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Groups ask U.S. Justice Department to Close Prison Pipeline in Wake County Schools

By Sharon McCloskey ncpolicywatch.com
Handcuffed for stepping out of line in the cafeteria. Pepper-sprayed in the eyes, TASERed in the chest, violently tackled to the ground or pushed into walls. Interrogated and searched without consent, parental or attorney involvement.
Sounds like the stuff of a youth detention facility on lockdown, except it's happening in Wake County schools -- a pattern of police misconduct that's more often landing students in the criminal courts than in the principal's office.
And it has to stop, said Legal Aid of North Carolina's Advocates for Children's Services.

Yesterday the group, along with a coalition of local, state and national advocacy organizations, asked the U.S. Department of Justice to step in. In a detailed 74-page complaint filed on behalf of eight students and others in Wake County schools who've been subjected to excessive school police practices, the groups have asked the Department to investigate the police departments involved and order the district to revamp its discipline practices.

Hundreds of NC NAACP Members Come Together at Winter Conference to Recognize its 2013 Effort

RALEIGH - Hundreds of North Carolina NAACP members met in Raleigh on Sat., Jan. 25 at the organization's annual winter conference to push the organization's campaign against the state's immoral and unconstitutional legislative policies forward into 2014.

Youth and adult leaders engaged in a day of training and workshops centered on the critical issues of our time. They will be trained in voter mobilization and voting rights and how to continue to build and support this powerful movement growing in North Carolina.

"In 2014, North Carolina is on the front line in this nationwide struggle for equality, justice, and economic opportunity," Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II said. "And so this year, the winter conference theme is 'We Shall Not Be Moved: Holding on to Past Victories as the Fight for Equality and Justice Continues.' The NC NAACP will be ready to stand alongside the hundreds of thousands of North Carolinians who are ready to move forward together."

The conference was held at Abundant Life Church of God in Christ & Life Center, 4400 Old Poole Rd. Raleigh.

Mrs. Lorraine C. Miller, the Interim President & CEO of the National NAACP, was scheduled to address the conference during the Lunch Keynote Speech. Other speakers included Kevin Myles, director of the NAACP Southeastern Region V, and Ms. Penda Hair, the nationally-acclaimed attorney and Advancement Project Co-Director. Ms. Hair and her team of lawyers help to represent the NC NAACP in the critical challenge to the state's unconstitutional voter-suppression law--a law that was pushed through the NC General Assembly in the first year after the U. S. Supreme Court gutted the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

On Saturday evening, Rev. Dr. William J. Barber, II presented the NC NAACP 2014 Humanitarians of the Year award to the over 100 volunteer attorneys who have given countless hours of their expertise and their services to represent the Moral Monday arrestees.

"I am pleased to announce the winners of our most prestigious award will be the scores of volunteer attorneys who are valiantly representing more than 940 of us in our struggle to vindicate our constitutional rights to peaceably petition the government for redress of our grievances," Dr. Barber said. "In making this fight, they breathe fresh oxygen into these fundamental rights for all of us."

Their steadfast work has opened a dialogue in North Carolina's courts and over its kitchen tables over what it means to participate in a

democratic government. Just this week, a prosecutor dropped all charges against the arrestees in more than 50 cases.

At Saturday's banquet, the attorneys join the ranks of other renowned recipients, including Dr. John Hope Franklin, National Poet Laureate Dr. Maya Angelou, Governor Jim Hunt, and others who have championed the cause of human rights in North Carolina.

Dr. Barber will present the award, on behalf of tens of thousands of members of the NC NAACP, the hundreds of thousands of members of the 160 partner-organizations who are part of the Forward Together Moral Movement and Historic Thousands on Jones Street People's Assembly Coalition, and the over 940 people who were arrested for exercising their constitutional rights during the Moral Monday demonstrations last year.

"The Wake County Public School System's over-reliance on unregulated school policing practices, often in response to minor infractions of school rules, results in the routine violation of students' educational and constitutional rights," the groups said in the complaint.
Those practices are disproportionately directed at students with disabilities and African-American students, they added, with devastating and lifelong consequences, since North Carolina is the only state that treats all 16- and 17-year-olds as adults when charged with criminal offenses.

