STATEMENT BY YOUTH OF COLOR ON SCHOOL SAFETY AND GUN VIOLENCE IN AMERICA IN THE AFTERMATH OF THE MASS SHOOTING AT SANDY HOOK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

We can imagine the pain and suffering that the youth and families in Newtown, Connecticut are experiencing. As youth growing up on some of America’s deadliest streets, we are all too familiar with gun violence and its impacts. Too many of us have been shot and shot at. We have buried our friends and our family members. Nearly all of us have been to more funerals than graduations. **No one wants the violence to stop more than we do.**

But, we have also seen how attempts to build public safety with security systems, armed police and prisons have failed. **We want college prep, not prison prep.**

President Nixon declared the War on Drugs and enacted the first use of zero tolerance laws in communities. President Reagan expanded the War on Drugs and his Secretary of Education, William Bennett, enacted zero tolerance in schools. School shootings were used to expand these policies at the local, state and federal level, most famously by President Clinton following the Columbine shootings. For forty years, federal, state and local dollars have gone toward the massive build-up of juvenile halls, jails and prisons while simultaneously severe cuts have been made to our school and higher education budgets. Locally, these policies resulted in the takeover of school security by police departments and school resource officers.

**As a result, in communities of color throughout the nation, students now experience a vicious school-to-jail track.** Despite the fact that school shootings have overwhelmingly happened in white schools, youth of color have paid the price. We have been handcuffed and humiliated in front of other students and staff for “offenses” as small as being late to school; detained in police interrogation rooms at our school; expelled from school for carrying nail clippers, markers or baseball caps; and arrested – even in elementary schools – for fights that used to be solved in the principal’s office. With our backpacks searched and our lockers and cars tossed, at the end of a billy club or the butt of a gun, knees down-hands up, or face down on cold concrete or burning asphalt – we have experienced the true face of “public safety.” These policies haven’t protected us, helped us to graduate or taught us anything about preventing violence. They have taught us to fear a badge, to hate school and to give up on our education. **We understand too well that guns in anyone’s hands are not the solution. You can’t build peace with a piece.**

**Effective Solutions to School Safety**

The movement to end the school-to-jail track, mass incarceration and deportation of youth of color is our generation’s civil and human rights struggle. Throughout the nation, our efforts are pressuring school districts and state legislatures to dismantle unfair discipline practices that force youth out of school, and to move instead toward positive student supports that not only dramatically increase school safety but also improve graduation rates. The tragic shooting at
Sandy Hook Elementary School must not interrupt this progress or return us to policies and practices that are racist, inhumane and unjust.

**Specifically, we are calling on all federal, state and local officials to:**

1. **End Zero Tolerance** and other policies that take away school-based decision-making and force schools to suspend, expel and arrest students in order to be in compliance with the law or to receive federal or state funding.

2. **Eliminate willful defiance, disorderly conduct and other minor infractions** as punishable by suspension, expulsion, ticketing or arrest.

3. **Reject efforts to expand police and military in our schools** as well as razor/barbed wire, security gates, metal detectors, surveillance and increased use of handcuffs and police detention inside and around our campuses. Replace school police and school resource officers with intervention/peacebuilders and the other alternatives listed below.

4. **Reject efforts to increase criminal penalties, mandatory minimums, gun enhancements and the transfer of more youth into adult courts** that will unfairly target youth of color for extreme sentencing and decades of incarceration.

5. **Fund Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS)** – specific strategies educators can use to reward positive student behavior, hold students accountable for our actions in ways that keep us in school, cause self-reflection and growth, and improve our relationships with school staff.

6. **Fund Community Intervention/Peacebuilders in schools** – trusted community leaders who are trained to provide safe passage to and from schools; create a safety perimeter in and around schools especially during breaks and lunch; reach out to students who are regularly late or missing from school; work with youth who are acting out in class or on campus; prevent inter-group or inter-neighborhood conflict – often contributing to or stemming from neighborhood conflicts that, if unresolved, can lead to serious violence in the community; rumor control to prevent future violence and retaliation; run violence prevention, conflict mediation and restorative/transformative justice meetings; and make home visits to students who are struggling in school.

7. **Fund Restorative/Transformative Justice (RJ/TJ) in schools**, which develops the skills of students, staff and other community members in conflict mediation and problem solving, de-escalation of violence, and techniques to defuse bullying, harassment and disrespect. RJ/TJ involves students and others in solving problems such as truancy, fights, bullying, theft, intoxication, vandalism and failure to follow school directives without resorting to suspension, expulsion, ticketing and/or arrest. In addition, youth and staff learn skills that we can use to improve relationships and solve conflicts outside of school.
8. Support the development of schools as Community Centers open year around, after school and on weekends to extend the school day, build public safety, and increase student attendance and achievement through homework help, tutoring, college preparation, counseling and health/mental health care (many community schools have on-site health/mental health clinics), job training and placement, arts and recreation, even night school for parents and older family members. Schools that operate as community centers also increase family involvement in schools, leading to improved student relationships with parents/guardians and increased graduation rates.

