



The State of Black Girls in New York State

Introduction

In early 2019, four 12-year-old girls of color were subjected to sobriety tests, strip searches, and/or suspensions for refusing to disrobe in a Binghamton, New York middle school. The basis for this humiliation was an adult staff member who felt that the girls were giggling too much and being “hyper and giddy.” The traumatization that these children experienced led over 200 community members to pack a school board meeting in solidarity with the young girls. This horrific incident brings a spotlight to the many ways that Black girls are criminalized in their educational settings and adultified – or perceived and responded to as more adult-like, excluded from the social construction of childhood – with their needs often left out of the popular narratives around both the school-to-prison pipeline and women’s rights.

New York State must shift to recognizing Black girls’ joy, including their acts of resistance, as an extraordinary asset.

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Black girls across the state of New York face challenging barriers, including racism, sexism, transmisogyny, homophobia, poverty, and economic inequity, that threaten their ability to live self-determined lives or access opportunity.

While Black girls continue to persevere and demonstrate incredible brilliance despite structural violence, careful attention must be paid to what must be dismantled in order to make New York State more equitable and just.

Around the same time as the incident in Binghamton,¹ the Office of the Governor of the State of New York released a report on the status of women and girls. The report outlined key investments and commitments to improve the opportunities available to girls in the state.² In particular, access to computer science and technology in public schools, access to menstrual hygiene products in grades 6-12, and school-based mentoring programs. Despite these important commitments, we know that without an intersectional analysis explicitly naming the systems that converge in the lives of Black girls in particular, any efforts to improve the lives of girls will fall short.

This year, New York and its local governments will be working to recover from incalculable loss and an unprecedented disruption to schooling while facing a financial crisis. Looming cuts on the state level mean local districts may cut services or programs for young people at the same time as remote learning exacerbates inequality. Advocates and government leaders must listen to the knowledge of Black girls produced through navigating systems of power and oppression in their daily lives, including through their acts of defiance, creativity, and survival.

Decision-makers must work with young people to address structural inequities and take action to reform systems and meet the needs of those at the margins.



Part I: Education & Criminalization

The public invests in the public education system to function as a protective factor, supporting young people through caring relationships, high expectations, and opportunities for learning. However, as education becomes bound with criminalization, a system that is meant to support is too often intensifying the marginalization of Black girls. **Punishing institutions of the state, like the juvenile justice and policing systems, and nurturing institutions, like the education system, instead come together to criminalize, stigmatize, and limit the life chances of Black girls.**

Schools can support young people's development and strengthen factors that increase their life chances, but the absence of care extended to Black girls and hyper-exposure to punitive practices fuels systemic inequities and disproportionately pushes Black girls out of school and further into the margins. Initiatives and recommendations too often ignore the complexity of systemic and interlocking forces at work in education, neglecting the ways girls are multiply marginalized and consistently criminalized for the ways in which they navigate through structural inequalities.³

There has been mounting scrutiny for schools' reliance on harsh disciplinary practices over the past decade, specifically critiquing 'zero tolerance' discipline like suspensions and expulsions.

Research and government initiatives have established attention to the needs of boys of color often neglecting to attend to the experiences and needs of girls of color, specifically Black girls who are overrepresented across all categories of school discipline and are made to endure a unique standard of arbitrary acceptable school-based behavior.⁴

Educational research has consistently shown that the strongest predictor of academic achievement is active academic engagement, drawing into question strategies such as suspension that remove students from their opportunity to learn.⁵ The use of suspension and expulsion has also raised civil rights concerns due to strong and consistent evidence that students of color are over-represented among those who are so disciplined.

