Barriers to care.** In California, home to 1.1 million uninsured children, Latino males from birth to 17 are about five times as likely as their White counterparts to be uninsured. More than one in five young men of color ages 15 to 21 have no regular source of care.<sup>5</sup>

**Trauma and chronic adversity.** Economic and social insecurity combined with violence and limited opportunity add up to a harsh reality. In California, African American children are 2.5 times and Latino children 1.3 times more likely to suffer from abuse than White children. Maltreated children are more likely to be incarcerated and to suffer a host of mental and emotional problems.

<sup>2</sup> Children Now analysis of data from the California Department of Education, Educational Demographics Unit, "California Standards Test Score," for 2010 STAR Test Results, <http://data1.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>.

<sup>3</sup> Edelman, Peter, Harry J. Holzer, and Paul Offner. 2006. *Reconnecting Disadvantaged Young Men*. Washington, D.C.: Urban Institute Press.

<sup>4</sup> Rumberger, Russell and Susan Rotermund. 2009. *Ethnic and Gender Differences in California High School Graduation Rates*. Santa Barbara, CA: The California Dropout Research Project.

<sup>5</sup> Davis, Lois M., Rebecca Kilburn, and Dan Shultz. 2009. *Reparable Harm: Assessing and Addressing Disparities Faced by Boys and Men of Color in California*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

**Violence.** Homicide is the leading cause of death for African American males ages 10 to 29 nationally, and the second leading cause of death for Latino males in that age group. Young men of color are five times more likely to be murdered than girls and young women and seven times more likely to die from gun violence.

**Unhealthy communities.** Communities with high levels of concentrated poverty lack basic amenities such as access to fresh and healthy foods, parks and green space, and safe streets.<sup>6</sup> This contributes to high levels of obesity and chronic disease in boys and men of color.

## **Employment and Wealth**

**Unemployment.** In an economy that has left people of all ages and races out of work, people of color fare worst and in some communities, unemployment rates among young men of color far exceed America's unemployment rate during the Great Depression. Unemployment was a staggering 45 percent for 16- to 24-year old African American men in Alameda in 2010. In Fresno nearly one of every five Latino young men was out of work.<sup>7</sup>

**Diminishing prospects for the future.** From 2008 to 2018, state labor demand will increase more than twice as much for college-educated workers than for high school graduates or dropouts, which makes the high school push-out rate among young men of color all the more alarming. By 2018, 61 percent of jobs in California will require some postsecondary education or training.

**Assets gap.** An indicator of the success, well-being, and economic security of individuals, families, and communities, this is a key factor in intergenerational poverty. The gap between White and African American families has more than quadrupled over a generation.

## **What about girls?**

Young women of color face significant barriers, too, and deserve help. The work to improve outcomes for boys and men of color is not in opposition to, or at the exclusion of, efforts to support girls and women. Rather, it goes hand in glove with work to support women of color, strengthen families, and develop healthy communities. Often, the most significant barriers to young women's success are healthy and supportive boys and men. Moreover, the statistics underscore the especially formidable hurdles facing many males. Actions that for other boys and teens would be treated as youthful mistakes are judged more severely and more often result in lasting punishment and restricted opportunity for young men of color. None of us can afford to lose a generation of productive men.

## **The Context for State Action**

### **Economic and Fiscal**

Addressing racial disparities and the systemic barriers that limit the success of Californians is not merely a matter of fairness and equality—it is essential to the economic strength and competitiveness of the state. The loss of economic contributions by young men of color is akin to valuable plant equipment idled by disrepair and a lack of investment. Maintaining the world's largest and most expensive prison and jail system prevents our state from meeting many essential services all Californians count on.

Consider the costs of the status quo—and the potential savings in policies that ensure the success of young men of color:

- California spends an average of around \$9,800 annually per public school student, but more than \$224,712 per juvenile system detainee (2010-2011)<sup>8</sup> and \$47,000 to incarcerate an adult in state prison for one year.

<sup>6</sup> Bell, Judith and Mary Lee. 2011. *Why Place and Race Matter*. Oakland, CA: PolicyLink, p. 16.

<sup>7</sup> Interview with Gay Cobb, Executive Director of Oakland Private Industry Council.

<sup>8</sup> Center on Juvenile and Criminal Justice, *The Cost of the State's Division of Juvenile Facilities*, April 2011, [http://www.cjcj.org/files/The\\_Cost\\_of\\_the\\_States\\_Division\\_of\\_Juvenile\\_Facilities.pdf](http://www.cjcj.org/files/The_Cost_of_the_States_Division_of_Juvenile_Facilities.pdf).

- Increasing the state’s graduation rate by just 10 percent for African American and Latino males would result in \$7.39 billion in additional income, tax revenue, social service savings, and economic productivity over their lifetimes.<sup>9</sup>
- African American and Latino men who graduate high school generate \$681,130 and \$451,360, respectively, in additional dollars for the state of California.<sup>10</sup>

## Place and Race

Research on the disparate outcomes impacting boys and men of color underscore two key findings. First, place matters. Where you live, to a large extent, determines whether you are exposed to hazardous pollutants and unhealthy food; whether you attend a good school or land a decent job with a livable wage; and whether you are likely to go to jail or die relatively young. Second, the challenges boys and young men of color experience in their neighborhoods stem from broader inequities driven by race, class, and gender.

