

EMILY HARRIS:

Welcome. My name is Emily Harris and I'm Executive Director of the Disability and Philanthropy Forum. I use she/her pronouns and I'm proudly disabled and come to you from the unceded land of the Council of Three Fires, the Ottawa, Ojibwe, and Potawatomi Nations, now known as Chicago. As part of our commitment to accessibility, our panelists and I will each provide an audio description of ourselves. I'm a white woman with dark, curly hair and glasses, wearing a pink, black, and white pattern blouse. Behind me is a white and tan screen. My access needs are met today because we have CART captions. A few housekeeping items. There are two ways to access our live captions today: use the CC button at the bottom of your screen or to access the captions in a separate window, see the link to the external caption viewer in the chat.

Today, only our moderators and panelists will be on camera. You will be muted throughout the event. This webinar is being recorded and you'll receive a link to the recording in the next few weeks. Although we will be using the chat to share links with you, it will not be available for you to communicate out. Instead, please use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to share your questions anytime during the session. We'll try to integrate them into the discussion as they come in, and we will also make time for the questions at the end, moderated by my colleague Gail Fuller. If the Q&A is not accessible to you, please feel free to send your questions to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org. We'll be live posting on X, formerly known as Twitter today, and hope you will join us on social media using the hashtag Disability Philanthropy. You can also follow along by connecting with us on X @DisPhilanthropy.

We have a poll question to help set the context for our conversation today, please answer it now, if you don't mind multitasking a bit while I speak. The question is, about 38% of kids in youth prisons have a disability. What percent of the 38% are children of color? 90, 60, 85 or 75%? If the poll is not accessible to you, feel free to send an email to communications@disabilityphilanthropy.org or note your answer in the Q&A. To moderate our panel, I'm delighted to introduce Judy Belk, Senior Advisor for the California Wellness Foundation. Judy is joined on the panel by three disability thought leaders and advocates. You can learn more about the panelists from their bios that are linked in the chat.

We acknowledge that our conversation today centers on the disability advocates speaking about legal and policy aspects and does not include the perspective of someone who has been incarcerated. We encourage you to engage with and learn from the diverse perspectives of currently and previously incarcerated people following today's webinar. And please listen to our Mental Health and Disability Webinar on our website that features Marq Mitchell, Founder and CEO of Chainless Change who has experienced incarceration in both juvenile and adult facilities.

Before we start, and I kick it over to Judy, the correct answer to the poll is, 85% of incarcerated youth in prison with a disability are children of color. Many of you got that answer right, with that equal numbers saying 90, 60, and 75%. You'll hear a lot more from our panelists about the 85% of incarcerated youth in prison with a disability. Thank you, and Judy, I'll kick it over to you.

JUDY BELK:

Thank you, Emily. I don't know whether to feel good or bad that I got the answer right, 85% of color just astounds me, but doesn't astound me. Welcome everyone. I'm going to introduce myself and then I'm going to have a panelist introduce themselves and to jump right into the discussion. I want you to hear the perspectives of these three amazing women that are joining me, and I know they, like me, are really interested in hearing any questions that you have. So we're going to try to do a lot in an hour. I'm Judy Belk, I am an African American woman, short hair with a very colorful pink, flowery blouse. I've never met a color I didn't like. I'm in New York sitting in the offices of the Surdna Foundation where I'm on the board. I'm usually based in Los Angeles. I am going to ask Candace to introduce herself. And Candace, as you introduce yourself, can you also just share a little bit about any personal perspectives or stories that has influenced you and your work in this arena?

CANDACE COLEMAN:

Sure. Thanks Judy, and thank you all for having this panel. My name is Candace Coleman, my pronouns are she, her. I come from Chicago. I am an African American woman with the pixie cut, long face, big smile, coral orange top. And my background is the Access Living logo, which is circular lines over a purple and white background with the words that say Access Living. And I come to this work as a Community Organizer starting off as a Youth Organizer. And what really inspired or thrust me into this work is, my belief as a Community Organizer is that you have to be in the community with the people. And the way that we organize towards systems change campaigns is really listening to each other, hearing what the issues are and how we as people with disabilities are impacted. And so because I am from the South side of Chicago, a lot of students that I had the opportunity to meet and to community organize with were students with disabilities who came from schools that had a high population of, the criminal justice system being right in the center of the school.