9. Provide every student pre-school through college with a Metro/bus/public transportation pass to ensure we have transportation to and from school, while also providing unlimited access to essential resources throughout our communities including employment, housing, food, health care, etc.

10. Ensure that every young person on Probation or Parole and all youth coming home from lock-up are immediately enrolled in a quality education program, and end the illegal blocking of system-involved youth from schools and entire districts. In order to ensure immediate enrollment, ensure that everyone who spends 3 or more weeks detained or incarcerated leaves lock-up with a state ID, birth certificate, social security card, immunization records, medication (if needed) and connection to health/mental health referrals, updated transcript and test scores, and a voter registration card (optional). For undocumented youth, we must leave lock-ups knowing the risks of deportation especially for convicted people and with referrals for immigration assistance.

11. End the discrimination against undocumented youth, the cooperation of school districts and local law enforcement with Immigration and Customs Enforcement (including the Secure Communities Program), and eliminate barriers to all immigrant youths’ access to education and student supports from pre-school through college.

This is Why You Should Support These Recommendations:

1. The voice of youth and communities of color is usually absent from the debates on violence in America.

2. More than 96 percent (96.2) of school-based shootings in America have been caused by white shooters in overwhelmingly white schools and white communities. Yet, the policies that are created in response to these horrible incidents criminalize, push-out, prosecute, imprison and deport youth of color at much higher rates.
3. There is *little to no* recognition or support for youth of color who *are* victims of gun violence.

4. Zero tolerance and other harsh school discipline policies unfairly target youth of color.

5. Positive relationships and opportunities – *not guns* – create safe schools.

6. Schools look and operate more and more like prisons with harmful impacts on students.

7. Schools that are heavily policed have higher rates of school push-out and – as a result – lower graduation rates.

8. Police in and around schools are much more expensive than more effective school safety strategies.

9. Students who are pushed out of school are most often pushed into an inferior, substandard education, isolated in our local districts’ least resourced schools.

10. Students who are pushed out are more likely to be victimized by the violence of the streets.

11. School safety policies based on fear also exclude as volunteers and school staff many of the people who are in the best position to build and maintain safe schools.

12. Schools that are heavily policed also exist in communities that are heavily policed.
13. Officials have focused on harsh prosecution and punishment that also impact youth of color at much higher rates.

14. Guns are much more likely to kill unintended victims than dangerous targets.

15. Any gun control strategy has to address gun manufacturing, as well as how the guns get to our streets.

16. America’s addiction to guns corresponds with our reliance on armed law enforcement to solve all school and community problems.

17. There is a real and legitimate fear of law enforcement in poor communities and communities of color that must be addressed if we are ever to solve violence in our nation.

Data and Additional Support for Each Statement

1. The voice of youth and communities of color is usually absent from the debates on violence in America. Young people of color consistently experience higher rates of violence than white youth. Yet we are often excluded from conversations and solutions around violence prevention. We have been part of numerous press conferences where the media have quoted everyone except us. We have experienced the negative result of police and zero tolerance in schools, but we are not included in educational decisions on local, city, state, or federal levels.

If you had a Commission on the Status of the Black Community and only white people were appointed to serve on it, there would be an outcry from officials and media. The same would be true for a Women’s Caucus with only men in its membership. But every day, from city halls to the White House, adults discuss what youth are experiencing and decide what youth need without ever talking to us.¹

We are the experts on school and community safety. We need to be at the center of decision-making regarding policy changes that will impact our blocks and our classrooms. Silencing us keeps the bars up, the fingers pointed, the guns drawn, and the streets and our schools unsafe. No more incarceration without representation!

2. More than 96 percent (96.2) of school-based shootings in America have been caused by white shooters in overwhelmingly white schools and white communities. Yet, the policies that are created in response to these horrible incidents criminalize, push-out, prosecute, imprison and deport youth of color at much higher rates.

3. There is little to no recognition or support for youth of color who are victims of gun violence.

Among 10 to 24 year-olds, homicide is the leading cause of death for African Americans; the second leading cause of death for Latinos; and the third leading

¹ From The Brotherhood Co-founder, Jason Warwin, (Harlem, NYC).
cause of death for Native Americans/First Nations and Alaska Natives. Homicide rates among African-American males, age 10-24 are the highest in the nation - 51.5 per 100,000; 25 times higher than for (non-Latino) White males in the same age group (2.9 per 100,000).^2

When shootings occur in predominantly white schools and/or communities, the response is very different than when youth are shot in our neighborhoods. For example, when the Columbine and Sandy Hook shootings occurred, the media, mental health and child guidance experts rushed to the scenes, offered support to students and their families, and searched for answers – “How could this happen in America?” The assertion is that the youth who are shot are innocent and even the shooters are “troubled,” “bullied,” and/or “mentally ill.”

