

Latino JUVENILE JUSTICE Network

Throughout the U.S., Latino youth are targeted for severe punishment at the hands of the juvenile justice system and in every stage of the system, including police stops, arrest, detention, waiver to adult criminal court, and sentencing. This unjust treatment creates a grim and devastating reality: broken youth, families, and communities. Disparate representation of Hispanic youth in the system is compounded by inadequate data collection and reporting, making Latino youth invisible in the system. These factors can result in unjust sentencing and unnecessary confinement when youth might be effectively diverted into community-based programs.

The National Council of La Raza (NCLR) is committed to addressing this dismal treatment of Latino youth in the justice system. It also recognizes that meaningful juvenile justice policy reform requires direct involvement of the communities most affected by it.

NCLR has created a project called the Latino Juvenile Justice Network (LJJN) from which Latino advocates can influence justice system reform and shape a brighter future for Hispanic youth, their families, and communities.

LJJN is a long-term, multistate juvenile justice reform effort based in Pennsylvania, Illinois, Washington, and Louisiana. It is a key partner of the MacArthur Foundation's "Models for Change" initiative, which seeks to develop a comprehensive working framework for a model juvenile justice system that can be replicated in other states. The formation of the LJJN allows NCLR affiliates and other local Latino community-based organizations

to collectively identify issues and approaches for juvenile justice reform specific to their county or state. Through its affiliate network and community partnerships, NCLR will build a Latino-specific model for reform that connects service providers to juvenile justice reform efforts to address four core issues:

- Disproportionate Minority Contact (DMC)
- "Adultification" and "criminalization" of Latino youth, which contributes to differential treatment
- Anti-gang laws targeting Latino youth and their families
- Increased funding for prevention and treatment programs and other alternatives to incarceration

"Latino youth are significantly overrepresented in the U.S. justice system and receive harsher treatment than White youth, even when charged with the same types of offenses."

¿Dónde Está la Justicia?
Building Blocks for Youth, July 2002

NCLR's LJJN, a catalyst for juvenile justice reform, is a focused approach for reaching the Hispanic community. LJJN intends to leverage the effective and promising work that is already taking place among service providers serving youth by implementing a combination of strategies to achieve juvenile justice reform including: advocacy; media outreach; community education and mobilization; and research and policy analysis. The ultimate goal of the project is to reduce the number of youth serving sentences for nonviolent offenses and improve outcomes for Hispanic youth in the justice system. The first phase of LJJN will take place during a 24-month period beginning in January 2006.

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