That being said, the policies and procedures that were there for code of conduct and disciplinary actions, often led students with disabilities into the school to prison pipeline. And oftentimes that was because, people didn't understand people's disabilities types, what kind of supports there were available. If it was not resource school, then more than likely they didn't have the supports and services to really provide opportunity for support for students with disabilities, especially those of color, to have the kind of supports they needed in order to participate in the school setting.

And so if you asked the student themselves what are those things that really led them, it was a lack of understanding, trauma, not having proper support at home or in school or in the community. We talk about ableism a lot, and then we talk about labels that people use to describe disabilities. And personally, they didn't feel like it meant them. And so there's always a conversation of how I identify with the disability versus the way people provide services to me and how there's often conflict in what that means for them versus what's available. And so I can go into more detail later, but that's just the start or the premise of how I got into this work.

JUDY BELK:

And Candace, we're going to peel a little bit more of that, but thank you. And welcome Jamelia. Would you introduce yourself? Tell us where you are and what perspective do you bring to this work?

JAMELIA MORGAN:

Hi everyone. I'm Jamelia Morgan, I use she, her pronouns. I am a Black woman with locks in my hair, a green blazer and a green string necklace. I'm in my office at Northwestern University in the City of Chicago on the unceded territories of the Ojibwe, Ottawa and Potawatomi people. I am a Researcher, a Teacher. I am so honored to be in this space, because I've been inspired by the co-panelists that I'm sharing the stage with Candace and Subini who have influenced my work in many ways and the praxis of many of us.

My research and my teaching try to tackle the criminalization of disability broadly. I rely on the incredible work of Dr. Annamma, DisCrit: Disability Critical Race Theory, and of course disability justice of which Candace practices daily at Access Living. And so I am trying to bring the law, if you will, as applied, as written in compliance with those principles, recognizing it's a limited tool to do so. And that it can be accompanied by activism and local movements grounded in community, of course, but that the law can, in some ways be made less harmful, get out the way and provide opportunities for more transformative radical change.

I get into this work as a personal matter. Growing up in Los Angeles, unceded territories of the Tongva people, and growing up in Los Angeles area broadly in the early '90s and having relatives that faced the brunt of police violence and ultimately incarceration. I, as someone growing up, Black girl growing up in that area wasn't politicized to think about disability. But in my political consciousness, I've come to see many of the challenges that relatives faced to be rooted in both racial injustices and in a lack of recognition of their particular accommodation needs and supports as Black boys in particular with disabilities. And so that motivates me, that's my North Star. Thank you.

JUDY BELK:

Thanks a lot, Jamelia. Subini, can you share with us where you are from? Talk a little bit about your work and what you bring in this space?

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Hi everyone. First of all, I'm so honored to be here with these brilliant panelists and our moderator, these powerful Black women and women of color. My name is Subini Annamma, I use she, her pronouns. I am in San Francisco, which is on the unceded lands of the Ramaytush people. And I work at Stanford, which occupies the lands of the Muwekma Ohlone people. Oh, and I'm wearing, sorry, I always forget this part, but we're always trying to do better, but I'm wearing a green shirt, some long oval earrings, they're very long. I have very short hair, I shorn off all my hair recently, and so my sides are shaved and I've got the short hair. But I see a bunch of short hair baddies on this, so I feel at home here at this call. My work focuses on racism and ableism through the lens of Disability Critical Race Theory.

And really the work that I do really focuses on young people. And that is because, as a Special Education Teacher in middle and high school for many years, focusing specifically on kids with emotional and behavioral disabilities who are labeled with such disabilities, I saw a lot of my kids disappearing. And they would come back a few days later or a few weeks later and they would say, "Miss, I was in juvie." Or, "Miss, can you call my probation officer and tell them I'm doing good?" Or, "Miss, another teacher is threatening to call my probation officer." And so in these ways, I started to see not only the little links between schools and prisons, which activists named the school-to-prison pipeline, the school-to-jailhouse track, and then we started talking about the school-prison nexus.

But they also really taught me because I was a Special Education Teacher, the links between race, disability and how young people who exactly are targeted for removal from public schools and pushed into incarceration. And what I started to learn also was the different institutions that participate in that. That's where I'll leave it for now. I'm so excited to be here and talking with you. So thank you to Candace for all the ways you show up in the world and Jamelia and Judy as well.

