



# The CAMPAIGN for the FAIR SENTENCING of YOUTH

## Racial Justice Belief Statement

We believe that...

- Racism is embedded in the very foundation of our country, and by extension, its social, economic, and political structures, including the juvenile and criminal justice systems.
- Our current crisis of mass incarceration is a legacy of American slavery and exerts control over communities of color in modern society, hindering their economic and political power.
- Racial animus and unconscious bias have led to selective enforcement and significantly harsher penalties for African Americans and other people of color accused of crimes than for whites charged with the same offenses.
- The now-debunked “superpredator theory,” a racially biased, scientifically deficient, and morally bankrupt idea suggesting that black teenagers are hyper-criminal, continues to shape societal perceptions of children of color, and contributes to a climate in which it is socially, culturally, and politically acceptable to sentence children of color to extreme sentences, including sentencing them to die in prison.
- Discriminatory policies in schools, heightened law enforcement presence and a dearth of support services and economic opportunity in communities of color have resulted in children of color being disproportionately funneled into the juvenile and criminal justice systems and thereby disproportionately subjected to extreme sentences such as life without parole. *Specifically, black youth are sentenced to life in prison without the possibility of parole at a per capita rate that is ten times that of white youth.*
- The disparate rates at which youth of color are subjected to JLWOP and other extreme sentences is also a function of laws, policies, practices and decisions made daily in cases throughout the country. Over-charging, unnecessary transfers of youth to adult courts, and sentencing and parole decisions in individual cases are major factors in these racial disparities. The good news is that these dynamics can, therefore, be changed if system stakeholders take steps to both ensure that all defendants face an equal playing field and if those same stakeholders examine and change patterns of decision making that currently result in unnecessarily punitive responses to crimes.
- Efforts to transform the current juvenile and criminal justice systems are and should be led by individuals and communities directly impacted by the injustices we work to resolve—chief among them, individuals incarcerated as children for serious crimes, survivors of crimes committed by children, and the families of both.
- All children are capable of, and worthy of, redemption. No child should ever be sentenced to die in prison, and every child deserves an opportunity for a second chance, regardless of their race, socio-economic background, or the crime of which they have been accused.
- The value we place on our children’s lives, and the potential we see in them to grow and change is not dependent on their race, but on their innate characteristics as children.