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NEW REPORT SHOWS OREGON HAS SEVENTH HIGHEST RATE OF AFRICAN AMERICAN IMPRISONMENT IN THE NATION

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PORTLAND, Ore. – A new report on racial disparities in state prisons provides evidence of a disproportionately high rate of incarceration of black Oregonians. [“The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparities in State Prisons”](#) from The Sentencing Project in Washington DC shows Oregon has the seventh highest rate in the United States of incarceration of black people in state prisons per 100,000 black residents. 2061 black Oregonians are incarcerated per 100,000 black residents, a rate that is 46% higher than the national average. That compares to a rate of 366 whites per 100,000 white residents and 395 Latinos per 100,000 Latino residents.

1 in 21 black men is incarcerated in a state prison in Oregon, compared to an average across all states of 1 in 26. The report shows rates of incarceration of adult black men vary across the nation from as high as 1 in 14 in Vermont to as low as 1 in 61 in Hawai’i. With the inclusion of jail and federal inmates the rate would be even higher.

While the rate of African American incarceration in Oregon is one of the highest among the 50 states, when incarceration rates between races are compared, the differences are less dramatic than in many states. Not only are African Americans in Oregon imprisoned at higher rates than the national average, but so, too, are whites and Hispanics, 33% higher for whites and 5% higher for Hispanics.

“It’s an unfortunate takeaway from the report that while Oregon’s incarceration rate for black people is one of the nation’s highest, the disparity in incarceration rates between blacks and whites is roughly average,” said Bobbin Singh, Executive Director of Oregon Justice Resource Center. “Unfortunate because it demonstrates that we’re also incarcerating white and Latino Oregonians at higher rates than average. We need to take a closer look not only at what’s driving this over-incarceration of all Oregonians but also specifically address racial disparities in our criminal justice system.”

Awareness of racial disparities in prison populations is not new, and there have been numerous attempts to identify the causes. As “The Color of Justice” highlights, research shows that racial differences in offending rates are not enough to explain the disparities, particularly for less serious crimes and drug crimes.

“What the report shows is that, despite the efforts Oregon has made to reduce racial disparities in incarceration, the problem persists,” said Dr. Ashley Nellis, Senior Researcher at The Sentencing Project who wrote the report. “There are decision points throughout the criminal justice system when law enforcement officers, prosecutors, defense attorneys and/or judges may be predisposed to view one group differently from another. Addressing this differential treatment through meaningful reform should be an urgent priority for state officials and those working within Oregon’s justice system.”

This new report follows the publication of [an earlier, unrelated, report using data from Multnomah County](#) which also showed racial and ethnic disparities between whites and people of color at every decision point on the journey through the county’s criminal justice system.

“‘The Color of Justice,’ along with the Multnomah County RED report, demonstrates that Oregon’s criminal justice system needs deeper evaluation of its impact on communities of color,” said Singh. “We need to take ownership of the fact that our system is punishing communities of color more harshly and the differences can’t be explained by differences in offending rates.”

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Access the full report online at <http://www.sentencingproject.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/The-Color-of-Justice-Racial-and-Ethnic-Disparity-in-State-Prisons.pdf>

Dr. Ashley Nellis, Senior Researcher at The Sentencing Project and Bobbin Singh, Executive Director of Oregon Justice Resource Center, are available for interview.

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