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Boys and Young Men of Color National Youth Table Statement

1. Introduction

As young people of color from across the country, we have come together in response to President Obama's call to action to improve the lives of boys and young men of color. The Youth Table represents the voices of tens of thousands of organized boys and young men of color throughout the United States, as well as a network of over 200 agencies working with youth across the country. We have been organizing for quality education, good jobs, healthy communities, and just treatment by courts and police. We are African American, Latino, Asian and Pacific Islander, and Native American. We are male, female, transgender, heterosexual, and gay. We stand together to express our commitment to ending the inequities experienced by boys and young men of color. We are honored to be included in this unprecedented initiative to improve the lives of all boys and young men of color and view this opportunity as a long awaited and necessary call to action.

As boys and young men of color who are caught in the crossfire of failed policy, broken promises, and deferred dreams, we are deeply committed to the success of this initiative. Based on the surveys we collected, our work in our communities, and our own unique experiences as young people of color, we offer the following three guiding principals, that we believe will help ensure that these initiatives truly improve the lives of boys and young men of color.

First, ensure the active participation and leadership of boys and young men of color at all levels of decision-making. In other words, nothing for us without us. No one understands the plight of young people of color better than we do, because we live through it daily. Our voices, experiences, ideas, and solutions not only need to be included in a meaningful way, they must be central to the conversation and process.

Second, invest deeply in programs and strategies that build the power of communities to eliminate the structural inequities that impact boys and young men of color. Contrary to the messages that are often propagated about us, the

challenges we face are not because we are lazy, violent, or apathetic. They are due to hundreds of years of oppression and the persistence of inequity in our communities, including under-resourced schools, lack of jobs, and discrimination from police and courts. Traditional one-on-one mentorship programs alone cannot address these issues. The focus must be placed on eliminating these long standing inequities. Youth and community organizing are especially needed because they empower us to take collective action and transform us as individuals and communities at the same time. We take seriously our responsibility for strengthening our communities; we also call on our country's leaders to join us in addressing the real barriers to equal opportunity that still surround us.

Finally, recognizes the diversity of boys and young men of color as well as the importance of empowering and improving the lives of girls and women of color as well. Boys and young men of color have complex identities beyond the black and brown binary. Often excluded from the conversation are our indigenous/Native American, Asian Pacific Islanders, and South East Asians brothers. In addition, expanding the frame of “masculinity” to include queer and transgendered identified boys and young men of color is a critical shift that will ensure a more inclusive set of strategies. We also recognize that we cannot improve the lives of boys and young men of color if we leave behind our sisters and mothers.

In addition, we have reviewed the recommendations that have been developed by the White House and philanthropic leaders. We are particularly pleased to see the commitment to addressing school discipline and support for youth organizing. Based on the feedback we received from young people across the country, we offer the following recommendations for strengthening and ensuring the success of this important work:

- **Support Youth Organizing:** Youth organizing is a vital strategy for improving outcomes of boys and young men of color. It transforms the lives of individual young people, builds lifelong leaders, and addresses root causes of inequity. We hope that philanthropic leaders will recognize youth organizing as one of the anchor strategies for this work and will support it accordingly to address a range of issues.
- **Build a Leadership Pipeline:** The organizations in the Youth Table engage many talented and dedicated young men of color in working to improve our communities. Often there is little support for these young men to grow and develop their leadership. We hope that My Brother's Keeper will be an opportunity to build a comprehensive leadership pipeline that supports young men of color who are engaged in their communities to become the next generation of community organizers, faith leaders, teachers, elected officials, and fathers that our communities need.
- **End the School to Prison Pipeline:** We are pleased to see the emphasis on fair and equitable school discipline in the recommendations. Still, far too many boys of color are being criminalized at an early age. We believe that this initiative could make a transformational impact on the lives of young men of color by supporting restorative justice approaches to school discipline, working

to limit police presence in schools, and advocating for legislation to address disparities in school discipline rates.

- **Support Undocumented Young People:** Many young men of color in this country are undocumented. Lack of services for undocumented people and deportations are tearing our communities apart. Stopping deportations of innocent people and non-violent offenders and increasing educational, social, and health supports for undocumented people will strengthen immigrant communities.

We honor the President's call to action to improve life outcomes for boys and young men of color in this country. We are more than ready to answer this call. As young people of color, we feel the urgency of addressing the inequities in our communities every day. Based on the surveys we collected, the long standing work our member organizations have been doing in our communities, and our own unique experiences as young people of color, we have developed a comprehensive set of recommendations for policy makers and funders to improve the lives of boys and young men of color. We believe that we are the leaders of both the present and future and we stand united and ready to join with all our allies to eliminate barriers to opportunity and create strong and healthy neighborhoods for ourselves, our brothers, our sons, and our whole communities.

