

2023 Annual Report Spotlights



EDUCATION

From kindergarten to high school to college, disparities in education are one of the most pressing issues facing Black males.

Consider the racial achievement gap in K-12 education. CSSBMB's report shows that Black children have lower proficiency levels in math compared to their peers, in part because they have less access to Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs in their schools.¹ Another factor is school discipline, where large gaps persist in the number of Black boys who experience exclusionary discipline compared to their peers.² This has a direct impact on achievement, as Black boys struggle to keep up with their coursework and stay in school while battling unequal punishment practices.

Similar racial disparities continue in higher education. Of all groups, Black men have the lowest college and university completion rate at 40 percent.³ Part of the reason is financial: 65 percent of Black college students have to work full-time while pursuing a degree.⁴ Relatedly, Black student enrollment in colleges has been steadily declining: from 2010 to 2020, it fell by 22 percent, a loss of over 650,000 potential college students.⁵ At the same time, underinvestment in Black education remains a serious issue. CSSBMB's report notes that 16 states have historically underfunded their land-grant HBCUs by almost 13 billion dollars, and only two states have provided equitable funding.⁶ Connecting disparities in K-12 to higher education is the issue of teacher diversity. CSSBMB's report illustrates how much teacher diversity matters for outcomes. For Black male students, having a Black male teacher can have a significant impact on school achievement and broader life success.⁷

Recommendations:

- Increase federal and state funding for more STEM classes and programs in K-12 schools.
- Increase funding for federal and state initiatives to increase teacher diversity.
- Address funding disparities for HBCUs.
- Increase federal support for reforms to school discipline, overseen by the joint efforts of the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, and the Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights.

¹ U.S. Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2023 Annual Report, 12.

² Ibid, 15-16.

³ Ibid, 17.

⁴ Ibid, 17.

⁵ Ibid, 17-18.

⁶ Ibid, 19.

⁷ Ibid, 20-21.

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HOUSING

Owning a home has long been one of the most important sources of financial well-being for Americans.

However, deep disparities in access to housing keep people of color—and, as CSSBMB's report details, Black males—from sharing in this opportunity. Many Black men are cut off from housing entirely: according to HUD, in 2022 nearly 40 percent of homeless Americans were Black, and 61 percent of this group were male.¹ Black youth experience even worse disparities. CSSBMB's report notes that among public school children, Black children are 83 percent more likely to become homeless than White children.² Indeed, estimates of homeless individuals aged 18-24 indicate that nearly 78 percent are Black.³

Homeownership rates reflect similar disparities. Despite improvements since the Fair Housing Act of 1968, the gap between Black and White homeowners in 2023 is as large as it has been in a decade, and Black Americans lag almost 20 percentage points behind the average homeownership rate for all Americans.⁴ As CSSBMB's report explores, part of the reason is racial discrimination in housing, including issues like unequal access to home loans and the long-term impact of redlining. Black homeowners are not the only group affected: Black renters are among those most negatively impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath, with 1 in 4 reporting being behind on rent payments.⁵ Relatedly, CSSBMB's 2023 ACT NOW Summit evaluated how housing policies that exclude individuals with criminal records can unfairly impact Black males who are disproportionately the target of policing practices.⁶

Recommendations:

- Provide additional funding for research on the causes of homelessness and its solutions. Develop additional programs similar to Executive Order 13985, "On Advancing Racial Equity and Support for Underserved Communities Through the Federal Government."
- Continue federal-level investigations of racial discrimination in housing policy as conducted by the Department of Housing and Urban Development.

¹ U.S. Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2023 Annual Report, 26.

² Ibid, 26-27.

³ Ibid, 26.

⁴ Ibid, 27.

⁵ Ibid, 29.

⁶ Ibid, 69.

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HEALTH

Prioritizing the health of Black men and boys is a significant issue that goes beyond individual well-being.

Despite advancements in healthcare, CSSBMB's report highlights that widespread social disparities persist, underscoring the need for wholistic efforts to ensure equitable access to quality care and improve health outcomes for Black males. Indeed, Black men and boys rank at or close to the bottom of nearly every measure of health and well-being.¹ For example, Black infants are almost twice as likely to die as White infants, and Black children are twice as likely to be food insecure as White children.² On average, Black males live shorter lives than White males and Black females, and Black men die younger than any demographic group other than Native Americans.³

CSSBMB's report explores how several causes of these health disparities are social in nature. For example, structural barriers to economic well-being and the historical impact of the experience of racial oppression both contribute to a negative environment that worsens health outcomes. Mental health problems are one consequence of these environmental factors: Black males experience disproportionately higher rates of mental health issues and substance abuse disorders, and studies show that 62 percent of Black men have directly experienced a traumatic event in their lifetime.⁴ Overall, the combined impact of broad socio-economic challenges and a history of racial oppression has led to a severe racial health gap in positive outcomes for Black men and boys.

