

CHILDREN DON'T MATTER: THE NUMBERS DON'T LIE

BY KERRY SHAKABOONA MARSHALL

Pennsylvania don't care about the human rights of children. There, I've said. Many people are fearful of making such a straight-forward yet truthful statement. But the numbers don't lie:

- PA has 540 Children serving Life-Without-Parole (LWOP) prison sentences.
- PA has the most Children serving LWOP in the nation and in the world.
- In PA, about 70% of Children serving LWOP prison terms are African-American and 10% are Latino.
- In PA, of the 540 Children serving LWOP prison terms, about 350 are from the city of Philadelphia.
- In PA, LWOP is a mandatory prison sentence for First and Second degree murder offenses. Post-SB 850, there is now a different sentencing scheme for Child offenders, which does not retroactively apply to the 540 Child offenders already serving LWOP.
- PA is one of only six states that has LWOP imprisonment as the only life sentencing option. A Life prison sentence is a Death sentence in PA.
- In PA, about a third of Child offenders serving LWOP prison sentences have second degree murder convictions, which is a felony-murder charge which says that legally the child did not murder anyone but was involved in some way.
- In PA, due to a post-1997 state statute that changed the Board of Pardons, commutation of LWOP sentences are no longer possible for Children serving LWOP.

- In PA, Children serving LWOP imprisonment are calling LWOP sentences "Death by Incarceration", which is the new death penalty.
- PA spend \$2 billion a year maintaining its Department of Corrections, with annual increases of \$100 million to cover contractual increases in cost.
- In two years, the Philadelphia school district has stripped \$400 million out of its annual budget, closed 30 schools, eliminated 7,000 jobs of mostly teachers, and suffers from a \$304 million deficit. At the same time, PA is constructing 3 new prisons at a cost of \$800 million.

In PA, a devastating public school-to-public prison pipeline has been quietly thriving over the past few decades, resulting in children of color being treated as undesirables and thrown away like disposable diapers in social trash bins we call prison. Children don't matter. The numbers don't lie.

I am Shakaboona
and Thank You for listening.