

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/success-of-my-brothers-keeper-will-rely-on-removing-racial-disparities-from-our-criminal-justice-system>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Last month, President Obama introduced a new initiative, My Brothers Keeper, which brings together government, business, philanthropy, the faith community, nonprofits, and others to work together to create more pathways to success for young men of color. The President spoke of current racial disparities and their historical roots, saying, The plain fact is, there are some Americans who in the aggregate are consistently doing worse in our society. Groups that have had the odds stacked against them in unique ways that require unique solutions, groups who have seen fewer opportunities that have spanned generations. And by almost every measure, the group that is facing some of the most severe challenges in the 21st century, in this country, are boys and young men of color.

Targeted, strategic, and responsive support from the My Brothers Keeper network can help this group reach the highest levels of academic achievement, obtain well-paying employment, and become leaders in their families, communities, and the public and private sectors.

In addition to providing young men of color with opportunities, however, we also have to stop taking those opportunities away unfairly. President Obama also spoke of disparities in the criminal justice system and their effect on this group, saying in his speech, By the time you reach high school, you [as a young man of color] are far more likely to have been suspended or expelled. There's a higher chance you end up in the criminal justice system. And a far higher chance that you are the victim of a violent crime. We know that one in three black men born today are likely to be incarcerated in their lifetimes, that young men of color are far and away the most likely victims of homicide and other violent crimes like robbery, and that they are far less likely to get support when victimized. [Research indicates](#) that the disparities in the criminal justice system cannot be accounted for solely by the actions of the young men themselves.

President Obama said that we can reform our criminal justice system to ensure that it's not infected with bias. Despite the hundreds of millions of dollars invested and the accompanying effort of so many stakeholders, the full potential of My Brothers Keeper will never be realized unless equal emphasis is placed on identifying, addressing, and uprooting racial inequities where they exist. Young men of color are crucial stakeholders in the criminal justice system whether as defendants whose rights must be upheld even as they are held accountable, as witnesses to crimes, or as victims entitled to inclusion in and information about the process. And we have to commit to building informed by their input and the evidence alike a criminal justice system that advances safety and justice for everyone.

Note: In the coming weeks, Vera will issue a brief about the challenges and opportunities related to addressing the experiences and needs of young men of color when they are harmed by crime.

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