

'Minority Youth, Inequities in Justice' event addresses racial disparity in youth discipline

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Black students in Missouri's public schools system are five times more likely than their white peers to receive an out-of-school suspension, according to a 2018 report by the ACLU of Missouri. Another report by The Sentencing Project in 2015 found Black youth in Missouri were almost five times more likely to be detained or committed than white youth.

The disparity in how minority youth are disciplined in the school and juvenile justice system is a deep-rooted problem in Missouri's education and justice system. In response, community groups got together to organize the first part of "Minority Youth, Inequities in Justice," a virtual forum that addressed this issue Wednesday night.

This forum is co-sponsored by League of Women Voters of Columbia-Boone County; Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc., Kappa Chi Omega Chapter; Boone County Children's Services Board; Mid-Missouri Civil Liberties Association; Minority Men's Network; and the NAACP, as part of Boone County's Journey Toward Inclusive Excellence.

Mahree Skala, a local member of the League of Women Voters and one of two forum moderators, said the idea behind this event originated in the league's Civil Liberties Committee and was suggested by Janet Thompson, a fellow league member and Boone County commissioner who worked as a public defender for many years.

"We hope the forum will contribute to the participants' journey by increasing knowledge of this important issue and inspiring them to take action through their relationships, work and volunteer work," Skala said.

Wednesday's speakers included Ranita Norwood, supervisor of student services with Columbia Public Schools; Ruth McCluskey, chief juvenile officer with the 13th Circuit Court; Sarah Johnson, a public defender with the Children's Defense Team in St. Louis; Asia Smith, a Battle High School student; and Steve Calloway with the Minority Men's Network.

They addressed topics such as:

- Columbia Public School District's implementation of professional development for teachers and administrators to combat discipline disparity, which includes equity and restorative practices.
- The four requirements for the Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention Act — deinstitutionalization of status offenders, removal from adult jail and lock-up, sight and sound separation of adult inmates and removal of racial and ethnic disparities — and the steps the 13th Circuit Court has taken to improve racial and ethnic disparities in the system, both locally and statewide.
- Children's Defense Team's work in the public defenders system.
- Smith's experience as a minority youth.
- The school-to-prison pipeline in Columbia Public Schools.

Seventy-eight people attended the forum, said Lauren Williams, community services manager for Daniel Boone Regional Library and the forum's second moderator.

The second part of the virtual forum, which will go more in-depth about how the community can help improve the situation, will take place at 7 p.m. Feb. 17. Community members interested in attending can sign up on the Daniel Boone Regional Library's website.

The organizations co-sponsoring this event have also compiled a list of background information and resources on the topic.

MORE INFORMATION

Report says discipline more likely for black students in Missouri

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I'm from Vietnam.

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