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OPINION

Prisons, Poverty and the Price of Freedom

Jay-Z gesture bring focus to justice reforms

BY MARC H. MORIAL

Hip-hop legend Jay-Z recently celebrated Father's Day by allowing incarcerated fathers to spend the day with their families.

Pick any day of the week in America and an estimated 700,000 people are populating our nation's local city and county jails. Of those behind bars, 60 percent, nearly half a million people—many of them black and Hispanic—will remain in jail, not because they have been convicted of any crime, but because they are guilty of the unpardonable crime of poverty and cannot afford the court-stipulated price tag placed on their freedom.

Pretrial incarceration can look very different based on race and socio-economic status. A Bureau of Justice study found that African



Americans are 66 percent more likely to remain incarcerated before trial and Hispanic defendants were 91 percent more likely to remain trapped behind bars, in comparison to white defendants.

If a defendant cannot afford bail (nationally, 61 percent of defendants are required to post bail for pre-trial release), he or she will stay behind bars until trial. It is in that purgatory of being presumed legally innocent, but locked away from your family, your job and support networks that Black and Hispanic communities are further traumatized and shattered.

For decades, activists and social justice groups have fought against this destructive facet of mass criminalization and incarceration. This year, the movement to reform our criminal justice system's current application of pre-trial incarceration added the platform, power and philanthropy of a high-profile ally to its unceasing work: Jay-Z.

The rapper, entrepreneur—not

a businessman, but a business, man—and now proud father of three, donated to Southerners on New Ground and Color of Change to free and reunite incarcerated fathers with their families on Father's Day—the continuation of an earlier campaign to bail out mothers of color for Mother's Day.

To put the impact of incarceration on communities of color in context, it is important to note that today one in nine Black children living in America has an incarcerated parent in jail. In an essay for Time magazine explaining why he was taking on the "exploitative" bail industry, Jay-Z was personal and poignant:

If you're from neighborhoods like the Brooklyn one I grew up in, if you're unable to afford a private attorney, then you can be disappeared into our jail system simply because you can't afford bail. Millions of people are separated from their families for months at a time — not because they are convicted of committing a crime, but because they are accused of com-

mitting a crime. [...] When black and brown people are over-policed and arrested and accused of crimes at higher rates than others, and then forced to pay for their freedom before they ever see trial, big bail companies prosper. This pre-incarceration conundrum is devastating to families.

The cost of being imprisoned as if you are guilty while you are legally innocent is high and the damage extends well beyond jail-house bars. From the separation of family members to jeopardizing current—and future—housing, benefits and work, studies have also consistently found that in comparison to defendants who were released before trial, defendants who remained incarcerated were three times more likely to be sentenced to prison, tended to receive longer sentences, and are more likely to reoffend the longer they are incarcerated. Because the inability to pay bail is both an impediment to freedom and a major cause of pretrial incarceration, people are essentially being punished for being poor.

Like so many other misguided criminal justice actions, pretrial incarceration makes us less safe and poorer. As a nation, we are collectively footing a monstrous \$9 billion dollar annual bill to incarcerate people who have not been convicted of a crime, while the ballooning bail bond industry continues to profit off the poverty and desperation of vulnerable communities.

Many solutions to the problem of pretrial incarceration have been proposed, from limiting the use of pretrial incarceration to individuals who pose a threat to society to implementing alternative forms of bail besides cash bail—or forcing defendants to use bail bond companies that put profits before people and engage in predatory lending practices. We must reform this two-tiered system of injustice urgently—to save lives, families, communities, and restore our faith in our badly damaged criminal justice system.

Marc H. Morial is president and chief executive officer of the National Urban League.

Training and Connecting People to Employment

Budgets reflect priorities and values

BY JAMES PAULSON

As the chair of Worksystems, the Portland Metro Workforce Development Board, the Trump Administration's new focus on workforce development sounds promising and signals a recognition that improving the skills of American workers is key to advancing and sustaining the greatness of the nation. However, the President's proposed budget plan includes a 40 percent cut in the primary resources used by the public workforce development system to train and connect people to employment.

Funding for workforce development has already been reduced by \$1 billion since 2010. Cutting further is counterintuitive and would be devastating to millions of job seekers around the country. Here at home, a cut of that magnitude would mean nearly 24,000 fewer people will be trained and placed in jobs. As is often the case, many of those impacted would be



our most vulnerable, at-risk, and underrepresented citizens.

The President is focusing his jobs training message and dollars on the apprenticeship model. We support promoting apprenticeships as a workforce strategy - it is a highly successful model that needs to be expanded. We have worked hard to advance this approach locally, among other proven programs, for many years.

We completely disagree with the Administration's claim that the federally funded workforce system is inefficient. What is needed is better alignment of job training resources with the public workforce system and increased coordination of programs targeting job seekers with barriers to employment.

The framework for this increased alignment and coordination is outlined in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA), passed with overwhelming, bi-partisan support in July 2014. Implementation is just getting underway and needs to be allowed to continue.

Locally, Worksystems is working with our network of partners to coordinate and align resources to support the training and em-

ployment needs of job seekers and employers in the Portland region.

Each year, 60,000+ people visit one of our five WorkSource centers to receive assistance - many of whom are low-income with barriers to entering the workforce. Our resources provide a broad range of services that enables job seekers to develop new skills and to advance in their career. We close the skills gap and put people to work every day while providing local employers with the skilled workers they need to compete and grow.

Budgets reflect our nation's priorities and values. The smart way to make America great again is to support our entire workforce so that everyone can maximize their potential and contribute to our economy. Investing in our workforce is the best investment that government can make. We need more funding to do this important work, not the devastating cuts proposed by the Trump Administration.

Worksystems is a non-profit agency that accelerates economic growth in the City of Portland, Multnomah and Washington counties by pursuing and investing resources to improve the quality of the workforce. We design and coordinate workforce devel-

opment programs and services delivered through a network of local partners to help people get the skills, training and education they

need to go to work or to advance in their careers.

James Paulson is chair of Worksystems.

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