JUDY BELK:

Thank you. You can see why we're in for a treat in terms of a conversation. And I should say that, it feels both my personal and professional work are all coming together in this conversation. Many of you who know me know I have a younger sister who was incarcerated for 12 years and she had a disability while incarcerated. I lost a sister to gun violence. And most recently that case has been solved or I think it's been solved. The alleged person has a disability. I have a sister who's in law enforcement. So I've seen all sides.

And one of the things that I'm just going to put out for conversation is that, I don't think any of us were surprised by the poll numbers. And Candace, I know especially, and all of you talked about working with youth, can you talk a little bit about that intersectionality of race and policing as it impacts the disabled community and then the disproportionate number of incarceration? What are you seeing on the ground Candace? And then I want our two scholars to weigh in and say, what is your research and what are the disabilities that we're finding that's really impacting disproportionate intersectionality of race and disability? But Candace, can you tell us what you're seeing on the ground in terms of working with young people?

CANDACE COLEMAN:

Sure. I just want to start off by saying that poverty plays a major role in decision making, when it comes to the outcome of a person of color in the criminal justice system. First of all, when we don't have the conversation around disability because we can't, the medical industrial complex and how we come to terms with what having a disability means, it's full of the word can't, what you can't do, is full of legal jargon, it's full of decisions between my livelihood on an everyday basis, occurrence versus being able to get access to transportation or good doctors or food for some matters.

And all of that plays into what coming to school looks like, am I hungry? Am I in a supported environment? Is my IEP or 504 plan being followed? Is there ever a conversation about what the disability means to me? Do I have choice in this matter? Is the conversation happening over my head or directly to me or around me? And oftentimes the conversation is not happening directly to me. We're not explaining what the disability is, so I don't have any knowledge of what my triggers are or how I can even accommodate myself in certain situations. I'm not having a conversation around what the legal jargon of having a 504 or IEP plan means. I've never heard you say that I have a disability, so when you tell me that in this particular school setting, it is a disruptor instead of something that I can accept.

And so all of those initially play into first self-identity as it relates to disability, but then actually being in the school house or the actual system or in a community where it's over policed, and so it's over policed where I cross the street, it's over policed in front of my home, it's over policed when I'm in the school building, and then people telling me that I can't act a certain way when I don't have... I can't control this and I don't know what to do. And then when something happens, instead of it being explained or processed, then I'm punished and put in front of police, which leads me into records, which leads me into jail, which follows me for my lifetime if I don't get the right kind of support.

JUDY BELK:

Candace, that's what's happening on the ground. And then Jamelia, then tell me what's happening where people with disabilities are facing a disproportionate rates of incarceration and policing? And what is it that we can do to break the cycle, follow up on what Candice is seeing down the ground, that all makes sense? What type of disabilities are we talking about? Why are folks with disability more prone to have interactions with law enforcement and then maybe eventually incarcerated?

JAMELIA MORGAN:

Sure. I'll build on a bit of what Candace shared, I think and talk in particular about maybe some of the vulnerabilities, what Devon Carbado calls pathways into police violence. Let's think about the way that we provide quote unquote, "Mental health crisis care services," in many jurisdictions and including in the City of Chicago, police remain a part of helping individuals get access to emergency crisis care services. And in many ways, that's a clear pathway into police violence. We should be investing in robust behavioral health systems that do not rely on law enforcement to distribute access to emergency care services. And moreover, we could think about providing access to on-demand community based at home mental health services, so that we don't move to the crisis care need in emergency situations. And so when I think about the policing problems, that's one component of it.

The other part of it is that we confer police with a lot of discretion to decide who is disorderly, to decide who is abnormal, strange, weird. I'm thinking of Elijah McClain, a black youth that is minding his own business in Aurora, Colorado, observed by a quote unquote, "Concerned neighbor," that he looks strange and he is weird. That becomes a pathway into police violence. He's singing along to music. He's reported to be wearing a ski mask, because he has anemia

and he's accommodating himself, yes, in the hot summer month of August, but he has the right to do so. And the police stop him, they perform a stop that we would say violates the Fourth Amendment, that amendment that regulates police, because they lack reasonable suspicion when they stop him, not suspicious of he's not engaging in anything that would amount to criminal suspicion, we would say. And that's a finding from the report that comes out of the killing.

So that we can also see as creating vulnerabilities, the amount of discretion we give to police to stop individuals that have disabilities, that might not fit the quote unquote, "Norm." When I think about the disproportionate number of people with disabilities in prison, and I'll end here, it's across a number of disability types, so about one in three in state prisons report having a physical disability.