What the media and officials really mean is “How could this happen in white America?” Because, by comparison, our murders rarely get more than a mention in the homicide statistics. Often, we are not even named: “Shot – Black male, 16;” or “Found dead by handgun, Latino teen, presumed victim of gang rivalry.” Because our murders are rarely covered, they are also considered important, and mental health and other supports never arrive at our schools and streets to check on the wellbeing of survivors. Both the shooters and the victims are immediately discounted as “gangsters” and “monsters” – often without any evidence of this fact. No one searches for answers in our diaries, asks about our histories of abuse and trauma, or questions how such levels of violence occur in our families and communities. The assumption is that we are all violent – no wonder we die at such alarming rates. (In the past 3½ years, the Youth Justice Coalition, located on the border between South Central Los Angeles and Inglewood, has known 40 young people connected to the center who have been killed by community or police violence. Despite the fact that the organization has regularly notified the media and the public about the killings and the accompanying funerals, candlelight vigils and repasts, not a single journalist, elected official or mental health institution has ever appeared to offer support to the survivors or to get a more complete picture of the victim.)

In fact, in any search for coverage on the issue of gun violence in America, it is easier to come across statistics that frame young people of color as chronic perpetrators of crime and violence than to find numbers that tell the true story we already know: that we are the victims of gun violence at a higher rate than any other group in the nation, and our schools are one of the few safe spaces in our neighborhoods for both us and our families. For example, in 2010, African Americans represented 13 percent of the nation’s population, yet accounted for 49 percent of all homicide victims. The homicide rate for Black victims in the United States was 16.32 per 100,000. In comparison, the overall national homicide rate was 4.42 per 100,000 and the national homicide rate for whites was 2.66 per 100,000.^3

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^3 The Violence Policy Center ([www.vpc.org](http://www.vpc.org)) - a national educational organization working to stop gun death and injury.
We are stereotyped as criminals even when we are killed or injured. Just as when we are suspected of being the shooter, the assumption when we are killed or injured is that we were in some way guilty of wrongdoing – especially that we are “gang involved.” In fact, the sheriffs in Los Angeles County have used a term when shootings happen in our communities that they assume have victims who are connected to the streets – “NHI – No Humans Involved.” But nationwide in 2010, only 15 percent of Black homicide victims (420 murders) were reported by law enforcement to be gang-related; and only 29 percent were related to another felony. 4

Even when Trayvon Martin was killed by a Community Watch vigilante while walking home from the store with Skittles and Iced Tea, the media and officials spent weeks re-victimizing him by suggesting that he must have been the aggressor. Just as happens on the street, any increase of guns in schools – including the presence of police and military – will threaten our lives.

4. Zero tolerance and other harsh school discipline policies unfairly target youth of color.

Just like a prison, our schools have no tolerance for anything we do wrong. There is no recognition that family responsibilities, the stress of the streets and personal problems can sometimes get in the way of our ability to learn. Zero tolerance isn’t the way to run a school, where we are afraid to come because with one more absence we’ll get kicked out. Or where asking a question gets you sent to the office with a referral for defiance. Black and Brown youth first have to take little brothers and sisters to school on public transportation, because our mothers work the midnight shift, and we end up with handcuffs on our wrists for truancy when we’re a few minutes late to our own school. In middle class schools, they have counselors and student supports. In our schools it’s survival of the fittest. Poor, black and brown youth walk the streets, while rich and white walk the stage. Instead of having police and zero tolerance why not have real counselors and peacebuilders. Now that’s REAL school safety.

Mississippi’s out-of-school suspension rates are nine times the national average and overwhelmingly impact African American youth. In Holmes County, students are suspended for wearing the wrong color belts, undershirts and shoes or for wearing bangle bracelets, hoop earrings or bringing certain types of combs to school. Students are still paddled in Mississippi – yes, corporal punishment is still in the Mississippi schools! We are sent to detention for being late and sprayed with mace for fighting, or simply arguing intensely. When fights occur, we are treated like prisoners, the school is put on lockdown and everyone eats lunch without talking. In one of Mississippi’s largest school districts, Jackson Public Schools, only 4% of school-based arrests during the 2010-2011 school year were for behavior that actually threatened students, staff, or the school. In fact, the most common “offense” for one-third of all arrests on school grounds, was for “disorderly conduct.” 5

In Lawrence County, Mississippi, Black students are eight times more likely to receive an out-of-school suspension than White students. In Meridian, Mississippi, a Black male student in the 8th grade was put on Probation by a youth court judge for getting into a fight. Since then, he has estimated that he has gone back and forth between school and the juvenile court system at least thirty times. Any infraction, even some as

4 The Violence Policy Center (www.vpc.org) is a national educational organization working to stop gun death and injury.
5 U.S. Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, Civil Rights Data Collection (2009-2010)
minor as being a few minutes late to class or wearing the wrong color socks in violation of the dress code, was counted as a violation of his probation and resulted in immediate suspension and incarceration in the local juvenile detention center. 6

