



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

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## ACTION ALERT

**DATE:** August 20, 2008  
**TO:** Concerned Parties  
**FROM:** Hilary O. Shelton, Director, Washington Bureau

# NAACP Urges Swift Enactment of Legislation to Address Racial Disparities in the American Criminal Justice System

### THE ISSUE:

While people may argue about the reasons behind it, few would disagree that extensive racial and ethnic disparities exist today in the American criminal justice system. These disparities are particularly true for African American men and boys, who are grossly overrepresented at every stage of the judicial process, from initial contacts with police to punishments. African Americans routinely receiving more jail time and harsher punishments; 42% of Americans currently on death row are African American. Nearly a million African Americans today are incarcerated in prisons and in jails, and unless there is a change, a black male born today has a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime. In fact, despite the fact that numerous studies show that African Americans and Caucasians use cocaine at roughly the same rate, statistics confirm that over 80% of those currently in prison for crack cocaine possession are African American.

To address these disparities, Senators Joseph Biden (DE) and Arlen Specter (PA), both senior members of the Senate Judiciary Committee have introduced the bipartisan *Justice Integrity Act* (S.3245), which aims to address the issue of unwarranted racial disparities in the American criminal justice system. This important legislation would establish 10 pilot programs to create local advisory groups charged with collecting and analyzing racial and ethnic data on charging, plea negotiations, sentencing recommendations and other factors involved in creating these disparities.

It is difficult for Americans of color to have faith and confidence in the American judicial system when we know from experience that we are treated differently because of the color of our skin. This lack of confidence in turn, makes us not only distrustful of the system at every level, but also makes it much less likely that we are willing to turn to or cooperate with the very people and institutions who are charged with protecting our safety and ensuring that our Constitutional rights are upheld.

While this legislation will not solve the problems overnight, it is a very important first step. If we as a Nation are going to truly meet our potential, we must address these disparities, and thus we appreciate that you have taken this important first step.

[More...](#)

## **THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:**

Contact both your Senators **and URGE THEM TO SUPPORT AND CO-SPONSOR S. 3245, THE JUSTICE INTEGRITY ACT.** To contact your Senators you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your Senators in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Senators' offices. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

✓ **Write a Letter**

To write letters to your Senators, send them to:  
The Honorable (name of Senator)  
U.S. Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

**A SAMPLE  
LETTER IS  
ATTACHED**

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Senators' offices (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for their fax numbers (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your Senators, go to [www.senate.gov](http://www.senate.gov); click on "*Find Your Senators*". Look up your Senators by state; go to their web sites for e-mail addresses.

REMEMBER TO CONTACT BOTH YOUR SENATORS!!!!

## **THE MESSAGE**

- Study after study has shown that extensive racial and ethnic disparities exist today in the American criminal justice system. In fact, racial and ethnic minorities now make up more than two-thirds of the prison population.
- African American men and boys, especially, are dramatically overrepresented at every stage of the judicial process, from initial contacts with police to punishments.
- Nearly a million African Americans today are incarcerated in prisons and in jails, and unless there is a change, a black male born today has a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime.
- It is difficult for Americans of color to have faith and confidence in the American judicial system when we know from experience that we are treated differently because of the color of our skin.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!  
If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

**MEMBERSHIP IS POWER! JOIN THE NAACP TODAY.**

To become an NAACP member or to sign up for e-mail legislative and press updates, visit [www.naacp.org](http://www.naacp.org)

## Sample Letter

(date)

The Honorable \_\_\_\_\_  
United States Senate  
Washington, D.C. 20510

### **RE: SUPPORT FOR S. 3245, THE *JUSTICE INTEGRITY ACT***

Dear Senator \_\_\_\_\_;

As your constituent, I strongly urge you to support and co-sponsor S. 3245, the bi-partisan *Justice Integrity Act*. This important legislation addresses the continuing plague of racial and ethnic disparities in our criminal justice system.

Study after study has shown that extensive racial and ethnic disparities exist today in the American criminal justice system. African American men and boys, especially, are dramatically overrepresented at every stage of the judicial process, from initial contacts with police to punishments. African Americans routinely receiving more jail time and harsher punishments than Caucasians; 42% of Americans currently on death row are African American. Nearly a million African Americans today are incarcerated in prisons and in jails, and unless there is a change, a black male born today has a one-in-three chance of going to prison in his lifetime. In fact, despite the fact that numerous studies show that African Americans and Caucasians use cocaine at roughly the same rate, statistics confirm that over 80% of those currently in prison for crack cocaine possession are African American.

It is difficult for Americans of color to have faith and confidence in the American judicial system when we know from experience that we are treated differently because of the color of our skin. This lack of confidence in turn, makes us not only distrustful of the system at every level, but also makes it much less likely that we are willing to turn to or cooperate with the very people and institutions who are charged with protecting our safety and ensuring that our Constitutional rights are upheld.

If we as a Nation are going to truly meet our potential, we must address these disparities. I therefore strongly urge you, once again, to support and co-sponsor S. 3245, the *Justice Integrity Act*. I look forward to hearing from you soon to know what you are doing to address these problems and what I can do to support you.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and  
remember to include your address)

*Remember to contact  
BOTH your Senators.*