According to data obtained by GGE from the New York State Education Department, school districts outside New York City imposed out-of-school suspensions on more than 70,000 students in the 2018-19 school year — an average of at least one student a minute, every hour of the school day according to the New York Equity Coalition.⁶

Schools impose the most disproportionate discipline on Black female students; a report from the New York Equity Coalition explains that elementary and middle schools outside of New York City were nearly eight times as likely to suspend Black female students as their white female peers, and in New York City the district was nearly 11 times as likely to suspend Black female elementary and middle school students as their white female peers.⁷

According to the most recently available national Civil Rights Data Collection, there were 2,203 school expulsions in New York State during the 2015-2016 school year: while Black girls represented 8.6% of all girls enrolled in school they made up 32.7% of all expulsions of girls.⁸

Studies that examine girls' experiences suggest that girls of color are being disciplined for reasons that differ from their male peers. In particular, girls are more likely to face discipline for failing to meet dominant white cisgender expectations of femininity.⁹ Black girls in particular are more likely to be disciplined for "talking back" and being "unladylike,"¹⁰ and are also more likely to be arrested in their schools for being "disrespectful" and "uncontrollable."¹¹ In addition to experiencing their own gender-specific forms of policing, Black girls are also disciplined for behaviors such as disruption, defiance, and fighting. Many of these infractions are subjective, and determined by the opinions of school teachers and administrators.

Often neglecting attention to girls' experiences, like survivorship or impact of gender violence, this punishment of girls as a form of classroom management is a state-sanctioned way to control girls and limit their access to opportunity. **A healing-centered and restorative framework for school communities would instead cultivate respect for the creativity and dignity of Black girls and girlhood, and inspire action to remedy inequities that motivate resistance.**¹²

In the fall of 2020, the Solutions Not Suspensions Coalition, a statewide coalition of organizations advocating for education justice of which GGE is a part, called on the Governor, Board of Regents, and State Education Department to bring about a statewide moratorium on school suspensions during the 2020-2021 school year. As safe, healthy schools are suspension-free schools, this moment calls for bold demands.

Advocates contend that students who have been excluded from school are more likely to fall behind academically and become distanced from supportive relationships, subsequently pushing students out of school where they are then uniquely targeted by the criminal legal system. Others contend that schools create militarized conditions for students, where students of color are constantly subject to security systems and profiling by school administrators and school police, and are disciplined and monitored in ways that create a punitive, hostile environment.¹³

Across New York State, school districts utilize exclusionary and punitive school discipline practices in a variety of forms, some resorting to expulsion and others utilizing police intervention through school-based school resource officers or municipal police departments. Researchers also contend that the increasing presence of police officers has translated to more criminalization and arrests of students at school, where the presence of police officers who are authorized to criminalize and arrest students leads to the inevitable criminalization and arrest of students.¹⁴ **Taken together, schools have not only failed to address girls' needs but also punished them for acting out in response to compounding forms of violence in their lives.**

In June of 2020, the Minneapolis Public School Board made movement history by adopting a resolution to disband school policing. Since then, districts across New York State have been having conversations about police-free schools. Two weeks after Minneapolis, the Rochester City Council voted to make police-free public schools a reality for the young people of Rochester.¹⁵ Then, in late August, the Plattsburgh City Council unanimously voted not to renew the School Resource Officer contract between the city and district.¹⁶ School Districts like Syracuse, Jamesville-DeWitt, Massena, New Paltz, Kingston and many others have also been reported as part of the national police-free schools momentum.¹⁷

The Governor's August 2020 guidance book for the New York State Police Reform and Reinvention Collaborative, released as part of Executive Order 203 requiring each local government in N.Y. State to adopt a policing reform plan by April 1, 2021, goes as far as to ask the question of "Should law enforcement have a presence in schools?" but does not advance the progressive leadership this moment demands.¹⁸

A 2019 report from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) revealed that 14 million students across the country are in schools with police but no counselor, nurse, psychologist, or social worker.¹⁹ While the report alleges New York State clearly underreported police presence to the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC), there were still more police and security officers than social workers, with New York State operating well above the School Social Work Association of America's recommended ratio of 250 students to one social worker.