2. Philanthropic Recommendations

Opportunities to Expand the Frame

Missing from the conversation on how to improve the outcomes for boys and young men of color are four critical framing issues: 1) the role of youth leadership in moving the initiative forward, 2) the need for systemic and structural change, 3) intersecting identities (race, gender, sexuality, class, etc.) and 4) a gender and sexuality lens. Acknowledging and integrating these framing issues moving forward will shift and broaden the conversation about how to best address the needs of all boys and young men of color.

Youth Leadership

Talking about improving outcomes for boys and young men of color will generate solutions. Engaging us about improving outcomes for our lives will generate the best solutions. At all opportunities, talking with us must be prioritized over talking about us. We need to be engaged as thought partners in initiatives designed to improve our lives. We need to be invited to talk about our lived experiences and engaged in conversations about solutions in all of the sector tables and at all levels of the initiative. Thoughtful engagement of us will require more than photo-ops, public relation events, and having a seat at a meeting. We must be provided leadership opportunities that are supported by adults. As a result of being acknowledged, seen, and listened to, we will be invested and empowered.

Systemic and Structural Change Needed

Traditional one-to-one mentorship is valuable and needed. We need caring and involved adults to guide and support us through life. However, providing mentors

can't be the only nor the major focus of recommendations to improve the outcomes of boys and young men of color. Beyond mentorship, we need solutions that address institutional racism, racial profiling, inadequate and under-resourced schools, homophobia, and political, economic and social oppression. Deep systemic and structural change is what is needed to transform the educational and employment outcomes for us. Criminal justice reform, school discipline reform, dismantling the schoolhouse to jailhouse pipeline, public safety and health are issues that can only be addressed through policies and collective community organizing efforts.

Intersecting Identities

Boys and young men of color have complex identities beyond the black and brown binary. Often excluded from the conversation are our indigenous/Native American, Asian Pacific Islanders, and South East Asians brothers. Our ethnic and racial diversity points to particular needs and circumstances necessitating a closer and nuanced approach. If we are sincerely committed to lifting up all boys and young men of color in this country we must take into consideration commonalities, differences, and an "intersectional" perspective. Intersectionality takes into account all the facets of our identity, such as being both black and gay, or Native American and disabled, or South Asian and undocumented. Using an intersectional lens allows services to effectively address all aspects of our identity and the needs that may arise.

Boys and young men of color face barriers that are exponentially magnified by being one or more of the following: queer or trans identified, undocumented, involved in the criminal justice system, in foster care, homeless, and/or being a teen or young parent. Undocumented boys and young men of color face additional hardships including not being eligible for financial aid to pursue higher education and being marginalized from employment opportunities and critical health services. Formerly incarcerated youth and young men of color often struggle securing safe housing and employment, reintegrating into school, and accessing counseling and medical resources. Youth aging out of foster care often feel left hanging without a safety net and much needed transitional age youth services. Homeless youth struggle with permanent housing and stability. Teen and young fathers struggle to provide for their families without affordable and reliable childcare.

Gender and Sexuality Lens

Expanding the frame of "masculinity" to include queer and transgender identified boys and men of color is a critical shift that will ensure a more inclusive set of strategies. Outcomes for boys and young men of color are dire when it comes to access to higher education, employment, health and wellness, and life expectancy. Outcomes become exponentially more challenging for those of us who identify as Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Questioning, and Intersex (GBTQQI). Queer and transgender identified boys and young men of color have amongst the highest rates of suicide, face relentless bullying in our homes, schools, and communities, and lack the support of strong allies and services that address our particular social, emotional, and health needs. Creating safe spaces to address gender identity and sexuality with a focus on gender means broadening the definition of "what a man is," how masculinity is defined and enforced in our families, cultures, and society. This broadening goes beyond breaking down familiar stereotypes to challenging the gender binary and

widening the lens to look at the intersections of gender and sexuality.

Recommendations for Philanthropy

The following recommendations address three out of five critical intervention points identified by the White House: a) Interactions with the criminal justice system, b) Pathways to college and career, including school discipline reform, and c) Ladders of opportunity and support.

