

2/27/2014

Dear Community and Elected Officials,

210 million dollars for a new juvenile detention facility is more than a loud statement, it is a clear indicator that "Staying tough on Crime" is the primary focus and any prevention based alternatives that will help salvage countless of young lives are out. That getting tough on crime is a long term commitment towards more racial profiling, sentence disparities and marginalizing poor minorities. This new youth jail will end up becoming nothing more than an apparatus that strengthens the fabric that holds institutional racism in place, and we as a community need to do whatever it takes to prevent the city from continuing down this destructive road.

The supporters of this "new jail" project I am sure would articulate their stance from a race neutral perspective, then go on about how this new jail will be better equip to service troubled youth with more resources and better evidence based programs. One thing they will not be able to tell us is what is in place to prevent children of color from being over represented within this project in the first place! Because the fact of the matter is a new jail will need to be filled and kept that way to justify the quarter billion dollar tab, and good sense should tell us that gang ordinances, controlled drug buys, and bait car sting operations (which will be some of the tools used to maintain this new jail capacity) will not be occurring in Mercer Island, Bellevue or Magnolia, so there shouldn't be a question in our mind as to whose children they see filling the beds of this new jail project. Building a new Jail is more than laying a cement foundation and erecting steel barbed wire fences. It is a mechanism that reinforces a punitive mentality that disproportionately feeds black and brown children into its system, even though research has proven that black and brown children do not commit more crime than their white counterparts. But since they lack the resources needed to fight a system insulated by policies and get tough legislation it makes poor communities of color as easier for law enforcement.

The No New Jail Campaign, which is supported by the Black Prisoners' Caucus, the Village of Hope, The Peoples Institute, the YUIR and many other community organizations, is more than a radical approach towards confronting mass incarceration, it is a vehicle that is advocating for more prevention and intervention methods which can cultivate compassion, forgiveness and concern in the criminal justice system, especially for youth who are just now beginning to get a grasp on what life is really about. The 210 million dollars allocated towards this new prison can go a long way in impacting street crimes. Prevention- Is creating and supporting a jobs initiative for young teenagers that will provide job training, bonding incentives, and tax breaks for businesses to hire high school aged children dealing with real life issues. Easier employment options will give youth more choices than robbing, stealing and selling drugs. Intervention- Can be setting up job corps contract as a diversion program for youth whose crimes were financially motivated. This is a viable alternative to incarceration which can help the youth stay in school, make some money, acquire some applicable skills and avoid a long troubling criminal history.

As a child who spent a good amount of his childhood incarcerated because of financially motivated crimes, I was too young to work and not mature enough to care or understand about the consequences of my actions. What was missing for me and many other youth struggling with life hardships were alternatives to the choices we were making. Most children go to detention as troubled youth and come out as delinquents because of the environment and mentality that being locked up creates and if different more realistic options were made available it would of made a tremendous impact not only on the crime level, but gang recruitment and many other criminal choices young children were left to make under their dire and frustrating circumstances.

Our children have been growing up in the streets for decades trying to survive by whichever means are available, now they need to be shown how to live and we need to make sure they have that chance because as a community that is the duty we have inherited. If were unwilling to change the old ways of going about how we pursue the means of justice then there is no way we can honestly expect any different outcome other than what we have been receiving - inequality, discrimination and empty promises, all of which destroys the future of our children, not anyone else's.

Sincerely,

Kimonti Carter

President

Black Prisoners' Caucus – Clallam Bay