Falling short to address policing and its harmful impacts on child development will continue to undermine health and educational equity for Black girls and their communities across New York.

Part II:

Sexual Violence Compounds Educational Inequity

In January 2019, three Black girls and one Latina student were subjected to unlawful sobriety tests and strip-searches for appearing "hyper and giddy" while leaving lunch at their Binghamton, New York middle school.²⁰ The girls were each asked to remove articles of their clothing by the school nurse, and were subjected to offensive comments about their breasts and physical appearance.²¹ By April, the nation's oldest civil and human rights law office, the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, filed a lawsuit on the girls' behalf.

The lawsuit stated that the girls were subjected to violations of their 4th and 14th Amendment rights, violations to their right to a free and appropriate education under the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA), and violations of Title VI of the Civil Rights Act. The lawsuit alleges, among other things, that the girls were targeted for this humiliating experience because of both their race and gender, and stereotypes associated with Black women, Latinas, and girls.

The staff at the Binghamton middle school did in fact make comments rooted in historic race-based and gender-based stereotypes in front of the girls, including stating that the girls had “attitudes” and that they were “disrespectful,” presumably for laughing or for questioning the unlawful searches.²²

These stereotypes facilitated school-sanctioned sexual violence and are not limited to this one middle school in Binghamton.

According to research commissioned by the American Psychological Association, Black youth in particular are viewed to be much older than they actually are and, according to research by the Georgetown University Center for Poverty and Inequality, as a result of these beliefs, Black girls are not afforded the protections of youth and notions of childhood innocence.¹⁶

These beliefs are not innocuous, the decision-making of adults in schools, as evidenced by the staff at Binghamton East Middle School, have detrimental impacts on the ways that Black girls are able to access education in New York State and live free of the fear of sexual or gender-based violence.

The girls from Binghamton all “felt uncomfortable returning to school because their trust in school officials had been violated. They felt embarrassed, humiliated, and targeted for unwanted attention.”¹⁷

Over one year later, the girls, now entering high school, are quoted as saying that because the district continues to deny their experience, they still do not feel comfortable attending school.²³

In 2017, GGE released *The School Girls Deserve Report*, the outcome of a participatory action research project conducted through listening sessions with 120 participants aged 9-23 across New York City.²⁴ The examples of interpersonal violence that the young people reported included but were not limited to: sexual harassment, racial harassment, Islamophobia, and control of their gender expression and identity. Our research showed that approximately one out of three of the vision session participants reported experiencing some form of sexual harassment in school. **For girls across the state, attending school is not a source of joy and promise, but instead a place to be treated harshly or treated suspiciously by the adults charged with their care.**

Adults’ practices of routine surveillance and hyper-scrutiny which rely heavily on the absence of consent culture and the presence of subjective understandings of appropriate behavior often target girls of color, especially Black girls, for discipline or punishment.

National-level research finds that 60 percent of Black girls have experienced sexual assault before the age of 18.²⁵ In order to end child sexual assault, abuse, and gender based violence, we understand solutions within the spectrum of preventing violence before it begins and offering supportive, non-coercive, voluntary services for survivors.

There is overwhelming evidence documenting the effectiveness of comprehensive sexual health education, particularly education that the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists (ACOG) cites as embracing “community-centered” efforts.²⁶

Curricula that teach students about gender and power are more effective at protecting young people than those that do not.²⁷ However, according to the Sexuality Information and Education Council of the United States (SIECUS), only one state in the country has a health education curriculum that mandates that students are educated about consent.²⁸

New York State, in fact, does not currently require comprehensive sexual health education (CSE) in public schools. This means many schools do not provide any sexuality education and when they do, it is too often exclusionary, discriminatory, inaccurate, and stigmatizing.