In New York City, the NYPD School Safety Division arrested or ticketed more than 11 students each day in schools during the 2011-12 school year. More than 95% of arrests were of Black or Latino students; 74% were of males; and 1-in-5 arrests were of students between the ages of 11 and 14. 7

In a recent survey of 954 middle and high school students in the Los Angeles Unified School District, youth reported on the police activity we have experienced in our schools:

• Police handcuffing students inside and outside school - 81.3%
• Police stopping and frisking students in and around school - 64.9%
• Metal detectors to enter school - 31.6%
• Police and/or security doing locker searches - 49.8%
• Police and/or security doing backpack searches - 71.3%
• Dogs are brought into and/or around school to search for drugs - 47.2%
• Students are searched or disciplined for having markers - 58.4%
• Students are searched or disciplined for having tagging on their backpack or notebooks, or for having a “piece” book (with their drawings) - 51.8%
• Police arrest students for fist fights - 67.9%
• Police arrest or pull students out of class for talking back to teachers - 37.5%
• Police and/or security claim students are in a gang - 43.3%
• The school has a “room” for detaining students—like a police holding room – 39.1%
• Police push you to leave school at the end of the school day when you are hanging out at school - 40.1%
• Police counsel or support students - 17.7%
• Police help solve conflicts without punishing or arresting people - 16.5%
• The school is surrounded by high security fences, barbed wire and/or security gates on the windows - 36.7%
• The school has no open grass or trees - 47.6%
• The school, police or security have stopped you from speaking out or trying to organize for changes (such as passing out flyers) - 19.9%
• The school police or security have stopped you from having a rally or marching out of school - 21.5% 8

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6 ACLU, Mississippi Coalition for the Prevention of Schoolhouse to Jailhouse, Advancement Project and NAACP, Handcuffs on Success, the Extreme School Discipline Crisis in Mississippi (January 2013)

Recently in Los Angeles, youth marched 50 miles from Sylmar Juvenile Hall to the Norwalk site of the nation’s largest Fusion Center that consolidates data from domestic police surveillance. Along the way, they surveyed 1,642 residents. When asked what are the three most important things L.A. could do to prevent violence and crime in our communities and schools, only 1.7 percent of the people surveyed said to expel and/or suspend more youth from school; 1.8 percent said to lock more youth up; 2.3 percent said to add more gang injunctions; and 8 percent said to hire more police. But, 73.4 percent said to give youth access to summer and after school jobs; 43.8 percent said to hire “former gang members” to run prevention programs and build truces; and 73.3 percent said to open youth centers after school and on weekends.  

The California Endowment surveyed California voters and found that people “strongly believe that more mental health services and better emergency response training for school staff are the best strategies for preventing violence in schools.” When asked whether hiring a school counselor or a police officer would be more effective at preventing violence, surveyed voters chose counselors by more than two to one (67% to 26%) over police. 

But, in California in 2010 – the most recent year that statistics have been released - there was one counselor for every 810 students. Nationally, the data is also bad where on average each school counselor is expected to work with more than 400 students. The American School Counselor Association recommends that at least one counselor is needed for every 250 students. But that is for the traditional role of checking on students’ grades and making sure they have what they need to graduate and get into college or a career. This doesn’t account for the counseling needs of students to address the much more difficult problems we face such as homelessness, violence, bullying, substance abuse or family separation through foster care or incarceration.

Similarly, in New York City public schools, there are 5,100 School Safety Agents who are employed and trained by the New York Police Department (NYPD). By comparison, there are only about 3,000 guidance counselors.

6. Schools look and operate more and more like prisons with devastating impacts on students.

Within hours of the Sandy Hook shootings, schools in our communities were already increasing the presence of police and security. In Grenada, Mississippi, a high school installed metal detectors. When a student asked why, she was told by school administrators that the equipment was added

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10 Fairbank, Maslin, Maullin, Metz & Associates for California Endowment, 2012
because of the Newtown shootings. In Los Angeles, LAPD Chief, Charlie Beck, implemented increased police patrols and check-ins inside and around schools – including elementary schools. The community, students and parents were not consulted prior to making either of these policy changes.

We are already getting searched in our classrooms and hallways by police and drug-sniffing dogs; most of our schools have more police and Probation officers than guidance counselors; police raids and lock-downs of our campuses are common and increase the violence and fear; school security, school police and local police often increase conflicts in school or misread the roots of conflict; police and other school staff are using language, actions and policies that are racist, homophobic, anti-immigrant and sexist - increasing violence against individuals and groups of students; school staff no longer controls school discipline, so police regularly arrest people for things better handled at schools; our school newspapers are censored; we have little or no say in the running of our schools or the choosing of curriculum; student, teacher and parent solutions to school safety are usually not supported; and we still get a white-washed version of history, language and culture that adds to our anger at school and to inter-group tension and violence.

