

The FaithJustice Vision

The United States has the highest rate of incarceration in the world. The current criminal justice system relies on punitive measures to deter crime and these measures tend to reinforce social structures of inequity. Incarceration causes financial hardship for families and communities, hindering economic security and participation, and placing tremendous economic burdens on federal, state, and local governments. Dismantling the state of mass incarceration is an enormous task.

The FaithJustice Foundation is committed to being part of the movement for criminal justice reform. Our vision is to amplify the biblical perspective of justice so that all people can experience the liberation, healing, restoration, and redemption God desires for all God's children.

The Biblical Witness¹⁺

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me because the Lord has anointed me. He has sent me to preach good news to the poor, to proclaim release to the prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind, to liberate the oppressed. (Luke 4:18)

You must not distort justice; you must not show partiality; and you must not accept bribes, for a bribe blinds the eyes of the wise and subverts the cause of those who are in the right. Justice, and only justice, you shall pursue, so that you may live and occupy the land that the Lord your God is giving you. (Deuteronomy 16:19-20)

Remember prisoners as if you were in prison with them, and people who are mistreated as if you were in their place. (Hebrews 13:3)

Isn't this the fast I choose: releasing wicked restraints, untying the ropes of a yoke, setting free the mistreated, and breaking every yoke? Isn't it sharing your bread with the hungry and bringing the homeless poor into your house, covering the naked when you see them, and not hiding from your own family? (Isaiah 58:6-7)

Then the king will say to those on his right, "Come, you who will receive good things from my Father. Inherit the kingdom that was prepared for you before the world began. I was hungry and you gave me food to eat. I was thirsty and you gave me a drink. I was a stranger and you welcomed me. I was naked and you gave me clothes to wear. I was sick and you took care of me. I was in prison and you visited me." (Matthew 25:34-40)

Key Issues

Mass Incarceration

The U.S. incarcerates more of its citizens than any other nation. The jail and prison population increased from 200,000 in 1972 to 2.2 million today, largely due to mandatory minimum sentence laws for drug crimes passed in the 1980s. The U.S. accounts for 5 percent of the world's population but nearly 25 percent of its prisoners. And mass incarceration has had a disproportionate impact on African Americans and other minorities. African Americans make up about 13 percent of the nation's population, but account for 28 percent of all arrests, 40 percent of those incarcerated in jails and prisons, and 42 percent of the population on death row. Blacks are arrested at rates 2.5 times higher than whites; Native Americans were arrested at 1.5 times the rate for whites.

¹⁺ Scriptures are from the *Common English Bible* translation.

African Americans and Latinos are less likely than whites to be sentenced to probation and more likely to be sentenced to prison. Black men are more than six times more likely to be incarcerated than white men.

Beyond taking a toll on families and communities, mass incarceration is also a huge cost to taxpayers, absorbing funds that could be used for other public needs. It costs between \$36,299.25 to keep one person in federal prison for one year. In contrast, the yearly cost to educate one child in K-12 public school is approximately \$12,600.

Solutions: There is significant bipartisan support for reform of our criminal justice system. Many organizations are specifically advocating to reduce or entirely get rid of [mandatory minimum sentencing](#) laws, which took away judicial discretion for drug and other crimes in the 1980s. Instead they gave power to prosecutors, who often leverage the minimum sentence laws to strike plea deals. Getting rid of these laws would take away that leverage and allow judges to assess the seriousness of the offenses brought to them rather than forcing them to incarcerate people for set periods of years.

How to Take Action:

- Fight mandatory minimum sentencing laws with [FAMM](#)
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Returning Citizens

Life after incarceration is difficult. In addition to the natural challenges of reorienting to family and community obligations outside of prison, returning citizens (formerly incarcerated individuals) face a number of obstacles to rebuilding their lives as productive members of society. They have to find housing and jobs. Yet, job applications often require them to “check the box” stating they have a criminal record, and most employers are reluctant to hire them. Some states bar people convicted of certain crimes from accessing food stamps or public housing, or from obtaining some jobs that require a license. Additionally, some states bar those with felony convictions from voting and serving on juries.

Solutions: Numerous faith-based and other organizations, such as [Healing Communities USA](#), support returning citizens, accompanying them in their re-entry. Additionally, a movement of returning citizens, their families, and civil rights advocates have led a successful Ban the Box campaign over the last decade, advocating for removal of the question about conviction history on employment applications. [Over 150 cities and counties and 33 states have removed the question](#), and many have reformed their hiring practices to reduce discrimination against those with criminal records. As some studies have shown an increase in racial discrimination by employers after Ban the Box, the campaign continues, seeking to advocate for other “fair chance” policies and practices.

How to Take Action:

- [Become a Station of Hope](#) for returning citizens in your community through Healing Communities USA
- Start or join a Ban the Box or Fair Chance campaign with this [toolkit from the National Employment Law Project](#) or this [toolkit from the NAACP’s Successful Reentry Project](#)

Other Resources

Find a list of other resources to learn about and take action on criminal justice reform at www.faithjusticefoundation.org/charitycause/criminal-justice-reform.