1) Invest in Youth Organizing

Invest in youth organizing groups, networks, and alliances that are already doing work to advance outcomes for boys and young men of color, our families, and our communities by addressing systemic and structural barriers. Youth organizing is an especially powerful approach for young men of color because it allows us to take collective action to address the root causes of issues in our communities while at the same time supporting us as individuals in building the skills and sense of agency and power we need to become successful adults and community leaders. Youth organizing groups are winning campaigns to eliminate barriers to opportunity in our communities such as ensuring college preparatory classes for all students, addressing school discipline disparities, providing free transportation to school for low-income students, providing healthy food options in schools and neighborhoods, and protecting the human rights of immigrants. At the same time, these groups are providing young people of color with social and emotional support, leadership training, and helping us develop a critical analysis of the issues in our communities. Funders who are committed to improving outcomes for young men of color should see youth organizing as a primary strategy and fund it accordingly. Support should be provided for a comprehensive leadership pipeline for young men of color graduating from youth organizing groups to support their continued community leadership.

2) Replicate Restorative justice models/practices

Elevate and invest in the expansion of Restorative Justice Practices in our schools. Restorative justice practices in our schools help mitigate problems by addressing and repairing problems while keeping boys and young men of color outside of the juvenile justice system. Restorative justice practices ensure accountability and facilitate healing by addressing the harms. We understand the importance of and are committed to upholding safety for all young people, and just as importantly, responding appropriately and holistically to incidents and conditions where safety is violated or compromised. We do not believe that pressing charges and sending us into the juvenile justice system serves, in any way, to repair the harms. Conversely, we believe engagement with the juvenile justice system often perpetuates and exacerbates the pervasive culture of unchecked harassment and bullying that exists. Most concerning to us is that prosecuting boys and young men of color will actually deepen the wounds and harms, further exposing and burdening us to another environment and institution in which our needs and concerns will be neglected, our physical, emotional, and mental health safety placed at increased risk. Restorative justice practices are a strategy towards demolishing pipelines to prison for all young people. Restorative justice practices facilitate individual and community healing and accountability, and work to protect boys and young men of color, who have the

highest inequitable rates of contact, from entry and engagement in the juvenile justice system.

3) Fund Comprehensive Youth Centers

Increase funding for and replicate comprehensive youth centers in communities with high percentages of boys and young men of color. Comprehensive youth centers function as one-stop shops where we can access academic tutoring, career counseling, college preparation (support with S.A.T.s, writing admission statements, help with financial aid applications and scholarships), and job skills (job searches, resume and cover letter writing, and interview skills and practice). Comprehensive youth centers provide programming in areas of community health, education and career, media, arts, and culture, youth leadership, and youth justice while offering us safe alternatives to street and community violence. Comprehensive youth centers provide leadership opportunities and organizing skills to engage us in the betterment of schools and communities. They promote health and wellness by offering education on prevention and early intervention, sexual health education, exercise classes and nutrition programs, and culturally appropriate mental health services in the form of group and individual counseling with Trauma Informed care/approaches. With comprehensive youth centers we can positively impact the lives of more boys and young men of color, our families, and our communities by addressing our needs and keeping us out of the school-to-prison pipeline.

3. Policy Recommendations

Criminal Justice Reform

Boys and young men of color are disproportionately represented in the criminal and juvenile justice systems. It is imperative to address racial disparities in law enforcement contact and confinement. We support the following strategies to address this issue:

- Eliminate mandatory sentences, reverse “three strikes you’re out laws,” and create more discretion for judges to provide alternatives to incarceration.
- End policies and practices that subject Black, Latino, and Native American individuals to more severe sentences than white individuals who commit a similar crime.
- Provide re-entry programs that smooth the path to employment, education, and community service.
- Allow for the expungement of records.
- Repeal laws that permanently deny offenders the right to public housing, voting, scholarships, running for office, and the like.
- Stop expanding the for-profit prison system. No one should have a financial stake in other people being incarcerated.
- Create and steer state and county policies and funding streams in order to establish Positive Youth Development (PYD) based juvenile justice systems. PYD is a strengths- and assets-based approach that engages youth and families in a meaningful way and provides effective and culturally competent community based services, support, and opportunities for youth who are in or coming out of the system.

- Reform the juvenile and criminal justice system to end the charging of youth as adults, provide re-entry services, and make education support services available within institutions.
- Create pathways other than incarceration for lesser offenses.
- End the practice of housing juveniles in adult jails and prison facilities.