"Even in the event that a frivolous school-based criminal charge is later dismissed for lack of merit, students age 16 years and older must still bear permanent negative repercussions as the result of having an adult criminal arrest record that will resurface anytime a criminal background check is run."

In recent years, the increased presence of police and other security officers at Wake County schools has led to an increase in the percentage of school-based delinquency complaints there. During
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NATIONAL ALUMNI ASSOCIATION OF HILLSIDE HIGH SCHOOL -The e Board of Directors of the National Alumni Association of Hillside High School (NAAHHS) presenting a check to Hillside High School for its Fund-Raising efforts in 2013. For its 2013 efforts the Alumni Association has been able to give back \$9,189.00 in direct support and scholarships. Over the past 5 years NAAHHS has been able to give back to Hillside over \$30,000,000.

Pictured from left to right are NAAHHS Board Members are: Steve Avery, Dr. F. Vincent Allison III (President), Gloria Doyle (Vice President), Ernestine Turner, Allen Gattis (Chaplain), Thelma F. Hamilton, William Turner (President Emeritus), Jessie Giles (Acting Secretary), Frederick "Stoney" Brown (Treasurer), Teresia Parker, Veta McNeill-Best, H. Michael Spears. Board Members not pictured: Debra Williams (Asst. Secretary), C. Ray Jones (Asst. Treasurer), Dr. Teresa Daye, Timothy Faison.

For membership information to the NAAHHS email naahhs@gmail.com or visit www.naahhs.org. The mission of the National Alumni Association of Hillside High School is to advance the cause of education and to establish a mutually beneficial relationship between Hillside High School and its Alumni and friends.

Guards May Be Responsible for Half of Prison Sexual Assaults

By Joaquin Sapien
ProPublica

A new Justice Department study shows that allegations of sex abuse in the nation's prisons and jails are increasing - with correctional officers responsible for half of it - but prosecution is still extremely rare.

The report, released today by the Bureau of Justice Statistics, takes data collected by correctional administrators representing all of the nation's federal and state prisons as well as many county jails. It shows that administrators logged more than 8,000 reports of abuse to their overseers each year between 2009 and 2011, up 11 percent from the department's previous report, which covered 2007 and 2008.

It's not clear whether the increase is the result of better reporting or represents an actual rise in the number of incidents. Allen Beck, the Justice Department statistician who authored the reports, told ProPublica that abuse allegations might be increasing because of growing awareness of the 2003 Prison Rape Elimination Act.

"It's a matter of speculation, but certainly there's been a considerable effort to inform staff about the dangers of sexual misconduct, so we could be seeing the impact of that," said Beck.

The survey also shows a growing proportion of the allegations have been dismissed by prison officials as "unfounded" or "unsubstantiated." Only about 10 percent are substantiated by an investigation.

But even in the rare cases where there is enough evidence to prove that sexual abuse occurred, and that a correctional officer is responsible for it, the perpetrator rarely faces prosecution. While most prison staff shown to be involved in sexual misconduct lost their jobs, fewer than half were referred for prosecution, and only 1 percent ultimately got convicted.

Roughly one-third of staff caught abusing prisoners are allowed to resign before the investigation comes to a close, the report concludes, meaning there's no public record of what exactly transpired and nothing preventing them from getting a similar job at another facility.

"These findings point to a level of impunity in our prisons and jails that is simply unacceptable," said Lovisa Stannow, executive director of Just Detention International, a prisoner advocacy group in California. "When corrections agencies don't punish or choose to ignore sexual abuse committed by staff members' people who are paid by our tax dollars to keep inmates safe - they support criminal behavior."

The lack of punishment may deter inmates from reporting. When the Justice Department has surveyed inmates directly, as opposed to the administrators that oversee them, the reports of abuse have been far greater. A 2013 survey estimated that more than 80,000 prisoners had been sexually victimized by fellow inmates or staff over a two-year period, roughly five times the rate reported by administrators.

"Inmates don't report because of the way the institution handles these complaints: they're afraid if they do report, then the staff will retaliate," said Kim Shayo Buchanan, a law professor at the University of Southern California who studies the issue. "Even if you report and they believe you, which they probably won't, the most likely thing to happen is that the person will be suspended or maybe fired."