According to New York State's 2019 High School Youth Risk Behavior Survey results, 15% of Black girls reported experiencing sexual violence, 11% reported experiencing sexual dating violence, and 9.2% reported experiencing physical dating violence.²⁹

An audit by the New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) documented only 42% of the state's school districts taught about sexual harassment, with only 28% teaching about sexual assault or rape.³⁰ Further, GLSEN's 2017 New York State Snapshot reported that "most lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) students in New York experienced anti-LGBTQ victimization at school," inclusive of homophobic remarks, negative remarks about gender expression and transphobia, with only 33% of students who reported incidents saying it resulted in effective staff intervention.³¹ New York State waffles on adopting CSE just as research links social and emotional competencies developed in CSE programs to improved physical and mental health outcomes, as well as to healthy and satisfying relationships, and respect for gender identity and bodily autonomy.

The nexus of schools and state-sanctioned gender-based violence is further complicated by the stationing of police in schools.

While there is little transparency on the full scope or prevalence of police sexual misconduct, research indicates that police sexually harass and assault women and girls with alarming frequency.³² As one example, analysis of a New York City youth survey conducted by the CUNY Graduate Center found that 40% of the young women surveyed had experienced sexual harassment by police officers, and LGB youth were twice as likely to have experienced negative sexual contact with police.³³

In 2018, when BuzzFeed released thousands of records of NYPD misconduct cases, GGE filtered through documentation of school safety agents engaging in sexual misconduct, such as wrongful searches, simulating sexual gestures, engaging in sexual activity on school premises, digital harassment and harassing remarks.³⁴ **It is with this context that we make the argument that the work to win police-free schools is work to end gender-based violence.**

Public schools should be one of several venues to prevent sexual violence and abuse. The state must work with districts and invest in the resources and services that provide healing, emotional support, housing, and advocacy for survivors of gender-based violence. It is critical to ensure affordable, safe, and stable housing for youth survivors of gender-based violence. Researchers identify homelessness as the greatest predictor of involvement with the juvenile justice system, and with a national estimate of 40% of homeless youth identifying as LGBT, LGBT youth experiencing homelessness are especially targeted for policing and incarceration.³⁵ Further, the racial disparities in youth homelessness contribute to the overrepresentation of youth of color incarcerated, especially LGBTQ youth of color. **This means, in combination with ending youth incarceration, New York must address the specific needs of LGBTQ youth of color, homelessness and growing access to stable housing.**

Part III: Family Regulation & Criminalization

Multiple systems converge to hyper-criminalize Black girls in New York State. In other words, agencies and actors advance and create processes of making a person or peoples or certain behavior illegal, or criminalizable.

Work to broadcast phenomena such as but not limited to the “sexual abuse to prison pipeline” or “foster care to prison pipeline” explains the ways girls of color, especially Black and Latinx young people, are punished for their response to traumatization and a myriad of historic, structural, and institutional system failures. LGBTQ+ girls and youth of color are overrepresented in these two systems of child welfare and juvenile justice as a result of compounded structural racism and LGBTQ stigma.³⁶ Further, LGBTQ youth of color appear to stay longer in the systems and are overexposed to discrimination and violence compared to other groups of youth.³⁷

Again, the adultification of LGBTQ children of color leads to their exclusion from the least restrictive interventions or hyper-exposure to punishment through systems. Essentially, in this web of youth criminalization is the family regulation system and family policing.

According to one of the nation’s most recognized law offices dedicated to addressing the issues arising from the juvenile justice and child welfare systems; “[f]oster youth, particularly girls, are targeted by sex traffickers, and the criminalization of sex work can funnel these victims of modern-day slavery into the criminal justice system.”³⁸ The groundbreaking report, *The Sexual Abuse to Prison Pipeline: The Girls’ Story*, made clear that sexual abuse is one of the primary predictors of a girl’s entry into the criminal legal system.³⁹

The research overwhelmingly points to a need to prevent young people from ever experiencing sexual violence and to care for survivors rather than invisibilizing them through criminalization. Yet New York State continues to ignore the unmet social, emotional, or material needs of young people, especially Black youth, and then punishes those same young people for their own victimization.