Education

Education is a critical gateway for breaking the cycle of generational poverty. Policies and practices must be pursued that will eliminate the school-to-prison pipeline that results in far too many young people of color beginning their contact with the criminal justice system at an early age. High drop-out rates among boys and young men of color are often a reflection of unmet learning needs. Under-resourced schools that rely on zero tolerance policies also lack the resources to provide access to highly qualified teachers and support services. College and career pathways that would ensure we are prepared for life after high school are sorely missing. Moreover, the promise of education as the great equalizer has fallen short as evidenced by the disproportionate college going rates of low-income youth of color, and in particular young men of color, in comparison to our more affluent and white counterparts. Financial barriers stand in the way of being able to afford costly college tuition and books at all levels, from community colleges to four-year universities. This burden is amplified for undocumented youth who are ineligible for financial aid assistance. Technical training and vocational schools are also out of reach for many of us struggling financially. We are forced to choose between going to college or working to help support our families, often deferring our dreams to ensure basic living necessities are met. For teen and young fathers, affording quality childcare is an additional financial barrier. College and university retention rates are even more deplorable. We propose the following strategies for addressing these issues:

- Teaching and Learning
 - Promote school curriculum that reflects young people’s cultural history in an accurate and fair manner.
 - Require the teaching of relevant life skills content including financial management, civic participation, independent living, etc.
 - Support assessment measures that take into account different learning styles and are not exclusively test-driven.
 - Promote multiple pathways to success, including college, technical trade schools, and internships. Each pathway should respect a student’s skills and interests and not direct a student towards a single career pathway—college versus trade schools, for example—based on race or income level.
 - Create and sustain public schools as vital community resources that function as centers of opportunity in distressed neighborhoods.
- Increase access to expanded learning opportunities via after school programs, youth employment opportunities, mentoring, etc.
- Dismantle the School-to-Prison Pipeline
 - Enact federal legislation that requires school districts, states, and federal government to collect and report school discipline data on an annual basis and require states and districts applying for federal grants

- or waivers to address high suspension, expulsion, and arrest rates, as well as disparities by race and other characteristics
- Eliminate the use of Zero Tolerance policies.
 - Replicate sustainable school transformation as the leading model for school reform and education as a constitutional right.
 - Require that school staff be trained in the theory, principles, and strategies of evidence-based social and emotional learning, culturally responsive instruction, classroom management, trauma informed instruction, and positive approaches to discipline.
 - Increase in-school support for youth that is proactive instead of punitive. Examples include the hiring of more school social workers, guidance counselors, and youth development specialists instead of police officers.
 - Increase federal resources available to school districts to implement positive alternatives that reduce suspensions and arrests of students and racial disparities in school discipline.
 - Ensure that any studies on the use of police in schools examine the full impact of school-based policing on school environments—including the impact on student engagement, the ways that students feel criminalized by the presence of police and metal detectors, and any increases in referrals to law enforcement, ticketing or arresting of students—as well as the effectiveness of other staff deployments (such as counselors, community workers, etc.) rather than police or school resources officers.
 - End the School-to-Prison Pipeline, a system that promotes social control of poor young people of color and funnels them into the prison industrial complex and replace it with strategies rooted in restorative justice in which young people are treated with dignity and respect.

Workforce

Limited employment and career options for young men of color are widening the income gap across the nation. We are caught in an employment catch-22 situation where we can't secure employment because we don't have work experience. Paid training, summer jobs, year-round youth employment opportunities, and career exploration opportunities are limited. Employment available to us is often low wage, part-time with unreliable schedules and no real opportunities for upward mobility. The nature of these jobs makes attending school prohibiting. Although they provide training, unpaid internships are a hardship on us because we can't afford to volunteer our time. Access to paid training and employment opportunities are essential to breaking the persistent cycle of generational poverty. We support sustainable strategies that connect youth with relevant work experiences to help them gain the credentials and connections that will facilitate their entry into family-supporting careers.

- Increase employment readiness opportunities and eliminating employment discrimination and barriers for system-involved youth.
- Expand private internship opportunities that offer paid work experiences with companies that provide appropriate supports to the interns and potential for long-term employment.
- Establish a corporate tax credit of up to \$4,000 for each six-month, paid

internship offered to low-income young adults that results in employment.

- Increase number of Americorps service opportunities for priority populations, especially young men of color.
- Increase the funding to local communities to provide funding for summer and year-round employment for youth ages 16-21.
- Raise the Federal Minimum wage and promote companies that pay living wages.
- Promote efforts to “ban the box” regarding previous confinement from public and private hiring processes where previous criminal conviction is not relevant to job function.

