## School To Jail Track Story (S2JTR Version)

My name is Lupita Carballo. I grew up in Inglewood and South Central Los Angeles. Growing up, I heard police sirens and helicopters on most days.  When I attended schools in South Central, law enforcement was always out in big numbers. They lined us up at bus stops and train stops, demanding to see our Metro passes and giving us tickets if there was any suspicion that we didn’t have our fare.

With Youth Justice Coalition, I have organized to decriminalize fare evasion—first at the county and then through state law.

Growing up, police surrounded my schools and handed out truancy tickets even as we walked into the building only a few minutes late. We organized to change that in LA and are trying to end that across the state this year.

Inside our schools, we had more school police and Probation officers than counselors. They pulled us out of class to do random searches. They dumped out our backpacks and patted us down in front of everyone. Now, we are fighting to end random searches in schools. From a young age, Black and Brown youth are treated like we are notorious criminals.

The first time I got suspended from school was in elementary school at the age of 10. I threw a book in the air and told it to fly. I was out of school for a whole week. There was no one at home to watch me. Everybody worked. What good did that do? No one ever asked me what was happening in my life or why I was having a hard time focusing. I got kicked out of school a bunch of times after that, and I finally left in 11th grade. I felt I was too behind in credits. No one ever tried to stop me. No one asked what was going on or they would have learned that my sister - who was the center of my world - died of cancer, my Grandpa was sick, my family was getting pushed out of our city because new money-making homes for the Rams, the Chargers, the Clippers, and the Forum were all more important than homes for poor Black and Brown families.

Now, compare that to the little youth center in Inglewood and how I was treated there. It wasn’t big and you had to go down the steps to a room under the library. But, they were always happy to see me. I got my first job there. I knew what it was to have a safe place to go after school. I could talk to them about my problems.

Now I’m at the Youth Justice Coalition’s community center where we have a high school where youth can come to if they have been kicked out of other schools or as a court alternative to getting locked up. I graduated from high school there last June. We have counseling, job and college preparation, a youth leadership program where we are writing and passing new laws and organizing for change, and transportation to and from school. Instead of probation and police officers, we have Peacebuilders that actually sit us down and make us solve the root causes of our problems. I help out in the legal clinic and go to court with people to help in their defense.

Because of these experiences growing up, I worked hard to create the Youth Development and Diversion Department for LA County. It means that in LA as many as 11,000 youth a year will now be diverted from arrest - no fingerprinting, no criminal records, no prosecution in court.

But, even more importantly, youth will be switched from being punished to being empowered, introduced to the kinds of programs where we feel welcomed, where we learn real skills, where we can heal, and where we can a build a positive future without sitting in the back of police cars or behind prison bars.

Last year’s creation of the Youth Reinvestment Fund was the beginning of young people gaining access to state funding for youth development. We shouldn’t have to get arrested for our state and counties to notice that we are here or that we need some support.