

Path to Policy: The California Alliance for Boys and Men of Color Delivers for the Nation



Assemblyman Steven Bradford confers with Damonte Jones of the Sacramento City Unified School District's Men's Leadership Academy at the California Assembly Select Committee Hearing on the Status of Boys and Men of Color.

On August 4 through 7, nearly 300 young men and women from around California converged on the capital to advocate for policies to improve the life chances of boys and men of color. These determined young people met with nearly 100 lawmakers and state officials. They rallied on the Capitol steps. They packed a hearing room and overflow space, listening to peers deliver raw,

emotional testimony about the barriers they face every day. The testimony of Elijah Dupree Nemie, an African American and Mexican 15-year-old from Stockton, said it all:

“Tell me what you spend your money on and I’ll tell you what you value. I hope we begin to value youth.”

At a time when the nation can no longer afford to ignore the needs of boys and men of color, the California Alliance for Boys and Men of Color and the California Assembly Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color continue to deliver. The Alliance’s Third Annual Education and Advocacy Day was no exception, demonstrating that policy reform is not only possible, it is producing impressive results. This document chronicles that historic day and the preceding events, including the hearing, to make good on President Obama’s mandate, which was declared at the launch of *My Brother’s Keeper*: our collective future depends on the success of boys and men of color.

Building a Legacy That Can Produce Policy Results

The California story begins with an extraordinary partnership between the [Alliance for Boys and Men of Color](#), a statewide coalition of youth, community organizations, foundations, and systems leaders (supported by The California Endowment and coordinated by PolicyLink and the Movement Strategy Center) and the California Assembly [Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color](#).

Since its establishment in 2011, the Select Committee has worked with the Alliance to reduce barriers to opportunity and build pathways to education and employment for boys and men of color through comprehensive changes in policy and systems. Like the Alliance, the Select Committee is guided by the wisdom, voice, and experience of communities, youth especially.

In just three years, a robust network of young activists transcending lines of race, ethnicity, gender, and geography has emerged to work for positive changes in their communities and to address the most urgent civil rights challenge of our era. The Alliance has resulted in dozens of new laws and policies to make sure all youth have a fair shot to succeed. Some examples of these policies include:

- **Education**

In partnership with other coalitions, legislators, and systems leaders, the Alliance has made legislative inroads to reverse

harsh school discipline practices by giving local leaders flexibility to use best-practice alternatives to suspension and expulsion and supporting the equitable implementation of Local Control Funding Formula resources so districts, schools, and teachers with high- needs youth in areas of concentrated poverty received the support necessary to be effective.

- **Employment and Wealth**

Last year Alliance partners successfully passed a statewide “Ban the Box” law requiring the state, counties, cities, and special districts to remove the conviction-history question from their job applications and postpone such inquiries until later in the hiring process, when they are certain the applicant meets the “minimum employment qualifications” for the job. Simultaneously, the legislature worked with the governor to secure a \$250 million annual commitment for the state’s new Career Pathways Trust Fund in 2013 and 2014. These important resources will be used to invest in K-14 Career Technical Education partnerships that include work-based learning career pathways programs that lead to good jobs in high-growth, high-value jobs sectors.

- **Health**

The Alliance has informed the California Department of Public Health’s Office of Health Equity’s development of the Statewide Strategic Plan by encouraging the prioritization of boys and men of color. Additionally, the Alliance has been involved in California’s efforts to implement the federal Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act (ACA), by encouraging the Department of Health Care Services to allocate Medi-Cal outreach and enrollment funding to counties to supplement Medi-Cal outreach and enrollment efforts for target populations, including young men of color.

- **Juvenile Justice and Safety**

The Alliance has also been working steadily to ensure community safety and justice for boys and men of color throughout the state. The partnership supported the passage of AB 4, which prohibits law enforcement officials from detaining an individual on the basis of a United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement hold after that individual becomes eligible for release from criminal custody, unless certain criteria are met. Also, AB 720 was passed last year and it addresses one of the main barriers to reentry by helping formerly incarcerated inmates access physical, mental health, and substance abuse services.

Youth Lead a New Movement for Equity

One of the biggest lessons of this movement is that the most powerful way to advance change is through the vocal leadership of youth. A centerpiece of the Alliance effort is training and organizing young leaders of color to effect the change *they* want for their families and their communities. The gathering in Sacramento showcased the skill, passion, and authenticity they bring to this work.

The Alliance secured 98 meetings with legislators, legislative staff, and state leaders, including the governor and the attorney general’s office, and State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson. Young men and women led these meetings, arguing eloquently for investments that strengthen their communities and support all young people to live healthy, productive lives.