7. Schools that are heavily policed have higher rates of school push-out and – as a result – lower graduation rates.

Across the U.S., schools with School Resource Officers (SRO) have nearly five times the rate of arrests for disorderly conduct as schools without an SRO, even when controlling for poverty. 12 The Los Angeles Unified School District (LAUSD) has the largest school police department in the nation. Arrests and referrals to the juvenile court system in LAUSD schools are much higher than districts without police – including at least 85,000 citations and arrests in recent years – most of which were for normal youth behavior, not serious threats to other students, staff or the school, and included close to 3 times as many citations distributed as New York City school police, the only school district larger than LAUSD. Between 2004-2009, 47,000 tickets were issued by the Los Angeles Police Department and the Los Angeles School Police Department (LASPD) for truancy alone. An additional 37,500 tickets and arrests took place between 2009-2011 by just the Los Angeles School Police Department for incidents as minor as truancy, disturbing the peace, vandalism and petty theft. 13

Students and school staff can work together to create safety without relying on armed police. In Mississippi, youth at Nollie Jenkins Family Center are studying a group of leaders called “Scholars of Peace” that once lived in Timbuktu, Mali. These scholars scripted many Arabic manuscripts that talked about peace keeping, astronomy and many other topics. Most importantly, the manuscripts talked about creating a culture of peace. The Scholars kept the level of violence down throughout the region through peaceful resolution to conflict. We can learn from our ancestors how to decrease school and community violence without the violent tactics used by law enforcement.

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12 Justice for Families, Families Unlocking Futures: Solutions to the Crisis in Juvenile Justice (September 2012).
8. Police in and around schools are also much more expensive than more effective school safety strategies.

On average, the cost of a single rookie police officer - with salary, weapon, uniform and car – is $165,000, at least three times more than a peacebuilder/community intervention worker, and more than twice as much as an experienced school counselor or social worker.

Once we get arrested, the cost differences are even more extreme. For example, the California Department of Correction and Rehabilitation (CDCR) spends, on average, $261,000 a year to lock up one youth in a cell – the same cost as sending three youth to Harvard University with full tuition, room and board, books and expenses - $62,950 per student. The L.A. County Department of Probation spends $96,000 a year for one youth in a local youth prison (Probation camp) despite the fact that the county facilities have been under federal Department of Justice investigation for substandard conditions and miss-education for more than 15 years. For the same amount that L.A. County spends to lock a youth up, nearly two students could attend Stanford University all expenses paid ($58,846 per student).

Seventy-four percent of the youth locked up and 81 percent of the adults locked up by the state of California are rearrested within three years of their release. When our schools fail to graduate half the students, they are threatened by state takeovers, charter school conversions, even closings. But when the police, court and prison system fails, they get even more money to fix themselves.

In Los Angeles, just 1 percent of the funding for the LAPD, Los Angeles County Sheriffs, District Attorney’s Office, City Attorney’s Office, County Probation Department and courts is $100 million dollars, enough to fund 50 youth center in our schools and communities, each with a $500,000 a year budget, open 3pm – midnight after school and on weekends, year around; 500 full time peacebuilders/intervention workers, and 25,000 youth jobs. That doesn’t even include any funding from L.A. County’s 65 other police departments including the 65 other police departments in the county. 14

In the 1970s, before the massive expansion of the prison system, California had one of the best K-college school systems in the world. But in the last 33 years, the state build 21 prisons and only 3 universities, and now, the state is number one in prison spending, number 47 in K-12 education spending, and last – 50th – in spending for college and universities. Despite that history, California is investing billions more to build additional jails and prisons.

9. Students who are pushed out of school are most often pushed into an inferior, substandard education, isolated in our local districts’ least resourced schools – alternative, continuation and Probation schools with

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14 Youth Justice Coalition, Cross the Line, Why L.A. Must Challenge the Idea that Police Budgets are Untouchable in order to Support Youth and Build Safer Communities (First Release June 2011; Updated, December 2012) Available at www.laforyouth.org.
far less mental health and special education (IEP) classes, little enrichment (sports, music and arts), and none of the college prep classes necessary for entrance to a universities. These are the very resources that provide college and career options necessary for the economic survival and progress of all students, without which, many of us are trapped in poverty - surviving on sweatshop wages, forced into the military, or hustling on the streets until we end up as slave labor within the prison system or as a mortician’s paycheck.

10. Students who are pushed out are more likely to be victimized by the violence of the streets.

Injury, incarceration and homicide rates disproportionately impact out-of-school youth.

Nationally, youth without a high school diploma are eight times more likely to go to prison - 68 percent of the people in prison have no high school diploma; and in some states as many as 80% of the people who are incarcerated have not graduated. Once in the prison system, we are also blocked from many educational, housing and job opportunities, making our success even more difficult. This means greater poverty for both us and our families. The system isn’t working to prepare us to return home, isn’t making communities safer, and is bankrupting our states’ abilities to provide education, jobs and community-based youth programs that would reduce violence and crime. Lock ups also cause increased “gang” violence and race hatred, drug dependency, and mental illness.