Groundbreaking research by Dolores Acevedo-Garcia reveals the critical relationship between geography and early childhood development:

- 76 percent of African American children and 69 percent of Latino children live in poorer neighborhoods than the places where the lowest-income White children live.
- 62 percent of Black children grow up in high-poverty neighborhoods, compared to 4 percent of White children. Nearly half of Black children born into middle-class families grow up in high-poverty neighborhoods, compared to less than 1 percent of middle-class White children.<sup>11</sup>
- Living in a neighborhood of concentrated disadvantage has the same negative effect on the development of a child’s verbal cognitive ability as missing one or two years of school.<sup>12</sup> The impact persists even if a child moves out of a severely disadvantaged neighborhood.

Despite these challenges, few targeted interventions and even fewer institutional supports are designed with the explicit goal of ensuring that boys and young men of color succeed. Lack of understanding of the systemic nature of the problem has prevented policymakers and other stakeholders from developing comprehensive solutions to the challenges impacting the health, economic, and educational outcomes of boys and young men of color. Singular, discrete innovations will not succeed, nor will systemic reforms that do not target the inequities that lead to such disparities. To improve the health of California’s boys and young men of color, we must commit to changing the neighborhoods where they grow up and the underlying system of inequities that shape these conditions. In short, we must abandon piecemeal approaches and trickle-down initiatives in favor of targeted initiatives and comprehensive systemic reforms.

## Strategic Intervention Points

The Select Committee is holding hearings to examine and develop consensus on policies that will help California:

1. Achieve 100 percent graduation rates and reduce school push-out, in part by shifting away from punitive disciplinary policies;
2. Improve access to and use of needed health supports and services for all Californians;
3. Increase young men of color’s access to meaningful employment;
4. Promote healthy youth development; and
5. Reduce the level of violence in our communities.

<sup>9</sup> Belfield, Clive and Henry Levin. August 2007. “The Economic Losses from High School Dropouts in California.” Santa Barbara, CA: California Dropout Research Project.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Acevedo-Garcia, Dolores, et al. 2010. “The Geography of Opportunity: A Framework of Child Development.” In *Changing Places: How Communities Will Improve the Health of Boys of Color*, edited by Christopher Edley Jr. and Jorge Ruiz de Velasco. Berkeley and Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

To achieve these goals, the Select Committee is focusing on policy opportunities in five key arenas:

**Education.** As K-12, community college, and college and university leaders grapple with the state of education in California, it will be vitally important that the legislature and the governor challenge them to identify institutional practices that act as barriers to the educational success of boys and young men of color along the pre-kindergarten to university pipeline. A good starting point is the disproportionate use of harsh discipline policies and practices. The rate at which Black students are being pushed out of school and into the pipeline to prison far exceeds the rate at which they are graduating and reaching high levels of academic achievement. A deliberate, intense focus is needed to disrupt and redirect the current educational trajectory for males of color.

**Health.** Good health is not only the foundation of a productive society and a thriving California. It is also a prerequisite for young men of color to achieve social and economic success. We use the term “health” globally to capture indicators of physical and mental health status as well as of high-risk behavior. Healthy minds and bodies enable youth to learn, to embark on positive developmental trajectories, and to become active and productive citizens. Healthy child and adolescent development is shaped by multiple factors—from the family and neighborhood settings to local, state, and federal policies.<sup>13</sup> Policymakers, community activists, and government officials must address the health of a community not in individual parts, but as an unbroken whole.

**Employment and Wealth.** As business, public education leaders, and state government officials work to turn California’s economy around, it is critical to take the needs and the assets of boys and young men of color into account. Policy and system solutions that ensure young men of color acquire the education and workforce training needed to succeed in the global labor market is key. Improving labor-market opportunities for young men of color is about more than jobs. It is also about dramatically increasing the number of young men of color who are equipped with the postsecondary skills and credentials they will need to obtain opportunities in the labor market. And it is about improving their access to jobs that will provide them with stable employment at decent wages and opportunities for advancement.

**Juvenile Justice.** Law enforcement and incarceration policy and practices must be aligned with the goal of ensuring the state’s long-term economic and social well-being. We need to identify and implement strategies that ensure dramatically lower numbers of boys and young men of color find themselves languishing in jails and prisons at an expense to taxpayers that far exceeds the costs of sending them to the most expensive private universities. We urgently need to identify, cultivate, strengthen, and replicate the programs that can ensure that young incarcerated men receive the counseling and education needed to become productive citizens upon their release.

**Youth Development.** Youth development prepares young people to be successful in meeting the challenges of adolescence and adulthood by helping them develop socially, emotionally, physically, and cognitively.<sup>14</sup> For boys and young men of color struggling within failing systems or off the pathway to success, effective youth development opportunities through local programs and state policy are indispensable for assuring their successful transition into adulthood.

<sup>13</sup> Bronfenbrenner, U. 1979. *The Ecology of Human Development*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.

<sup>14</sup> Foster, Lisa K. et al. 2005. *Involving Youth in Policymaking and Coordinating Youth Policy: State-Level Structures in California and Other States*. Sacramento, CA: California Research Bureau.

## SELECT COMMITTEE CALENDAR

August 17, 2011  
Kick Off Hearing (Sacramento)

January 20, 2012  
Field Hearing (Oakland)

March 2, 2012  
Field Hearing (Los Angeles)

April 13, 2012  
Field Hearing (Fresno)

August 2012  
Final Hearing (Sacramento)

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