

Aug. 22, 2017 12:55 pm

# 'We are the counter force'

By Community Legal Services Staff / GUEST



This is a guest post by the heads of the Defender Association of Philadelphia, Juvenile Law Center, Education Law Center and Community Legal Services.

x

**L**ast week, the president equated the marchers carrying torches and Nazi flags while spewing vile epithets with those who risked their lives countering hatred.

His words may lead white supremacists to feel emboldened and those who are the targets of the hate to feel abandoned. We are the counter force.

We see the devastating impact of hate and inhumane treatment every day in our work as public interest lawyers. The enduring legacy of racism has resulted in structural racism — inequities that are the result of both historical and current harmful policies and practices. The legacy of structural racism is apparent in all the systems in which we work: justice, education, child welfare, housing, benefits. We care! We will not stop working to gain equality and opportunity for all members of our community.

---

*We cannot allow our society to continue to engage in practices that devalue some lives to the benefit of others.*

---

We cannot allow our society to continue to engage in practices that devalue some lives to the benefit of others. America must continue to strive to be better than this.

We fight for youth in the justice and child welfare systems to receive developmentally appropriate treatment and an opportunity to reach their full potential. Youth in the justice system should be treated as youth (<http://generocity.org/philly/2017/03/08/holistic-juvenile-justice-programs/>), not adults, and incarcerated only when necessary and with the goal of rehabilitation. Older youth in foster care should be provided the tools (<http://generocity.org/philly/2017/05/08/youth-matters-philly-launch-foster/>) they need to make a successful transition to a healthy adulthood. Youth of color are overrepresented and are more likely to be harmed at every stage of their involvement with these systems. Other vulnerable populations, such as LGBTQ youth and youth with disabilities (<http://jlc.org/current-initiatives/transition-adulthood/older-youth-disabilities>) are also disparately impacted.

We fight so that all children can access quality public education. In Pennsylvania, the higher the concentration of students of color in a district, the less funding (<http://www.elc-pa.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/03/Education-Justice-Report-1.pdf>) it receives from the state. These are the same students who are unfairly pushed out of the classroom because of discipline policies (<http://why.org/cms/radiotimes/2017/05/03/advocates-want-district-end-suspensions-elementary-school-students/>) that disproportionately (<http://www.philly.com/philly/education/Stop-suspending-elementary-school-aged-kids-advocates-ask-Philly-schools.html?mobi=true>) punish students of color, students with disabilities, those who are LGBTQ, and other marginalized populations. Our schools are reinforcing the status quo of inequality and injustice. That's why we're bringing people together from across Pennsylvania to push for

systemic change (<http://thenotebook.org/articles/2017/06/22/pa-guidelines-for-school-discipline-may-change>) in public education.

We fight for access to basic rights, to preserve homes, healthcare, families, and jobs. People of color are arrested at a disproportionately high rate (<http://www.sentencingproject.org/criminal-justice-facts/>). Often these arrests do not lead to convictions, but the arrest record will prevent an employer from giving a promising candidate a second look. We expunge thousands of arrest records (<http://generocity.org/philly/2016/09/29/technology-criminal-records-expungement-clinics/>) every year so that people can access good employment. We fight against predatory lenders who prey on low-income people of color, robbing them of their incomes and homes. We fight for access to healthcare (<http://generocity.org/philly/2017/04/25/these-cuts-hurt-panel-budget-trump/>) and other life-saving benefits.

---

*Race should not predict a person's success in this country.*

We fight for racial justice every day by serving as a counterbalance to an overreaching criminal justice system

---

([http://www.slate.com/articles/news\\_and\\_politics/jurisprudence/2016/10/how\\_did\\_pennsylvania\\_s\\_criminal\\_justice\\_system\\_Because\\_race\\_should\\_not\\_predict](http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/jurisprudence/2016/10/how_did_pennsylvania_s_criminal_justice_system_Because_race_should_not_predict) (<http://www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org/2015/11/decision-points-disproportionate-pretrial-detention-of-blacks-and-latinos-drives-mass-incarceration/>) a person's success in this country, we will not allow the legacy of racially charged policies and practices (<http://generocity.org/philly/2016/09/29/reforming-justice-system-keir-bradford-grey/>) to negatively impact (<http://www.safetyandjusticechallenge.org/2017/02/pretrial-detention-costs-13-6-billion-year/>) families and communities. Equality and justice for all are not concepts limited to certain people ([http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/opinion-and-essays/item/105966-op-ed-expungements-can-erase-the-stigma-that-haunts-people-of-color&Itemid=20&linktype=hp\\_opinionessays](http://www.newsworks.org/index.php/opinion-and-essays/item/105966-op-ed-expungements-can-erase-the-stigma-that-haunts-people-of-color&Itemid=20&linktype=hp_opinionessays)) or certain communities.

We will continue to emphasize the harms of profiling, call for unwarranted disparities in criminal sentencing (<http://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/color-of-justice-racial-and-ethnic-disparity-in-state-prisons/>) to be addressed, and continue to forge partnerships ([http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20161003\\_From\\_drugs\\_to\\_diplomas.html](http://www.philly.com/philly/news/20161003_From_drugs_to_diplomas.html)) that will create new initiatives to help the formerly incarcerated earn second chances (<http://aldianews.com/articles/local/philadelphia/want-save-life-push-few-buttons/47305>).

Moving forward our organizations will be more visibly present in the communities that we serve — sharing our knowledge and expertise, but also learning from our communities to become better advocates.

We fight against racism by working to change policies and practices that embolden it. We are proud to be on “the other side” of these hate groups. We need the support of the Philadelphia community especially during these times. We must channel our outrage into action through our work in the city, Commonwealth and nation.

We are proud to stand together, strong and united with a passionate sense of purpose and responsibility to represent respected and effective public interest law centers in Philadelphia. We are proud to work in a community that stands with us against racism and hate in all its ugly forms.

---

*Keir Bradford-Grey is the chief defender of the Defender Association of Philadelphia (<http://www.philadefender.org>)*

*Debby Freedman is the executive director of Community Legal Services*

*Deborah Gordon Klehr is the executive director of Education Law Center (<http://www.elc-pa.org>)*

*Sue Vivian Mangold is the executive director of Juvenile Law Center (<http://www.jlc.org>)*

---

*Founded in 1966 by the Philadelphia Bar Association, CLS has provided free civil legal assistance to more than one million low-income Philadelphians. As the City's oldest and largest legal services program, CLS represented approximately 10,000 clients in the past year. CLS assists clients when they face the threat of losing their homes, incomes, health care, and even their families. CLS attorneys and other staff provide a full range of legal services, from individual representation to administrative advocacy to class action litigation, as well as community education and social work. CLS is nationally recognized as a model legal services program.*

---



6 hours ago

## 'Uncomfortable conversations' are needed to build up a diverse tech talent pipeline

MORE STORIES +

Sign-up for regular updates from Generocity

## Email

Subscribe

---

V.2.8.2 November 30, 2016 / © 2016 Technically Media Inc. All Rights Reserved.