JUDY BELK:

Okay, that's what I was going to ask you. So it's across all disabilities, not just mental health.

JAMELIA MORGAN:

It is. The disproportionality, physical, when you think about psychiatric disabilities, the reporting, again, it's reported, so this could be under reported. We have limited ways of assessing data robustly in carceral facilities. For psychiatric disabilities, it's almost one in four in some jurisdictions, and as high as maybe three in four. And I say the three in four number, because when you look at women incarcerated in California, they reported 85% had issues with mental distress in the last few months before the study. Judy, I just want to emphasize that there are pathways that lead people into the criminal legal system, that capture them into the criminal legal system, and it starts with policing and the ways that we have decided to criminalize disability in society that has gone unaddressed and unremedied for decades.

JUDY BELK:

Yeah. Subini, can you build on that? Because in your writing, you've really talked about the fact that mass incarceration is a disability, justice issues and eugenics project. Break that down for me, tell me, and then how ableism and racism, all of this intersectionality gets us to these horrific statistics? Can you interject your work and your focus about where we need to be really thinking about this from a really strong intersectionality framework?

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Beautifully, Jamelia and Candace just laid out perfect examples of how mass incarceration becomes this disability justice project that we need to push back on as part of disability justice, just to be clear. And it is a eugenics project because of A, who it targets. One of the things I've started saying is, if we take that idea that Cornell West put forward that justice is what love looks like in public, then I think we can take it to recognize that mass incarceration is hate institutionalized. To me, it is clear who we hate by who we incarcerate. And so to give an example, so what I mean by that... And again, I want to be very clear, I'm definitely not the only

person saying this, Nirmala Erevelles, Liat Ben-Moshe, TL Lewis, there's a number of folks recognizing that disability injustice is so needed for abolitionist perspectives. So I want to just recognize that.

And then when we think about racism and ableism, if we can start with the concept that they are interdependent, they rely on each other. And what I mean by that is, as a Critical Race Theorist, Mari Matsuda talks about racism as being the foundation of a racial hierarchy. And then, so what I think a lot of us are adding is, if racism is the foundation, then ableism is the scaffolding. It's how we create the hierarchy, by situating some people as less than in behavior, in productivity, as TL would say, or intelligence. And so we create this hierarchy through racism and ableism leaning on each other. And so that's really what animates this project. And so to take it to young, Black and Brown youth, age doesn't protect disabled Black and Brown children because they're imagined as not as innocent. What scholars like Jamilia Blake and Thalia Gonzalez have named as adultification of Black girls.

But those same Black children are also imagined as hyper strong and aggressive, so they're also seen as these not innocent and yet super aggressive and strong. And so disabled Black and Brown children become punished because of their disabilities, even though they're supposed to be protected because of their disabilities, they actually start being punished because of these different qualities that people think that they have or anticipate them having. And when we start to realize that, we also realize that disabled Black and Brown youth are further traumatized and even disabled through prison conditions, which causes trauma. So not only the eugenics project works in these multiple ways, it is first of all, targets particular kids to put into the prisons, disabled Black and Brown kids, but then it further traumatizes them.

And what do I mean by that? So I mean, the amount of sexual assault that goes on in prisons, and I don't mean just from prisoner to prisoner and imprisoned person to imprisoned person, I want to use the word imprisoned, so we remember that's a choice we're making to imprison someone. But also, so in my work, I work with incarcerated youth and I look at schools in particular, the schools in these places. And one of the things that I've learned from both working and teaching and researching in these places, is that a pencil is considered a weapon, so before and after every class pencils have to be counted. There's us

Let's say there's 12 pencils, if a pencil goes missing, there is an automatic requirement for a strip search in most of these places right away. Now think about it, first of all, we're considering a tool of learning as a weapon in the most literal of senses in youth prisons. But then also if the consequences for having a tool of learning is sexual and gendered violence, because that's what a strip search is. Let's be very clear. It's sexual and gendered violence against young people. Again, when we see this eugenics project, it's not only of who we target, it's the trauma that we then cause.

JUDY BELK:

It's the trauma that we cause. Okay. I could talk hours. I've got all these questions I want to jump in. Candace, I want to ask you to help us understand what the barriers are, let's say when youth and other folks who've been disabled reenter society? We know the challenges that even

an able body formerly incarcerated person might face. What are the barriers that formerly incarcerated disabled people face with reentry that we need to understand, that this continues not only once, not only during the incarceration, but they still are dealing with major challenges?