Recommendations:

- Increase federal funding for the Department of Health and Human Services to research the causes of racial health disparities.
- Create initiatives that educate the public and Black men and boys about the value of mental health resources.
- Increase funding for initiatives supporting Black male health providers.

¹ U.S. Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2023 Annual Report, 33-35.

² Ibid, 34.

³ Ibid, 34.

⁴ Ibid, 37.

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LABOR

Black men encounter some of the largest hurdles of any group in the labor market—a fact which only underscores the critical importance of tackling racial and gender-based disparities in employment and job opportunities.

As of late 2023, the Black unemployment rate stood at 5.8 percent, nearly double the national average.¹ CSSBMB's report documents that Black men in particular are 10 percent less likely to participate in the labor force than all adult males (69 percent vs. 79 percent).² This number represents some progress over time but fails to tell the whole story: wages for Black men are still only 75 percent that of their White peers.³ Additionally, Black men are incarcerated at higher rates than any other group and because of this, a disproportionately larger share of them are unable to actively seek employment.⁴

CSSBMB's report also explores how the COVID-19 pandemic and its aftermath have led to additional challenges. For example, in the 2nd quarter of fiscal year 2023, Black men over the age of 20 made up the largest share of individuals who became unemployed, indicating that Black males experience the sudden shifts and instability of the economy more severely than other groups.⁵ And, while the tail end of 2023 saw a decrease in unemployment numbers for Black men, CSSBMB's report explores how a range of structural barriers—from education to housing to health—remain. These barriers are often referred to collectively as the Racial Wealth Gap. Studies have estimated that the U.S. economy has lost upwards of 16 trillion dollars over the past 20 years due to economic inequality and discrimination against Black Americans.⁶ One specific example is Black-owned businesses, which face multiple structural barriers to raising capital, impacting long-term survival and success.⁷

Recommendations:

- State and federal lawmakers should develop initiatives and policies to ensure that Black-owned businesses are competitive for federal contracts and support.
- Expand workforce development programs in The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.
- The Department of Labor, the Small Business Administration, and the Minority Business Development Agency should collaborate with state-level agencies to increase partnerships inspired by Florida's Ready to Work program model, which provides workforce training and credentialing to middle and high school students.

¹ U.S. Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2023 Annual Report, 43.

² Ibid, 43.

³ Ibid, 44.

⁴ Ibid, 44.

⁵ Ibid, 44-45.

⁶ Ibid, 47.

⁷ Ibid, 47-51.

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JUSTICE

Nowhere are the disparities facing Black men and boys more apparent than in the effects of criminal justice policy.

CSSBMB's report notes data from 2023 showing that 32 percent of state and federal prisoners were Black and 31 percent were White.¹ Given these groups' respective share of the overall population, Black people were five times as likely as White people to face incarceration.² In particular, Black men have roughly a 1 in 4 chance of going to prison during their lifetimes, and Black men are incarcerated in state prisons at nearly six times the rate of White men.³ While the United States incarcerates more people than any other nation in the world, CSSBMB's report documents how the brunt of its carceral policy disproportionately falls on Black males.

These disparities extend from Black adult males to Black boys. Arrest rates for Black youth are nearly twice that of White youth. Black children are more likely to be referred to the juvenile justice system than White children.⁴ Specifically, Black boys are three times as likely to be arrested at school than their White male peers.⁵ These numbers reflect the reality of what many researchers call "the school-to-prison pipeline," in which harsh and frequently discriminatory discipline policies in schools result in large numbers of Black youth, and especially Black male students, encountering the juvenile justice system.⁶ The result is often devastating for a student's life path. Equally devastating is the impact of gun violence on Black men and boys. CSSBMB's report explores Chair Federica Wilson's push for an assault weapon ban, noting that gun violence kills twice as many Black Americans as White Americans.⁷

Recommendations:

- Congress should enact the End Racial Profiling Act, among other provisions of the George Floyd Justice in Policing Act of 2021.
- Fund federal studies of the benefits of drug courts; expand drug court programs.
- Continue federal monitoring and reforms from the Department of Justice, Civil Rights Division, and the Department of Education, Office for Civil Rights, on racially discriminatory discipline policies in schools.

¹ U.S. Commission on the Social Status of Black Men and Boys, 2023 Annual Report, 55.

² Ibid, 55.

³ Ibid, 56.

⁴ Ibid, 64-65.

⁵ Ibid, 65.

⁶ Ibid, 65; see also 15-16.

⁷ Ibid, 63.