New York State must hold itself responsible for each family it chooses to entangle itself in as facilitated by child welfare systems, and for each child it removes from their family. The state must also be responsible for the immediate and long-term consequences of those actions.

Nationally, one quarter of the children placed into the foster care system are projected to be targeted by and enter the criminal legal system within two years of leaving foster care.¹⁸ As another example, in New York City 57.1% of young people who were in both foster care and the juvenile justice system experience adult incarceration within six years of exiting care, as compared to 14.7% of all NYC foster alumni.⁴⁰

Even though Black children (under 18) make up only 15% of the New York City population, they constitute 53% of the 9,000 children in foster care.⁴¹

Further, a November 2020 survey commissioned by the New York City Administration of Children’s Services (ACS) reported LGBTQAI+ youth are overrepresented in foster care, representing more than one out of three young people, are more frequently youth of color, and more likely to be placed in group homes or residential care and less likely to be placed in family-based care.⁴²

The pandemic has raised the issue of educational neglect calls during remote learning, with school staff responding to student absences from remote learning programs by contacting the State Central Registry (SCR).⁴³

Communities have amplified that throughout the COVID-19 crisis families have encountered a litany of roadblocks to connecting children to remote learning.

Hundreds of thousands of parents statewide – disproportionately Black and Latinx parents – experience devastating barriers to employment because of the SCR when there is no child safety concern. At the end of 2019, despite overwhelming support from the legislature, Governor Cuomo vetoed legislation to reform the SCR. As allegations of neglect are often the direct result of the absence of access to adequate child care, shelter and medical care, refusing SCR reform is a choice to punish family poverty.

The child welfare or family regulation system and the juvenile legal system overlap with the legal category of “status offenses,” meaning offenses that are applied to a class of people, often meaning young people. These are primarily activities deemed unlawful due to the person’s age, and would not be illegal if performed by an adult. Over several years New York State has adopted reforms to PINS, or “Persons in Need of Supervision,” including the end of PINS detention. However, reforms continue limited out-of-home placements prior to court disposition in foster care settings. This is referred to in statute as “pre-dispositional placements.”

From January to September 2020, girls represented 71% of all PINS pre-dispositional placements, demonstrating a unique gendered overrepresentation in this particular kind of youth control.⁴⁴ Youth of color represented 95% of PINS PDPs in all of New York State, and 100% of all PINS PDPs in New York City.

In New York City in 2019 for example, girls represented 68% of arrests at school under PINS warrants, 100% of whom were girls of color, and 56% were Black girls.⁴⁵

This describes a scenario where police enter schools to effectuate an arrest, disrupting the school day and tarnishing the young person’s relationship to their school building. Black girls are pulled in at disproportionate rates for a number of reasons: rates of poverty which may have an impact on family conflict, attending persistently underfunded and hyper-policed schools, and, not the least of these, subjective understandings about “appropriate” attitude, body-language, and behavior. These subjective understandings often put Black girls at odds with the adults in their lives, and revisit racist stereotypes, like that of the “angry Black woman” onto young girls.

Antiquated laws designed to control the normal, youthful expression of girls and young women rely on dangerous stereotypes about “ladylike” behavior, which often squelch the expression of girls of color, lesbian, bisexual, and queer girls, and youth who are gender non-conforming.

In New York State, language in the Family Court Act permits girls to be dragged into the court system for being “incorrigible.” This term was used by the system over one hundred years ago to categorize young girls who were incarcerated at the first “Training School for Girls,” a prison for girls in Hudson, New York. During the summer of 2020, state legislation to amend the Family Court Act and eliminate the use of the term incorrigible, passed the State Senate, and is to be reintroduced in 2021.

In the wake of landmark Raise the Age legislation, “incorrigible” is a stain on the state as it continues to label young girls, overwhelmingly girls of color, facilitating their entry into the court system through persons in need of supervision (PINS) petitions. Legally- and socially-constructed definitions of childhood and girlhood have and continue to shape the treatment of young people.