CANDACE COLEMAN:

Well, the first thing is the label that they've been in the criminal justice system. And so that label pushes them out of getting access to a lot of supports and services, and the basic necessities that you need to live. The second thing is we always talk about rehabilitation, but how are we building people back up? And particularly in our disability identity, and particularly not having access in the jail system, let alone knowing what kind of access you need outside of it.

JUDY BELK:

Candice? There you go.

CANDACE COLEMAN:

Not having access to medical support, housing, getting placed back in regular school. And if you are placed back in regular school, that comes with a lot of criminalizing procedures, so you can't be in certain classrooms, you got to be monitored at all times, and then you can't get all your resources. And so there's this repeated cycle that doesn't give you access to actually be a community member or the option to express yourself in that way. And then the option to have the basic necessities of housing supports and services and getting reacclimated back to pretty much where you started. And then let's not forget, there's a time-lapse. If I went into the juvenile detention center at 14 and come out at 25, all the things I missed, I don't know anything about technology advances, I don't know anything about the socialization of various processes. I had one person who ended up going back in the system because they didn't understand how to use an ATM machine.

JUDY BELK:

I remember that with helping my sister, her trying to understand after 15 years, what's the difference between a text, an IM and email, just had no exposure to technology. I'm mindful that I'm getting the note that in a few minutes., We're going to open it up for questions. I want to ask a question Jamelia, and then one of the questions I want to ask all of you before we end, is what are some bright spots of solutions? Or you've got a group of funders here, what's the call of action that funders should be doing to address this?

Jamelia, I want to ask you to just talk briefly about there are some oppressive policies like the Fourth Amendment, the Eighth Amendment, issues around research and seizure, excessive fines and all of that that are contributing to disproportionate number of folks being incarcerated. Can you just talk a little bit about that? And then I'm going to ask everyone to just say if there's one or two things that funders could do tomorrow to help alleviate this issue, what it would be, but giving others to talk about that. But Jamelia, I want to ask you to talk about some just suppressive policies that are on the books that's contributing to this issue?

JAMELIA MORGAN:

When we think about the Fourth Amendment and the Eighth Amendment, the Fourth Amendment regulates police conduct. It's our constitutional amendment, it's supposed to protect the people, that's us. The Eighth Amendment is supposed to protect us from cruel and unusual punishments. One of the reasons that I talk about in my work that the laws don't protect us, people with disabilities, people of color, people at the intersection, is one because of under enforcement and two, erasure oversight in thinking about how the rules apply in real life. When I talked earlier about the Fourth Amendment and the fact that Elijah McClain was stopped and officers didn't have reasonable suspicion, which is a requirement under the Fourth Amendment through a case called Terry vs Ohio.

The other thing to think about is when police stop disabled people and the law protects them, meaning that these forms of discrimination are seen as lawful. And that's what I found to be particularly troubling, because it meant that the Fourth Amendment wasn't protecting a group of people, people with disabilities. This is true when it comes to protections against intrusive searches, when it comes to the vast problem of use of force, what I found in my research is that the doctrine, the law doesn't take into consideration the unique vulnerabilities of people with disability. And so therefore, they tend to lose these cases when they're trying to seek redress under the Fourth Amendment. With respect to the Eighth Amendment, prison produces disabilities there, as Dr. Annamma Subini just mentioned earlier, lack of nutrition, violence, sexual violence in particular can produce traumas.

These aren't often remedied under the Eighth Amendment, because the standard is so difficult for plaintiffs to establish one, that there's been this serious deprivation of a basic human need, of which we could say safety is one. But then also you have to show that the prison officials were quote unquote, "Deliberately indifferent," meaning they were reckless. They knew that this was going to harm you, they didn't care, they did it anyway. That's a hard thing to win on. And so another thing we see is that the law creates barriers to relief for disabled people, to challenge these systematic forms of violence. And so I just want to end there to show, it's not always the unlawful behaviors that lead to violence and vulnerability against people with disabilities, sometimes it's the laws themselves, they're under protecting even when followed.

JUDY BELK:

Yeah. Jamelia, I really hope that people really understand, one, many people spend the majority of their lives in incarcerated. They get old, there are elderly, there are women who have children or are pregnant when they've been incarcerated, there are folks in terms of vision care, dental care, there are just so many disabilities. And the thing that I take away from what you said is that, the system itself self also insights and brings about disability. So it's just a great reminder. Okay. You are talking to many in the audience, if they're here, they want to learn, they care deeply, they may have resources, they may already be working in this area or thinking about it. What are two to three things, and we'll make it really quick so we can get to Q&A, that you would hope that funders might consider doing, supporting or maybe not supporting? Because

I'm sure you guys have ideas about things, telling [funders] "don't even go there." Starting with you, Candace.