Even more serious than incarceration, when we are on the street, we are in much more danger. In fact, school is by far the safest place in our communities – we are even more likely to be killed or injured in our homes than in our schools. And the streets – where most out of school youth spend most of our time – is the most likely place for Black and Brown youth in the U.S. to be killed.

Since 2008, more than 530 youth have been killed in Chicago with nearly 80 percent of the homicides occurring in 22 African-American or Latino communities on the city’s South, Southwest and West Sides. The largest number of deaths are of youth between the ages of 18 and 24 – the age at which we face the lack of hope and opportunity for out-of-school youth. The numbers of youth deaths and shootings in Chicago have not been significantly reduced despite efforts by Chicago politicians and police, including the Community Alternative Policing Strategy (CAPS), the concentration of officers in neighborhoods with high homicides, the “Culture of Calm” program instituted in so-called “high-risk” public schools, and the efforts of well-known organizations like the group CeaseFire. Community members, youth advocates and youth themselves consistently say that it is nearly impossible to address violence without addressing “extreme racial and economic segregation, lack of job opportunities, limited access to higher education, violence-plagued and under-funded public schools, and a general feeling of hopelessness and marginalization among many Chicago residents.”

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15 “School or the Streets: Crime and America’s Dropout Crisis,” Fight Crime: Invest in Kids
17 The Chicago Reporter, 2012
11. School safety policies based on fear also exclude as volunteers and school staff many of the people who are in the best position to build and maintain safe schools.

Barring access of people with court convictions to work or volunteer in schools serves as a barrier to family involvement, although numerous studies have proven that students do better in school when our families are present. In addition, these restrictions eliminate the very people who are in the best position to build safer schools and communities. Unlike police, many people with system experience understand best why troubled youth are struggling in school and can help us stay in school and avoid the traps of the streets and incarceration. They also often have the community relationships and respect needed to solve and prevent future school and neighborhood violence.

12. Schools that are heavily policed also exist in communities that are heavily policed.

On our way to school in the morning, surrounding our schools during the day, after school, nights and on weekends, we are constantly targeted by racist policies ranging from police stop-and-frisks also known as “bump-ups;” to surveillance from camera and helicopter-filled “ghetto bird” skies; to saturation policing on our public transportation, in our housing developments and on our streets. We live in a constant state of fear and paranoia.

Large numbers of law enforcement in schools and communities have also contributed to the labeling of students as “gang members.” In California, youth as young as 10 are entered onto the statewide CalGang Database without notifying them or their parents, without an opportunity to appeal, without clear rights to removal and – once labeled – are often excluded from positive school opportunities and treated differently by both school personnel and school police. Understandably, many youth are pushed away from school altogether at a time when we need the safety and positive opportunities schools have to offer more than ever. But, similar databases modeled after CalGang have been established throughout the nation.

13. Officials have focused on harsh prosecution and punishment that also impact youth of color at much higher rates.

Since the Sandy Hook shooting, many officials are again pushing for harsher court penalties for youth. In the past, laws including gun and gang enhancements, mandatory minimums, and transfer of youth into adult court have disproportionately impacted youth of color and have led to extreme life sentences for youth across the nation, even in cases where no one was injured or killed. In California, African American youth are 18.3 times more likely and Latino youth five times more likely to get a sentence to Life Without the Possibility of Parole (LWOP) than white youth. Pennsylvania leads the world in the

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18 Tracked and Trapped, a report released by the Youth Justice Coalition, exposes who is on the CalGang Database including youth as young as 10 without rights to notification, appeal, removal and resources available at http://www.youth4justice.org/ammo-tools-tactics/yjc-reports.
sentencing of youth to LWOP where nearly 500 youth (currently serving LWOP) will die behind bars unless laws change. Recent U.S. Supreme Court cases have found that the sentencing of youth to Life Without the Possibility of Parole for non-homicide cases, and in cases where youth are under 14 constitutes cruel and unusual punishment. Tens of thousands of youth are also serving sentences so long that they will not live to see their first Parole hearing, although they are not technically serving LWOP. *Mandatory minimums and gun and gang enhancements that are being proposed since the Newtown shooting are guaranteed to further criminalize youth of color and will lead to extreme and inhumane sentencing of us and our family members.* The United States represents 5% of the world’s population, but has 25% of the world’s prison population. And, the United States remains the only country in the world that sentences youth to die in prison.