A young man from East Oakland told of losing his cousin and brother to murder.

Marco Ocano, a beneficiary of President Obama’s Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program and a youth leader from Fresno, described the hardships that undocumented Californians face due to lack of health care. “Sickness doesn’t look at you and say, because you’re undocumented, you can’t get sick,” he said.

Youth detailed the harmful effects of being suspended as a result of the catchall disciplinary category of willful defiance. “We want solutions, not suspensions,” said Jonathan Laredo, an immigrant from Mexico who lives in Santa Ana.

A Senator’s staff member shared his own experiences with punitive school discipline policies, connecting deeply with the youth in the room and validating their efforts to change school “push-out” policies.

Conversations like this fueled the momentum that culminated with the Select Committee Hearing on the Status of Boys and Men of Color hearing the following day.

“If you’re not moved...you’re not listening”: A Packed Hearing

The Assembly Select Committee Hearing on the Status of Boys and Men of Color in California highlighted the progress made by state departments, agencies, and local and state partners in advancing the priorities and policies set out in the Action Plan. Ten assemblymembers participated. Youth, local advocates, media, legislative staff, state agency representatives, philanthropic leaders, and media filled every seat and inch of standing room.

Select Committee Chair Steven Bradford opened with good news: the introduction of AB 914, a bill to create a 21-member interagency taskforce modeled on the federal My Brother’s Keeper taskforce. The California taskforce would coordinate action across state agencies to follow Action Plan recommendations.

“At the federal level, every Cabinet department has come together to analyze what they are doing to help create opportunities or remove barriers facing boys and young men of color,” PolicyLink Founder and CEO Angela Glover Blackwell said in opening remarks. “Similarly, this new task force can take a deep look at the systemic reforms that are needed at the state level.”

Young men testified on all the Action Plan priority areas of education, health, employment, justice and safety. As in the legislative meetings, these stories ensured that lawmakers and administrators understand the impact of their policies and practices on the lives of boys and men of color.

“You can’t legislate from a vacuum, so it’s good to see the faces and hear the real-life experiences of these young men, these young boys,” Bradford said. “If you’re not moved by the testimonies of these young men, you don’t have a heart, you’re not listening.” Assemblymembers brainstormed potential legislation and pushed agency leads to come up with ways to respond to the needs in communities. Meanwhile, the youth took charge of their own narrative. They distributed talking points and created a photo essay project highlighting five youth leaders from across the state. They also led social media campaigns aligned with policy priorities, including a [Twitter chat](#) and [Thunderclap](#) to end willful defiance and a [collaborative Instagram effort](#).

What’s Ahead

Energized by all that took place in Sacramento, the Alliance plans a full agenda for the remainder of the year. At the top of the list:

- Advocate for passage of its priority bills, including the proposed statewide taskforce.
- Follow-up with legislators and systems leaders on their commitments to support California’s boys and men of color, including: working with Assemblymember Skinner to develop a clean-up bill on fines accrued during incarceration and

working with Governor Brown and the Employment Development Department to develop equitable strategies for spending the 15 percent set-aside of nearly \$60 million provided to California via the Workforce Investment and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

- Push for the equitable implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula and other priority laws.
- Work in support of Proposition 47, the ballot initiative that would reduce the status of several nonviolent offenses from felonies to misdemeanors, improving the lives of millions of Californians.

The Alliance also will partner with and support the next incarnation of the Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color, which will be reauthorized at the beginning of the current session.

The success of the Alliance, the partnership with the Select Committee, and the development of a large, vibrant, committed network of youth leaders demonstrate that efforts to drive policy change can be a transformative way to improve outcomes for boys and men of color.

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The [Alliance for Boys and Men of Color](http://www.allianceforbmoc.org/) is a coalition of change agents committed to improving the life chances of California's boys and young men of color. The Alliance includes youth, community organizations, foundations and leaders in government, education, public health, and law enforcement. For more information and to see a list of Alliance local anchors and state policy partners, please visit: <http://www.allianceforbmoc.org/>

The California Assembly's [Select Committee on the Status of Boys and Men of Color](#) was formed in 2012 to respond to the pressing needs of young men of color in California, where 70 percent of youth identify as people of color. In the 2013 session, the Select Committee continued efforts to advance common sense school discipline, design a more comprehensive approach to school safety, and facilitate the implementation of the Local Control Funding Formula to ensure that young men of color can access opportunity in their neighborhoods starting at an early age.

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