CANDACE COLEMAN:

Well, first of all, I think as funders you have influence. And in my work, I often find that funders don't ask the question if people are serving people with disabilities, let alone asking how they do it. And so I think at the basis of being an influencer and finding out what your recipients or grantees are doing in this area is important. Two, our reentry numbers, you hear all of these numbers about people being released from prison, but for people with disabilities, the numbers have gone up, as to how many people are still in the jails in the prison system. And one of the reasons why that is, is because the transferring out of that system lacks support.

And so if we just talk about housing, reentry housing is not accessible. Getting access to services and supports like Medicaid or Medicare or SSI or any of those things is such a time-lapse. And not to mention if you are a person who's acquired a disability, having a personal care attendant available in this system is also lacking. And so being able to fund programs that fund home and community-based services is extremely important. And that's just on a basic necessity need, just to mention a few. And I could go on and on, but that's just a few.

JUDY BELK:

Thank you. Okay. Subini, do you want to weigh in? What would be your advice to funders?

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Sure. I've got three unpopular solutions. One, tax the rich. We have huge wealth disparities in this country. If you are a wealthy person, pay your damn taxes. We wouldn't need philanthropy if rich people paid taxes, so we could fund public services. That's my clearest one. And like I said, usually pretty unpopular. Second, get out of the way and provide the money to those most impacted with as few strings as possible. We know what works, so put money into universal basic income, accessible housing for all, a mandatory minimum wage, healthcare for all and education. We know that that would help. And the third is focus on abolition. Police and prisons do not bring us closer to justice, period. So we need your help coming up with other things to respond to harm. Stop encouraging.

The thing is, I live in a very wealthy city. San Francisco is very wealthy, but the wealth disparities are huge here. And what we are seeing Democrats, because there's no Republicans in this city, that's what everyone claims, there's no Republicans here. It's all Left Coast, West Coast. You know what's happening? The Democrats, the people in charge of the city are claiming that they should have the right to jail the unhoused, because they don't want to see them anymore. Do you know how many disabled Black and Brown people who were formally incarcerated are now unhoused on our streets?

And the solution that the Democrats are pushing for, instead of saying, "We need to come up with housing, we need to get permanent housing, we need to do a universal based income," is,

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"Let's arrest them. Let's put them in care courts that force them into a court system and then force them into mental health treatment." Forced mental health treatment is not going to solve our problems. Coercion is not going to repair harm, the harm that we've done to people through poverty, and particularly Black and Brown disabled people. Again, unpopular opinion, but abolition all the way, start imagining a new world because this one ain't it.

JUDY BELK:

Yeah, reimagining.

CANDACE COLEMAN:

I support that. I also want to add, that people don't know that homeless shelters are not accessible. And so even in the system of public care, it's still not accessible.

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

And let's just add Candace, also we're in a COVID surge and are there any COVID precautions being taken? We're automatically endangering unhoused people by forcing them into shelters that are inaccessible and dangerous with the things that we have. Sorry to cut, but I just can't.

JUDY BELK:

No. That's what I want to hear. And these aren't outrageous ideas or unpopular ideas, these are thoughtful ideas. You're really talking about systems change here. And funders are saying that's what they want to do, many want to do. Jamelia, can you share your thoughts? And then I'm going to turn it over to Gail Fuller, who I know is collecting questions from the audience.

JAMELIA MORGAN:

Right. No, I really just wanted to echo what Candace and Subini shared. My two very much echo, let the community doing the work, the communities doing the work, set the agenda. Funders, let's move beyond liberal reform to radical transformative change. I've described, Subini described, Candace described, these are sometimes legally sanctioned practices, processes that are happening. We need to not see the law as the only tool to protect and save the lives of disabled people. We have to look beyond that. We need a new world. And so I think that in many ways, because you as funders are so influential, allowing the community to help set your agendas would do a lot to advance movements towards radical transformative change. Because these systems are harming disabled people, particularly disabled people of color. And we've seen no real reaction to that.

