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Immediate Release

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### **Students in Massachusetts' 3 largest school districts often arrested for minor rule breaking**

Students in Massachusetts are handcuffed, booked, and sent to court for behavior once handled by schools and parents, including swearing, slamming doors or banging lockers, failing to follow directions, or being disruptive in hallways, according to a groundbreaking report released today by the American Civil Liberties Union of Massachusetts and Citizens for Juvenile Justice.

The report, "Arrested Futures: The Criminalization of School Discipline in Massachusetts's Three Largest School Districts," reviews arrest data from the 2007-08, 2008-09, and 2009-10 school years, from Boston, Springfield, and Worcester schools. In all three districts, arrests for disruptive but otherwise relatively minor misbehavior made up the majority or a substantial percentage of all school-based arrests.

Other findings include:

- Springfield had the highest rate of arrests per 1000 students: three times higher than Boston and more than four times higher than Worcester;
- African-American students and students with disabilities were more likely to be arrested and to be arrested for minor offenses (e.g., "disturbing a public assembly" and "disorderly conduct") than other students, with the result that these students are disproportionately harmed by school officials handing over responsibility for school discipline to police officers;
- In Boston and Springfield, the highest arrest rates (up to 10 times the district-wide rate) were in schools purportedly designed to deal with children who have behavioral or emotional problems, or learning disabilities;
- In all three districts, children as young as 11 or 12 were subject to arrest, often as the result of childish outbursts. In one case, an upset 11-year old was charged with assault and battery on a public employee, disorderly conduct, and disturbing a lawful assembly after he left his classroom, ran outside the school building, and threw a snowball at a teacher.

"It was clear from our study that a significant percentage of the arrests in these schools were not because of weapons, drugs, or serious violence--issues we would expect police officers to respond to--but for behavior that most people would expect teachers and administrators to address without handcuffing kids or sending them to court," said Lael Chester, executive director of Citizens for Juvenile Justice.

"Overuse of arrests in schools has effectively created a school-to-prison pipeline," said Carol Rose, executive director of the ACLU of Massachusetts. "This report details kids getting arrested for offenses like swearing. This is not a good use of limited police and court resources, and minor misbehavior should not lead to a criminal record that could severely affect a child's future."

The report notes potentially devastating consequences to kids as the result of the arrests. For example, children arrested at school are three times more likely to drop out. Massachusetts also sends all 17-year-olds charged with crimes to adult court, no matter how minor the offense. That means that many high school students may end up with adult criminal records and even incarceration with older adult offenders simply because they broke school rules. An adult record also significantly limits educational, career, and military opportunities.

The study also examines the connection between having permanent, on-site police officers and higher rates of arrest. In 2012, Boston budgeted over \$4 million for school resource officers, while Springfield spent as much as \$2.5 million to pay for 22 Springfield police officers, even while it cut millions from other parts of its budget. By comparison, Worcester spent only \$120,000 on its school-police program. The authors note that there is little evidence that these kind of large expenditures on police result in safer schools, let alone improved school performance or more orderly school environments. As one police official interviewed for the report noted, "you cannot arrest away problems."

"This report is the latest to illustrate a disturbing nationwide trend, in which police officers are taking on educators' responsibilities for disciplining students," said Dennis D. Parker, director of the national ACLU's Racial Justice Program. "A growing number of children--particularly minorities and students with disabilities--are being pushed out of the school system as a result."

The report calls for schools to switch from having officers permanently assigned in school buildings--a practice that has not been shown to improve safety--to using on-call officers for true emergencies. Savings could be used to fund in-school measures that have been demonstrated to promote more orderly school environments, such as evidence-based behavior management programs or improved student support services. The report also recommends that police and school officials develop formal agreements about the roles of officers in schools, and that officers deployed in schools receive training in conflict de-escalation and child and adolescent development.

"Of course, schools have a right and responsibility to insist on good behavior," says Chester, "but there are far more effective, less costly and less damaging ways to hold kids accountable."

For a copy of the report, see:

<http://cfjj.org/pdf/ArrestedFutures-CfJJ-ACLU.pdf>

For more information about Citizens for Juvenile Justice, see:

<http://cfjj.org>

For more information about the ACLU of Massachusetts, see:

<http://aclum.org>