

OPINION



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NEWS ITEM: US QUILTS NUCLEAR ARM TREATY WITH RUSSIA



New school discipline guidelines backtrack

Undercutting discrimination protections

BY MARIAN WRIGHT EDELMAN

The U.S. Departments of Education and Justice in 2014 jointly released a 'guidance package' on school discipline to help schools and districts meet their responsibilities under federal civil rights law to use nondiscriminatory discipline practices. Years of data have shown children of color and children with disabilities are disproportionately punished by school discipline practices and suspended and expelled from school.

Many schools and school districts have finally begun reforming their policies to promote positive academic and behavioral outcomes for all students and eliminate harsh and exclusionary discipline practices that push students out of school. During the Obama Administration the Departments of Education and Justice supported these positive reforms. Their 2014 guidance was a key step reminding schools of their legal ob-

ligations, followed by resources to help schools make sure they were providing equal opportunity for all students. The Trump Administration is now actively undercutting and eliminating this guidance.

In December, just as most teachers and students were getting ready to leave for winter break, the Departments of Education and Justice announced they were rescinding the 2014 guidance reinforcing pro-

The letter says the 2014 guidance "clarifies that [the Departments of Education and Justice] expect schools and districts to treat all children fairly and provides practical tools and guidelines for educators to create safe, healthy, and inclusive environments for all students ... Rescinding the guidance sends the opposite message: that the departments do not care that schools are discriminating

students with disabilities, and any child who experiences systemic discrimination."

Every day in America 2,363 children are arrested. That's one child every 37 seconds. Thousands of children of color and with disabilities are getting trapped in the cradle to prison pipeline because of discriminatory school discipline policies that often push children into the juvenile justice system. We must continue to enforce the laws preventing discrimination, which remain intact, and the good practices referenced in the 2014 guidance and reject every effort to drag our nation's laws and children backwards.

As we enter Black History Month soon after celebrating what would have been Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s 90th birthday, his words inspire us to go forward and resist this administration's attempts to push our children backwards. I often quote his clear words the first time I heard him speak in person during my senior year of college in Spelman College's chapel: "If you cannot fly, drive; if you cannot drive, run; if you cannot run, walk; if you cannot walk, crawl. But keep moving. Keep moving forward." We must not miss a step in our march toward justice.

Marian Wright Edelman is founder and president emerita of the Children's Defense Fund.

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tections for students of color and students with disabilities from discrimination in school discipline.

The Children's Defense Fund joined the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights and 119 other organizations last month in signing a letter to the Departments of Education and Justice urging them to immediately recommit "to vigorous enforcement of our civil rights laws and to a meaningful response to racial discrimination in school discipline."

against children of color by disproportionately excluding them from school and that the departments will not fulfill their role in helping educators create and maintain safe schools that afford all students equal educational opportunities." The letter also notes that rescinding the guidance is another in a long line of administration actions that "make schools less safe for LGBTQ students, sexual assault survivors, immigrant students, students of color,