And I guess the last little point for the researchers, let's start funding new approaches to research. Not the same organizations that are white led, that are not disabled led, disability led, that continue to fund research and support projects by police, by prisons. Let's start looking at peer support models. Let's start letting people with psychiatric disabilities like the National

Coalition for Mental Health Recovery lead the conversation and set the research agendas and fund those projects. Thanks.

JUDY BELK:

I have loads of more questions, but I'm going to be generous and turn it over to Gail Fuller to really outline any questions that others might have. Gail, turning it over to you.

GAIL FULLER:

Thank you. This has been a great conversation. We have questions coming in from everywhere right now. The first question is, "In Texas, an armed guard or school resource officer has become mandatory at every school. Can you touch on the myth that policing in schools protects youth? And how will we see this impact disabled youth of color?"

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Wow. I just want to note that I see Candace's face right now, and I'm making this... I feel like I'm looking in a mirror, Candace, because that's the exact same face I am making. I'm going to just answer quickly, but then I'm going to let Candace go on, because I can see it. But those of us who study this know the facts, police don't make us safer, and particularly police with guns do not make us safer. First of all, there have been shootings where there have been security and police. And remember that in Parkland, the security guard that ran away, they found him. Police don't actually have the obligation to protect us. So this idea that suddenly somebody with an armed guard is going to protect us is ridiculous.

But also we know how often they turn on young people. Police are not trained to work with young people. They are not trained to deescalate. Even when they are trained, quote unquote, "Trained," whatever that means, the kids they often target are Black and Brown kids with disabilities. Disabled, Black and Brown youth will be harmed by this policy. Candace, I want you to answer, but I had to say that.

CANDACE COLEMAN:

No. In addition to that, if you just think of the core of training and you think about institutionalized knowledge, we generally don't get disability knowledge just as regular everyday people. And so they definitely don't get knowledge about the community, what it looks like, the scope. And let's not even talk about racism and the training that's supposed to be geared towards disabled people, but in their descriptor, they're only talking about white descriptions. And so usually the identity of what they think that they know is very medical model, it's racist, and it's not taking into account what that actual community looks like and how to be of service to that person. Because it's very control and command, nothing else. And so more police usually equals more negative outcomes and just more trauma just across the board, even as a community member.

JUDY BELK:

It seems so simple. Gail, another question.

GAIL FULLER:

Yeah. I think this one is really for Jamelia, based on some of your last comments. "Having family that have and are imprisoned, I have witnessed the total lack of care for those with mental health conditions. What have you seen in terms of mask incarceration and mental health and other neurological conditions such as epilepsy? And how is the system addressing these disabilities?"

JAMELIA MORGAN:

Sure. I think as the question points to, and as I shared earlier, there are disproportionately high numbers of people who are in prison and jails across America today that have psychiatric disabilities that are diagnosed, which is an under-reported number, because many have psychiatric disabilities that have not received diagnosis. And when you think about what it's like to be in prison, for everyone, it's harsh conditions. There's, as Candace shared, a command and control structure that structures the day-to-day life of people, whether they're in general population or they're in restrictive solitary confinement conditions. But when you have a psychiatric disability in prison, it's particularly tough. One, there's limited quality mental health treatment, things like therapy take place self side, or in the view of others. There's no privacy or confidentiality when you're trying to get mental health therapy. When you think about the administration of psychotropic medications, that can be limited and sporadic because of staffing shortages, you might get the wrong dosage one day, which really messes up your symptoms for that day.

It's really difficult to access care in prison. And then on top of that, when not provided with care, any behavioral reactions to the lack of care or the harsh prison conditions are punished with solitary confinement, with cell extractions, violent extractions of people when they're deep in a crisis moment. And so in many ways, I think of disability in prison as again, a site where disabled bodies experience the brunt of state violence. And that particular management of disabled people in these carceral sites is a continuation of what Subini shared, these eugenic projects to get them out of our society, to put them in prisons, to control their bodies and minds in these very hyper controlled settings. And I talked about some of the vulnerabilities then, you're not receiving treatment in the community. There's a web of criminal laws that will go after you and target you. And so I want us to think about these relationships across prison walls and into our communities.

CANDACE COLEMAN:

Candace, can I add that we also need to take the stigma away from having a mental health or behavioral health condition or identity? Every time we think about a mental health crisis, we think of the most violent occurrence. And that's just not statistically true. And even when folks get training to provide services or support, they're also automatically thinking about it from their perspective. And so we have to get to a place where we're not looking at a person that has a mental behavioral health diagnosis as other or something that is not attainable or something

that we have to fix. And so I feel like that should also be a part of the conversation. And so people are not being open to sharing if they have a mental health or behavioral health condition, because the criminalization just comes along with it, and then they're not able to ask for or request help because of the punitive response as well.