14. Guns are much more likely to kill unintended victims than dangerous targets.

The National Rifle Association is recommending that teachers be armed to protect students. Senator Barbara Boxer has introduced legislation to have the National Guard and additional armed police at schools across the country. In rural Arizona, unpaid volunteers with the Sheriffs Department are patrolling the schools with guns, for free. 19

*For all of us who have grown up around guns, the idea that guns make you safer is crazy. America is addicted to guns, and that addiction is killing us:*

- The U.S. government estimated there were 310 million firearms owned by civilians in 2009 - nearly as many weapons as the total population. 20
- The U.S. has the highest gun ownership in the world – there were 89 guns for every 100 people in America, compared to six guns per 100 people in England. 21
- There are more than 30,000 firearm deaths in the U.S. each year. About one-half are suicides, one-third murders. 22
- Over a million people have been killed with guns in the United States since 1968 when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy were assassinated. 23
- If you compare the U.S. to the other 22 populated, high-income countries, 80% of all firearm deaths happen here. 24
- From 1976 to 2005, 77 percent of murder victims between the ages of 15-17 died from gun-related injuries. 25

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19 New York Times, 01/17/13  
20 Congressional Research Service: “Gun Control Legislation”  
22 Federal Bureau of Investigation: “Crime Trends Additional Information About Selected Offenses”  
23 Children’s Defense Fund  
24 Richardson, Erin G., and David Hemenway, “Homicide, Suicide and Unintentional Forearm Fatality: Comparing the United States with Other High-Income Countries, 2003” *Journal of Trauma, Injury, Infection, and Critical Care,* June 2010
• An estimated 41% of gun-related homicides and 94% of gun-related suicides would not happen if no guns had been present.
• Gun related suicides are at their highest rate since 1998; nearly 20,000 people in 2010.\(^{26}\)
• Guns in the home lead to higher rates of homicides, suicides and unintentional shootings. \(^{27}\) This includes increasing the chance of a suicide by three to five times than in homes without guns. \(^{28}\) A simple fight between family members turns into a murder; a bad night with too much alcohol turns into a suicide; and childhood game turns into an accidental killing.
• An average of nearly 350,000 guns are stolen every year. So guns bought for home and business protection also end up on the streets in significant numbers.
• And numerous school shootings – including the most recent murders at Sandy Hook Elementary School – occurred when people took guns purchased “legally” by their own family members. \(^{29}\)
• Across the nation, gun homicides are down to their lowest levels since 1981. **But, what’s not being reported is that gun injuries are going up.** \(^{30}\) No doubt, there is a lot of good work happening by youth and intervention workers to hold down peace in many communities, and that is saving lives. But, we think there’s another reason why homicide is down, but attempted murders and other gun injuries are up – medical advances are keeping more people alive. It’s more important to look at injuries, not just homicides.

15. Any gun control strategy has to address gun manufacturing, as well as how the guns get to our streets.

Traditional gun control strategies will do little to impact gun violence in poor communities and communities of color.

**Here’s what we do know – no one in the hood makes guns.**

Until a few years ago, and for the past four decades when Los Angeles was known as the “gang capital of the world,” L.A., Orange and Riverside Counties also made up the “ring of fire” – the world’s leading manufacturer of guns – including handguns. At one point, the FBI reported that 86% of the handgun deaths in the United States were caused by a handgun manufactured in Southern California. And the gun makers have admitted that, “a lot of guns disappear between the factory and the market place.” Where was the

\(^{25}\) National Institute of Justice
\(^{26}\) Annenberg Foundation – FactCheck.org
\(^{27}\) Harvard Gun Control Center
\(^{28}\) Kellermann, Arthur L. et al., “Suicide in the Home in Relation to Gun Ownership,” New England Journal of Medicine, 327(7)
\(^{29}\) U.S. Dept. of Justice, Bureau of Justice Statistics, Guns and Crime
\(^{30}\) Annenberg Foundation – FactCheck.org
accountability for the people who make the guns and rake in billions of profits? As the 11, 12 and 13 year-olds get life sentences or a six-foot grave, the gun manufacturers make billions in profits.

Similarly, the ports and train yards of Los Angeles County continue to export more weapons than any other place in the world. The horrific increase in gun violence in Mexico is directly connected to guns made in the U.S. More than 47,000 people in Mexico have been killed in the past six years. And in the past five years, Mexican authorities have recovered 68,000 guns that have been traced back to the United States – including some to law enforcement and the military.\(^\text{31}\)

And the situation is getting worse. Gun manufacturing is up. The number of guns manufactured each year in the U.S. grew from 2.9 million in 2001 to nearly 5.5 million in 2010. Another 2.84 million foreign-made guns were imported in 2010.\(^\text{32}\)

In 2008, the firearms industry in the U.S. made 31 billion, up 12 billion from 2008 earnings.\(^\text{33}\) In 2011, U.S. companies manufactured more than 6.1 million guns, nearly doubling what was produced in 2007 – 3.7 million.

We agree with President Obama’s and advocates’ plans to ban assault weapons and increase background checks. But, this will do little to impact the bloodshed on our streets. Black and Latino youth are rarely killed by so-called “legal guns,” and many of our states already have strict gun laws.

