

PRESS RELEASE

Contacts:

Liz Sullivan, 646-342-0541, liz@nesri.org, <http://www.dignityinschools.org>

Marlene Sallo, 813-817-0163, msaloesq@msn.com

Public Dialogue on Human Rights and the School to Prison Pipeline

American Bar Association and Dignity in Schools Campaign host public dialogue on school safety and discipline

CHICAGO, Oct. 22, 2009 - In association with the Dignity in Schools Campaign, the American Bar Association Section of Litigation Children's Rights Litigation Committee is sponsoring a public forum to discuss discipline policies and practices that push children out of school, and explore how we can create safe learning environments where the human right to education is protected for all children.

The *Roundtable Dialogue on Human Rights and the School to Prison Pipeline* will take place on October 23 at Northwestern University School of Law from 3:45 to 5:15 pm. Michael Kaufman, Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs at the Loyola University School of Law will moderate a discussion on the school to prison pipeline between experts, activists and policy-makers that include Texas House Representative Dora Olivo, Alabama Family Court Judge Brian Huff, and Marcella Diana of the National Education Association.

Panelist Judge Brian Huff of Jefferson County Family Court helped develop a new School Offense Protocol adopted last week by the Birmingham school system to reduce school arrests, provide conflict resolution workshops and keep children in school.

"The [school to prison] pipeline is vast and includes arrests and incarceration for minor misdemeanor offenses that have historically been handled at the school administration level," said Judge Brian Huff. "It also includes the practice of 'pushing out' children from the educational system. As a result, children who may be labeled as 'difficult' will not receive the education they deserve and the chances of their ending up in the criminal justice system increases dramatically."

Dignity in Schools Campaign Co-Founder and Core Group Member Liz Sullivan said the upcoming open forum represents an opportunity to engage people in thinking about ways to counteract what she calls "an education crisis in the United States."

"We need to bring parents and youth together with educators, lawyers, and activists to combat this education crisis caused by excessive and abusive school discipline policies," Sullivan said, before mapping out an action plan on how to solve the problem. "We need to pass legislation and local district policies for positive alternatives, like restorative practices and positive behavior support, to strengthen and improve our education system and keep our kids in school."

Representative Olivo, a former educator and attorney who has been instrumental in the passing of several Texas House legislations based more on tolerance than discipline in schools, said the time to simply label education as a human right has passed—it's now time to provide for that right.

“We have to find a way to keep kids in school instead of on the streets,” Olivo said. “Some of these education policies [such as zero tolerance] have good intentions but not consequences; we need to inject more common sense into decision-making so that we have safe schools offering a good education.”

The public forum follows a full-day of discussion about establishing a model school code to be adopted by school districts and state legislatures that will, among other aims, dictate positive alternatives to current school pushout policies perceived by human rights advocates as systemic discrimination.

Roundtable Dialogue on Human Rights and the School to Prison Pipeline

October 23, 2009

3:45 p.m. - 5:15 p.m.

Northwestern University School of Law

Thorne Auditorium

375 East Chicago Avenue, Chicago, IL

Moderator:

Michael Kaufman, Professor and Associate Dean for Academic Affairs

Loyola University School of Law, Former School Board Member

Panelists:

Adilka Pimentel, Youth Organizer, Make the Road New York

Bernardine Dohrn, Director, Children and Family Justice Center, Northwestern University

Judge Brian Huff, Circuit Court Judge, Family Court of Jefferson County

Chandra Bhatnagar, Staff Attorney, American Civil Liberties Union

Representative Dora Olivo, District 27 Texas House of Representatives

Marcella Diana, Ed.D, Educator, National Education Association