Public Safety

Interpersonal and institutional violence is claiming the lives of young men of color at an alarming rate across the country. Ensuring the safety of our families and communities is a human rights imperative. Boys and young men of color live under the constant threat and trauma of violence in our neighborhoods and schools. Our traumatic experiences often go unrecognized and untreated resulting, in chronic stress and depression. The repeated loss of friends and family members weighs on our emotional and mental health. Gun violence is one of many stressors stacked against us. Gun violence in our communities is rampant, making public spaces like parks and routes to and from school unsafe. Poor school safety negatively impacts our attendance and school performance. Safety should be one of the highest priorities for increasing outcomes for young people and their communities. We support the following approaches for addressing this issue:

- Ensure that living and learning environments are safe in order to reduce physical harm, emotional trauma, and truancy.
- Empower residents to take leadership for creating and sustaining safe communities.
- Ensure that public services such as fire, police, and sanitation are responsive to community requests for service.
- Reform foster care, screening foster parents much more thoroughly and making sure the motive for serving as foster parents is not money.
- Support the repeal of stand-your-ground laws across the country.

Health

As a result of institutional barriers and cultural stigma, boys and young men of color are less likely to access life-saving health services. There is also a critical need to provide culturally appropriate access to quality mental health services to address the repeated cycles of trauma experienced throughout our lives.

- Ensure that systems that interact with young men of color use a trauma informed lens to prevent treating people as if they are broken or bad instead of in need of healing.
- Increase mental health support in schools and local communities impacted by racial, economic, state, and interpersonal violence. For example pursue legislation that extends victims of crime funding to peer counselors that work with victims of community violence to make sure they have access to culturally competent and approachable counseling.
- Providing mental health and grief counseling for children and youth who have

lost friends and family members through violence.

Sustainable Families and Communities

Strong families and communities are made possible by informed and engaged citizens. Policies must be pursued that support parental involvement, volunteer service, stable support services, civic engagement, and community organizing. Various barriers prevent young men of color from engaging in these opportunities, including but not limited to laws that create unnecessary barriers to fully participating in the building of their families and communities. Being financially strapped limits our access to opportunities for higher education, transportation, health, and employment to name a few. Not having sufficient bus fare becomes an added burden when public transportation is the only way to get to and from work and school. We support the following strategies to promote stronger family, civic, and community engagement:

- Pass comprehensive immigration reform for the well being of entire families.
- Pass the 2001 version of the DREAM Act to provide residency to millions of undocumented youth. This version provided access to financial aid and also, included community service, such as Americorps and VISTA, as alternatives to military service to qualify for the DREAM Act.
- Support funding for programs that promote civic engagement and community organizing.
- Expand public funding for 21st Century Community Learning Center's and other comprehensive youth and community centers.

4. About the Youth Table

The Youth Table was formed as part of the private sector initiative for boys and young men of color, which is working in conjunction with My Brother's Keeper. The Youth Table is co-facilitated by the Funders' Collaborative on Youth Organizing (www.fcyo.org) and the Movement Strategy Center (www.movementstrategy.org). Its primary purpose is to ensure the voices of boys and young men of color are included in efforts to improve their lives. In order to ensure the engagement of large numbers of boys and young men of color in a short period of time, the Youth Table primarily sought to engage national networks of organizations that are led by and represent young people of color and are already working on issues to improve outcomes for and address inequities facing boys and young men of color. Organizations that have participated are listed below. Organizations interested in participating in the youth table should contact mbkyouthtable@gmail.com.

- Alliance for Education Justice, National
- Black Organizing for Leadership & Dignity, National
- Black Youth Project 100, National
- Blocks Together and Illinois Juvenile Justice Commission, Chicago, IL
- BMe, National
- Brothers, Sons, Selves Alliance of The California Endowment, CA
- Building Health Communities, Statewide Youth Steering Committee of the California Endowment, CA
- California Center for Civic Participation, CA
- Community Justice Network for Youth, National
- Dear Black Men, Detroit, MI
- Dignity in Schools Campaign, National
- FFLIC, New Orleans, LA
- Harriet Tubman Center / YOUTH VOICE, Detroit, MI
- Kids Rethink New Orleans Schools, New Orleans, LA
- NAACP Youth and Student Division, National
- National Coalition of Young Leaders, National
- National Network for Youth, National
- Native Youth Alliance, National
- Padres y Jovenes Unidos, Denver, CO
- President's Youth Council of The California Endowment, CA
- RYSE Youth Center, Richmond, CA
- South East Asian Resource Action Center, National
- Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), Albuquerque, NM
- Task Force for Racial Disparities, Chicago, IL
- Urban Underground, Milwaukee, WI
- YouthBuild USA, National
- Youth Power, Detroit, MI