In the midst of national uprisings for racial justice this July, a case came to mainstream attention where a 15-year-old Black girl in Michigan faced incarceration during the coronavirus pandemic after a judge ruled that not completing her schoolwork violated her probation.⁴⁶ Grace's entry into the legal system, a court diversion program, was for "incurability." During and in the aftermath of this pandemic and fiscal crisis, New York State must take common-sense action and shift away from pushing girls of color into the court system for "incurability" and instead seek to meet their real material needs.

Part IV: A Costly Web of Girls' Criminalization

The juvenile justice system is a boundless network of police departments, detention facilities, probation departments, county attorney's offices, and courts. The Division of Criminal Justice Services' (DCJS') statewide juvenile justice profile presents data on juvenile justice case processing for arrest, detention, probation intake, family court, probation supervision and placement. However, the reporting does not disaggregate the data by multiple identity categories; thus, while we know that Black youth are disproportionately represented across all categories – for example, making up 16% of the state population but 60% of all juvenile delinquent (JD) and juvenile offender (JO) youth in detention – numbers on the specific impact on Black girls are not currently publicly accessible.⁴⁷

We are able to deduce that hundreds of young girls across the State are targeted for criminal justice system responses. In 2018, the most recent available data from DCJS, there were 8,666 arrests of young people ages 7 to 15 statewide,⁴⁸ with 25% (or 2,198) of those arrests being arrests of girls.⁴⁹

That led to 3,003 total admissions to detention (with girls representing 23% or 685 detention admissions). Ultimately, 129 girls were admitted for placement.⁵⁰ Of 3,867 family court petitions, 23% or 906 targeted girls. Information is further limited to be able to understand the scope of probation intake and probation supervision for girls, as the 1,783 probation cases opened are not disaggregated by race or gender.

In the 2006 landmark report, *Custody and Control: Conditions of Confinement in New York's Juvenile Prisons for Girls*, Human Rights Watch and the ACLU describe how in New York State, the proportion of girls in custody had grown from 14 percent in 1994 to over 18 percent in 2004.⁵¹ More recently, girls represented 22% of all youth in placement in 2014 and 23% in 2018.

This mirrors a national trend, where over the past quarter century, there has been a profound change in the involvement of women and girls within the criminal legal system.

Nationwide, girls of color are much more likely to be incarcerated than white girls, where Black girls are three-and-a-half times as likely as white girls to be incarcerated (110 per 100,000 compared to 32).⁵² While 60% of women incarcerated in state prisons across the country have a child under the age of 18, we do not have that data for New York's Department of Correction and Community Supervision (DOCCS) aside from 61% of all people imprisoned having one or more children.⁵³ We include this consideration as among many impacts of parental incarceration, according to one statistic, children of incarcerated parents are, on average, six times more likely to be targeted for incarceration.⁵⁴

Custody and Control also raised that because of the remoteness of youth prisons, incarcerated girls were isolated from their families and communities.

This concern later complemented the passage of Close to Home in 2012 and the removal of New York City youth from large, dangerous, and expensive facilities far from their homes.

In these non-secure placement and limited-secure placement facilities operated by the New York City Administration for Children's Services, there were 15 girls incarcerated in Fiscal Year 2020 – while we do not have disaggregated data across multiple identity categories, 98% of all admissions were of youth of color.⁵⁵

At this juncture, the exploding costs of reforms to tinker with youth incarceration are being questioned.

In September of 2017, Governor Cuomo announced bidding for \$89 million in construction projects to repurpose four facilities to incarcerate new legal categories of young people.⁵⁶ Under Raise the Age, the New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS), which operates the state's juvenile justice facilities, and DOCCS, which temporarily operated adolescent offender facilities before authority was transferred to OCFS in October 2020, were extended added imprisonment capacity.

