

## School-to-Prison Pipeline: Senate Hears Testimony

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**(The Root)** -- On Wednesday, less than two months after the Department of Justice filed a lawsuit against Mississippi officials for systematically incarcerating African-American children, the Senate heard its first-ever testimony about the "school-to-prison pipeline" -- the label assigned to the nationwide pattern of young people being sent to police stations, courtrooms and juvenile-detention centers for minor or trivial offenses.

The hearing before the Senate Judiciary Subcommittee on the Constitution, Civil Rights and Human Rights, and chaired by Sen. Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), was attended by students, parents, civil rights advocates and other community leaders.

No huge surprise: According to Judith Browne Dianis, co-director of civil rights organization the Advancement Project, who provided testimony at the hearing, black and Latino students are punished more harshly than white youths for the same minor infractions.

Dianis, a pioneer of the movement to end the school-to-prison pipeline, offered expert testimony criticizing the unnecessarily harsh practices as ineffective in improving school achievement and safety, and a waste of taxpayer resources.

"Overly harsh discipline policies lead to high dropout rates, lower academic achievement and students not getting the help they need," she said.

Other witnesses include former Chicago public school student Edward Ward; Judge Steven Teske of the Clayton County Juvenile Court in Georgia; Ohio Attorney General Mike DeWine; Deborah Delisle, assistant secretary for elementary and secondary education at the U.S. Department of Education; Melodee Hanes, acting administrator of the Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention; and Andrew Coulson, from the Cato Institute. Plus, students added to the record written accounts of their experiences in high-security schools with extreme discipline policies.

In addition to putting the national spotlight on the school discipline problem, witnesses explored proven alternatives to harsh discipline practices. Their hope, as Dianis put it, is to replace the pipeline with an approach that "keeps kids in school and on a pathway to a career or college, not prison."