



RIGHT ON
JUSTICE



Voices of Youth in Chicago Education

This statement informed by VOYCE's youth leadership is endorsed by the following Right on Justice alliance members:

Adler University, Austin Coming Together, Blocks Together, Community Organizing & Family issues, Communities United, Enlace Chicago, Illinois Balanced And Restorative Justice, Lawndale Christian Legal Center, Nehemiah Trinity Rising, ONE Northside, Precious Blood Ministry of Reconciliation, Southwest Organizing Project, TARGET Area Development Corporation, The Mansfield Institute for Social Justice and Transformation, United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations (UCCRO)

December 15, 2015

Statement from Citywide Alliance of Over 20 Community Organizing, Faith-Based, Policy and Legal Groups, Universities, and Restorative Justice Practitioners on Chicago's Police Crisis

Chicago Youth Impacted by the Police Crisis Call for Immediate Actions from Chicago Elected Officials

In the week following the release of the video of Laquan McDonald's murder, over 25 Voices of Youth in Chicago Education (VOYCE) youth leaders held a safe space for young people to heal and process thoughts and feelings that the video brought. They shared their collective vision to enact justice so that their futures do not amount to 16 shots in 30 seconds covered up for 400 days. At this convening, youth leaders identified steps needed to ensure a safe and supportive school climate, safer communities and immediate steps to hold government systems accountable to stop being a threat to black and brown lives. Unfortunately the release of the Laquan McDonald video was only the beginning of a litany of accusations and video evidence being released that documents the brutality of the Chicago Police Department against people of color.

Laquan McDonald's life story and lived experiences resonates with hundreds of Chicago Public Schools youth. As a young person who had been raised in the foster system, and endured little to no protection against abuse and neglect, he had difficulty finding support to help him stay in school. He had recently begun attending an alternative school where he was finally engaging. And then he was killed. By the police.

Studies have shown that, "educational success is a potential positive counterweight to abuse, neglect, separation, and impermanence. Positive school experiences enhance their well-being, help them make more successful transitions to adulthood, and increase their chances for personal fulfillment and

economic self-sufficiency. ”¹ Laquan McDonald was not able to continue with his educational pursuits. Unfortunately for Laquan McDonald and 22,000 Chicago youth arrested annually by the Chicago Police Department, young people are more likely to be hurt by criminal justice intervention than helped.²

It is time for adult allies to lift the voices of these youth, and demand meaningful support and resources for black and brown young people so that they reach their full potential.

Often youth’s first interaction with the criminal justice system is inside schools, which often leads to years of criminalization. Right on Justice, an alliance of community organizing, faith-based, policy and legal groups, universities, and Restorative Justice practitioners, stand in solidarity with (VOYCE) youth leaders and demand:

- **Immediate transparency in data to track police actions (including calls, arrests, and contact with youth) in Chicago Public Schools and in our communities.**
 - Students who have been arrested are 50% more likely to drop out. In 2009, there were 4,597 school-based arrests of CPS students’ age 16 and younger. 78% were for minor offenses.³
- **That taxpayer dollars used for school safety offer services, interventions, and supports that do not criminalize young people. Funding in schools should be invested in social and emotional learning support, mental health services, and restorative practices rather than squandering money on tactics that punish without providing services that help.**
 - Historically, black and brown communities have not received the type of investments they deserve. Many of the few investments have not been in the education, employment, health, but rather in systems and structures that work to incarcerate and criminalize black and brown youth from our communities.
- **Full accountability from elected officials on the cover up and inaction around the murders of Laquan McDonald, Ronald Johnson, Philip Coleman, and Rekia Boyd and fully address the culture of corruption that continues to deny justice to thousands.**

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The ROJ alliance is comprised of over 20 community organizing, faith-based, policy and legal groups, universities, and Restorative Justice practitioners from across Chicago and its surrounding communities. ROJ seeks justice reinvestment through a racial equity approach in Chicago and beyond. Our mission is to halt the school to prison pipeline and end mass incarceration of low-income communities of color through community organizing and restorative justice philosophy and practices. www.rightonjustice.org

¹ <http://www.nga.org/files/live/sites/NGA/files/pdf/0711WEBCASTFOSTERCAREFACTSHEET.PDF>

² Chicago Mayor’s Office: A statement in September 2015

³ <http://voyceproject.org/research-findings-solutions/>

VOYCE is an alliance led by students of color from community organizations across the city of Chicago. VOYCE builds the power of students and young people to advocate for structural policy changes that expand racial justice and equal opportunity throughout public education, limits on exclusionary discipline practices at all publicly-funded schools, high-quality teaching and learning, and increasing the graduation rate for low income students of color.

www.voyceproject.org