This included \$12 million in construction projects at the Harriet Tubman Residential Center in Cayuga County, for the facility to be a limited secure residential center for the incarceration of 25 sixteen- and seventeen-year-old girls.

In name, this site of youth imprisonment represents the co-optation of a radical legacy, appropriating a progressive narrative, in both form and content, to meet regressive aims.

In November 2020, *The Imprint* published "Sticker Shock: The Cost of New York's Youth Prisons Approaches \$1 Million Per Kid," detailing that New York's youth lockups were the costliest in the nation. In 2019, there were 47 girls admitted to OCFS limited secure, non-secure, and secure facilities – Harriet Tubman, Taberg, Brentwood, and Columbia – with 50 girls incarcerated on December 31, 2019.

Using rates reported by *The Imprint*, we calculated that this cost of incarcerating girls in New York State reached almost \$45 million last year.

With the fiscal impact of the pandemic, and increased public transparency around the escalating expenses of state-operated youth confinement facilities – price tagged at \$900,000 per young person per year – some lawmakers are considered redirecting funds.⁵⁷

In December 2020, DOCCS announced the planned closure of three adult prisons in 2021,⁵⁸ that same trend can be adopted for the 12 OCFS-operated "residential centers for post-adjudicated youth" – the youth prison system.

Aside from the ballooning fiscal cost of youth incarceration in New York City and State, youth incarceration comes at incalculable social cost. It is well established that incarceration harms young people developmentally, psychologically, and physically, and many of the barriers affecting youth in the juvenile justice system are directly or indirectly tied to structural issues such as systemic poverty, institutional racism, and a myriad of public health concerns.⁵⁹ Ending incarceration of Black girls and girls of color is one step toward chipping away at a culture of punishment and moving toward a culture of care.

Conclusion & Vision for the Future

2020 was a year of remarkable challenges for youth of color across the State of New York. It was a year marked by a worldwide pandemic that shut down their school buildings, limited access to supports and services, and brought about immeasurable loss.

The spring of 2020 was defined by yet another flashpoint of Black suffering: the killings of Black people including George Floyd, Tony McDade, and Breonna Taylor. Breonna Taylor, a young Black woman, had her dreams snatched from her by state violence.

There are concrete connections between the national conversations around race and gender, and long overdue state-level action.

If the New York State government is truly committed to healing from devastation and building toward a more just future, the state must commit to a serious re-prioritization of resources and a divestment from the criminalization of Black youth.

Yet, the government will only be accountable to those that it feels have power. Despite the struggles of the recent year, there have been countless examples of the effectiveness of organizing and the might of collective struggle.

Thousands of people who gathered in streets all across New York State to demand racial justice placed pressure on governmental leaders to take action on issues that they long evaded.

Our vision is one where people who are committed to radical transformation across the state are both mobilized and prepared to apply pressure.

For the coming year, we invite you to join us in fighting for our key policy priorities:

- 1. Resourcing public schools to build connections.** We are working to end school suspensions, build positive school climates, place a moratorium on the Regents exams, and demand full funding of the Foundation Aid Formula.
- 2. Ending criminalization of youth and families of color.** We are working to remove racially biased terms like “incorrigible” and habitually defiant from the state Family Court Act, ending dangerous practices of youth interrogation, stopping the collection of DNA from youth by police, and challenging the family regulation system.
- 3. Ensuring safe, supportive, and healthy school environments.** We are supporting comprehensive sexual health education in all public schools, where students learn about consent and healthy relationships to prevent school-based sexual harassment and assault.

We wrote this report with the belief that partners in movement work will join us to transform the State of New York with and alongside young people, we hope that you will join us.

About Girls for Gender Equity

GGE is a Brooklyn-based intergenerational advocacy organization, engaging cisgender and transgender girls of color and gender non-conforming youth of color. GGE centers Black girls in the movement to achieve gender and racial equity. Since 2001, GGE has committed to the optimal development of our communities through a combination of direct service, policy advocacy, community organizing, and culture change work.

Endnotes

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