**To save our lives, this is what’s needed:**

- Saturate our communities with jobs. Make it easier to find a job or a youth center than to find a gun. *It’s no mystery why we’re on the street – we need to eat.*
- Fill every neighborhood and school with peacebuilders that can build truces and cease fires between groups, reduce rumors and retaliations, and take guns from the streets and redirect people to opportunities.
- Create school and community education programs to reduce America’s addiction to guns.
- Address Post Traumatic Stress Disorder among people who have experienced extreme violence to reduce our perceived need to be armed to protect ourselves.
- Each shooting costs as much as 17 million dollars in police investigation, court and incarceration costs – and that doesn’t even include first responder, medical and burial expenses. (Overall, gun violence costs taxpayers $100 billion a year.\(^\text{34}\)) For every decrease in the attempted murder and homicide rates, redirect the cost savings back to our communities for increased jobs and positive solutions (called for in this statement.) After all, if we’re building and maintaining peace in our schools and communities, we should benefit not officials and law enforcement.

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\(^{32}\) Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives: “Firearms Commerce in the United States Annual Statistical Update 2012”

\(^{33}\) 25 statistics on the Firearm Industry, Huffington Post, 12/14/12

• Increase gun buy-back programs where people can turn in guns – no questions asked – for food or cash. Destroy all guns that are collected.
• Stop the manufacturing and sale of handguns.
• Stop the ability of gun manufacturers to donate to political campaigns, and – until that’s possible – expose where officials get their money. In 2012, 96 percent of the 3 million dollars donated to political campaigns by gun lobbyists went to Republicans.\textsuperscript{35}
• Go after people who use their ability to pass the background check to buy weapons and ammunition from gun stores and gun shows and re-sell them to the streets.
• Eliminate sales of weapons and ammunition at gun shows, swap meets and online.
• Hold gun manufacturers responsible for homicides and injuries in the same way that cigarette manufacturers are held accountable and have to pay for prevention, intervention and health care costs.
• Address police use of deadly force and replace law enforcement’s over-reliance on guns with better negotiation skills and non-lethal technology.

16. America’s addiction to guns corresponds with our reliance on armed law enforcement to solve all school and community problems.

We know first hand that the military technology used to arm America’s aggression and wars outside the U.S. are also used on our streets and in our schools. Police in communities of color are armed with helicopters, battering rams, militarized SWAT units and high-powered assault weapons, because the unfortunate mentality is that they are engaged in an urban war against civilian populations. Fontana Unified School District police in Fontana, California purchased 14 Colt LE6940 rifles last fall, and they were delivered the first week of December — a week before the shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School. The school police already carry revolvers. Over the holiday break, the district’s 14 school police officers received 40 hours of training on the high powered assault rifles that the school police bought with fingerprinting fees. Police claimed that the rifles were needed to protect students, although the decision was made without the request by students or parents, and without any school district hearing or community oversight.\textsuperscript{36}

Meanwhile, with all the money spent to hire and arm school resource officers and school police, there’s no funds left for the resources that do work to build safer schools.

17. There is a real and legitimate fear of law enforcement in poor communities and communities of color that must be addressed if we are ever to solve violence in our nation.

\textsuperscript{35} 25 statistics on the Firearm Industry, Huffington Post, 12/14/12
\textsuperscript{36} Flaccus, Gillian, Fontana, California, Schools Get High-Powered Rifles, Associated Press, 01/24/13
For youth of color, having police in and around our schools scares many of us away. A lot of our parents felt they had to teach us at a young age how to protect ourselves when getting stopped by the police – not because they expected us to be criminals, but because they knew the police would treat most of us like we were criminals. U.S. law enforcement – in the streets, in schools, and in detention centers and prisons – has a long and continuing record as an oppressive force that has specifically targeted, harassed, assaulted and taken the lives of far too many youth of color. From 2007-2012, law enforcement in the County of Los Angeles killed at least 232 community members at least 195 of who were people of color, mostly black and brown youth.\(^{37}\) In 2012, 120 Black people were killed by the police in the United States, one every 36 hours, 29% of who were youth under the age of 21.\(^{38}\)

The fear, mistrust, and trauma caused by police violence is real and painful for us. From Trayvon Martin in Sanford, Sean Bell in New York City, Devon Brown in Los Angeles, Oscar Grant in Oakland, Michael Nida in Downey, and Kendrec McDade in Pasadena to thousands of other victims of police killings and their families – too many of us have experienced the horrific effects of gun violence at the hands of law enforcement officers.

*In signing this statement, we challenge President Obama, Vice President Biden, state and local officials, and all law enforcement to do what’s right – not what’s political.*

*To sign on as an individual and/or organization, go to –*

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1HmhQenxfNGEQiAtaNzZ--zEBIzZrI5S3Rrj42sB5wRA/viewform

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\(^{37}\) Los Angeles County Office of the Coroner – Homicide Data

\(^{38}\) Malcolm X Grassroots Movement, 07/16/12