

My name is Jose Gallegos. I am a 24 year old Chicano from South Los Angeles. I have recently completed all requirements for my high school diploma from Free LA High School, and will be walking the stage this fall. I look forward to continuing my education at Los Angeles City College. For the last past eight months I have been a leader with the Community Rights Campaign, a project of the Labor/Community Strategy Center. Prior to those eight months, I had been incarcerated and struggling with stable housing. Let me share with you briefly my introduction to the LA County Jail.

In 2006 I was pushed out of Manual Arts High School, due to a problem inside my home. My parents were going through some issues that led them to separate. You see, my step dad was my role model, my coach, my teacher, and most of all my push into success. With him no longer in the picture the outcome of their divorce left a great impact on me which caused me to lose major interest in school. I could not focus in school with so much weight on my shoulders. I did not show up for school for some days. When I did return I was kicked out because of my unexcused absence. No one at the school tried to get to the root cause of why I, a student that had met all requirements and passed both parts of the CAHSEE, had missed those days. I was pushed out of education and soon into incarceration.

I started working in the fashion district of Downtown LA selling compact disks. I was arrested and charged with unlicensed sales. Now mind you, I had never been to juvenile hall, camp, or a detention center. I was 18 and instead of walking across the stage to receive my diploma, I walked across LA County Jail Inmate Reception Center and received a booking number. I was sentenced to 190 days, three years of probation, and an outrageous amount restitution fines.

That was my first felony and not my last. Upon my release, I was put back into society labeled as a felon, no shot at employment, and in debt with probation fines. These fines eventually became a threat to me that placed me in a catch 22 situation. I started hustling on the street corner to pay for the fines and to support myself. If the fines were not paid then I would be violating probation. So I had nothing to lose. That occurred in 2009 when I became one of the incarcerated African Americans and Hispanics that make up 90% of the California state prison population for drug possessions, which are classified as non-violent crimes.

Fortunately I refuse to accept the justice system plan to make me a permanent member of their prison industrial complex, so I took my experience with the justice system, and turned it around into positive energy. I chose to better my community and help guarantee that youth are not directed into the justice system but into a quality education system.

In August of 2011 I was fortunate to cross paths with the Community Rights Campaign. This community based program provided me the opportunity to let my voice be heard and develop myself into a success oriented individual, as well as develop the skills of a community organizer. They also opened the door for me to obtain my high school diploma at the Youth Justice Coalition. I have contributed over 80 hours of community service with the Community rights Campaign and the Youth Justice Coalition.

I have gained solid qualities of communicating with people from all walks of life by organizing on MTA buses. My work as a foot soldier was important to the Community Rights Campaign. I helped mobilize community members into our monthly meetings, movie nights, rallies, press conferences, and to many rallies to stop LA's daytime curfew L.A.M.C 45.04, which, in a great victory

for L.A.'s Black and Brown youth, was amended by a vote of 14-0 by LA city councilmembers in February 2012.

As a student leader with the Youth Justice Coalition, my time has been devoted to mentoring youth. I also traveled to Sacramento to lobby with California law makers on Senate Bill 9 and life without the possibility of parole (LWOP) for youth. My work there also gained me valuable experience and knowledge about social justice. It prepared the broader picture to further my college education in that field.

I am also involved with Boys and Young Men of Color, a project of The California Endowment. BMOY involves young men like me from different parts of the California such as Oakland, Fresno, and LA County. Earlier this March, the LA chapter held an Assembly Select Committee on the Status of BMOY in which I presented in one of the panels. I spoke about my personal experiences, and shared my ideas about changing the juvenile justice system.

As a Community Rights Campaign youth organizer I organize on one of the world's largest transit system. Riding the buses, I have one-on-one conversations with community members and try to get them involved with the campaign and also try to educate them about decriminalizing Black and Brown communities. As a leader I am responsible for facilitating our Taking Action Club at Manual Arts High School.

I believe the Bertha Wolf-Rosenthal Foundation fund 2012 stipend will help me tremendously to continue my education. I have my high school diploma, but I also plan to obtain a college degree in social justice. My tribulations with the social justice system have wet my appetite to expand my skills and knowledge in this field. I have also developed strong skills and interest in public speaking, with much experience speaking at a variety of public meetings and hearings on topics ranging from realignment on jails to school

push out issues. Last but not least, I always envision myself accomplishing the ultimate goal of my life, becoming the world's greatest motivational speaker. My experiences with speaking in front of a mass audience have helped me discover the inner beauty of myself. To be able to speak in front of a large crowd about my testimony, but to motivate youth and older people is a gift that I own and a gift I want to share with the world.