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Yeah. I just want to add-

GAIL FULLER:

Thank you Candace. Thank you... Oh, go ahead Subini.

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Sorry, Gail. I just wanted to add that, for young people too, please remember that when they become incarcerated, they're often forced not only into education because there's federal laws that mandate, but they often end up in mental health counseling. And so there's this narrative that, "Well, at least they'll get mental health care in prison." But please remember that... When I work with incarcerated youth and what they continually say is, "The mental healthcare I get positions me as the offender. And so everything is about changing my..."

One of the most common things incarcerated girls told me that I write about is changing their "criminal thinking." It's individualized, it's about criminal thinking, it's about fixing the girl instead of recognizing the broken systems that surround her, that led her to this situation in the first place. It's about not addressing the lack of care that society and everyone within it brought to her and the harm that was brought to her, but instead, often as, "You need to fix your criminal thinking. Stop hanging out with the bad kids." Very prescriptive behavioral things that don't actually address the systemic and institutional issues that got them there in the first place.

GAIL FULLER:

Thank you. I am going to read what this person wrote, and then their question, "I'd love to hear this group speak to what frameworks of disability are most prevalent in Black and Brown communities and how those frameworks work to either further disable or empower disabled students? How do we assist in changing the disability narrative to be more empowering?"

CANDACE COLEMAN:

I guess that's me. I'm a person with a disability, multiple disabilities. And to be honest, I came into this movement straight out of college and didn't know anything about disability rights, disability justice. And the thing that was affirming to me was actually having the conversation around disability from a strengths based approach, from the approach of having choice, from the approach of having community, from the approach of having definitions to how my body reacts and not knowing what that was before, and seeing people with disabilities live their best life the way that they want it, and in community to fight. The years of oppression that I faced

through all the systems, education, services, medical model, when I came to the point to see that none of that mattered because I could just live my life, that really helped. And so my work in youth work was around educating young people about the power of the disability community, the power, and knowing who you are as a person with a disability and navigating and using that choice for them to do systems change and power.

And so for me, it's the combination of knowing the history that the Disability Rights Movement was fought and led by disabled people, however, a lot of people of color was missing in that dialogue. And then bringing on the histories of all of our identity and identifying that people had disabilities across the spectrum of humankind. And when we get to that level, a point of understanding then it moves our work forward, at least for me. And so I just feel like having access to disability community, knowing rights and knowing disability justice, and we're moving along the continuum to include intersectionality and other things. It's an emerging area. And so having access to that has helped me to build and develop other people who are younger than me or who just didn't know. I'm working on gun violence right now, and so them learning about our movement is helping them to navigate how they want to move forward. And so I just find value in that. And that's just one perspective, but for me, that's where it's at.

JUDY BELK:

Wow.

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Sorry. Go ahead.

JUDY BELK:

Did you want to say something? Go ahead.

SUBINI ANNAMMA:

Real quickly. I think the other thing is, don't assume that Black and Brown communities don't value disability, even if it's talked about in different ways. Sami Schalk has a book called Black Disability Politics. Leah Laksmi Piepza-Samarasinha has a book called The Future Is Disabled, and she also has another one. I think there are people of color writing about this and Black folks writing about this, Felisa Thompson. I think we need to dig for those things instead of assuming that Black and Brown people need more models of how to have disability as empowering, just because the language isn't the same as what is used in white communities. I would encourage us not to analyze from a deficit perspective something that we don't understand.

JUDY BELK:

That's a great way to end. I think, Gail, if I'm not mistaken, I'll turn it over to Emily, but I don't want to do that without expressing my gratitude to my three, I'll continue to say badass women. I've learned a lot. And you've given us both things to think about on the system change level,

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both things that you can really do tomorrow to move this agenda within your organization and in terms of resources. And we'll make sure that, and I think we've already put some of the resources in the chat. And for those of you funders who want to do something, low hanging fruit, I would encourage you to immediately take a look at the Disability Pledge to take that into your organization. Think about joining many of other funders like California Wellness and many others who, while we're not perfect, are saying, "We want to stand to community and being able to look at changing not only in our organization, but changing our funding practices and support." I'll turn it over to Emily, but thank you. Thank you so much.