

A Call to Action

from the leadership of
the Georgetown Juvenile Justice Clinic & Initiative, the National Juvenile Defender Center, and the
Ambassadors for Racial Justice

As Black youth across the nation protest against police brutality and systemic racism, we are proud to stand with them. We are honored to defend youth in our nations' courts and join and support their demands for racial justice in the courtroom and beyond.

While outrage continues to mount as more Black people are callously murdered by police in America, the day-to-day brutalities of American law enforcement remain largely hidden from public view. We raise our voices in the call to end state-sanctioned violence against Black youth and adults in all forms.

Although Black youth comprised only 16 percent of our country's youth, they accounted for more than 40 percent of all youth charged in juvenile courts in 2017. Once they are arrested, Black youth are less likely to be diverted from the court system, more likely to be tried as adults, and five times more likely to be incarcerated than white youth. Black youth are also disproportionately suspended and expelled from school. These disparities exist despite evidence that youth of all races and ethnicities engage in the same risks and impulsive behaviors.

We demand an end to the routine police stops, frisks, and other racial traumas that shorten the lives of thousands of Black youth every day. Black youth who grow up under constant surveillance and a persistent threat of physical and psychological abuse by the police suffer from heightened anxiety and fear which jeopardize long term health and well-being.^[1]

Black lives matter. And we stand against the criminalization, dehumanization, and traumatization of Black youth.

Our commitment to racial justice is not new. Our clients have entrusted us with their stories of traumatic policing, and we embrace our solemn responsibility to amplify their voices. From the debut of our racial justice training for juvenile defenders in 2012, to the launch of Defend Racial Justice for Youth: A Toolkit for Defenders in 2019, to the inaugural cohort of the Ambassadors for Racial Justice, our 12-month leadership program, coming together on Martin Luther King, Jr. Weekend 2020, we are dedicated to equipping youth defenders with the resources they need to advocate for racial justice.

Today, we invite all youth defenders nationwide to join us as we continue to:

1. Confront our own implicit racial bias.

- We recognize that everyone has bias, even defenders who engage in career-long opposition to systemic oppression and state coercion.
- We will look internally to combat systemic racial injustice by acknowledging and dismantling our own racial biases. We will help our colleagues do the same.

2. Educate our communities.

- We will use history, data, and research to help our communities learn about the over-policing, over-criminalization, and school exclusion experienced by Black youth.

^[1] See Dylan B. Jackson et. al., *Police Stops Among At-Risk Youth: Repercussions for Mental Health*, 65 J. ADOLESCENT HEALTH 627, 629 (2019).

3. Argue against the racial injustices we see in our cases.

- We will make explicit arguments that insist upon racial justice at every stage of our clients' cases.
- We will encourage our fellow defenders to talk about the reality of race and the impact of racial injustice in their case advocacy by sharing sample pleadings, data, litigation strategies, and other resources.

4. Advocate for racially just policy reform.

- We will participate in legislative and systemic advocacy to advance racial justice.
- We will center the voices of Black youth and build coalitions with their communities.

5. Use our resources to prioritize racial justice.

- We will dedicate our time to writing racial justice arguments in our motions.
- We will use our creativity to become strategic, zealous advocates for racial justice in every aspect of our work.
- We will use our budgets to seek training and data collection that will advance racial justice.

6. Grow the community of defenders committed to racial justice.

- We will train a growing cohort of defenders to challenge racial injustice through legal advocacy in their cases and seek racial justice through policy and systemic advocacy.
- We will work hard to diversify our community of defenders and its leadership.

Sign up for [Defend Racial Justice for Youth: A Toolkit for Defenders](#) to access resources to help you take these actions in your community.

Apply to become a 2021 [Ambassador for Racial Justice](#). The Ambassadors for Racial Justice is a year-long training program that inspires enthusiastic, dedicated frontline youth defenders to assume leadership roles in developing strategies to combat racial inequities in their respective jurisdictions throughout the country. The 12-month program will (1) encourage and support defenders to challenge racial injustices through legal advocacy, (2) engage defenders in systemic and policy reform, and (3) equip defenders to facilitate difficult conversations about race. By creating a community of juvenile defenders committed to racial justice to share their challenges and successes, the program also hopes to (4) attract and retain a cadre of attorneys of color into the fight for youth justice. [Download the application](#).