



NETWORK LOBBY FOR CATHOLIC SOCIAL JUSTICE

Building Our Justice System Anew

In a world of growing economic disparity and increasing individualism, NETWORK members across the country call for federal policies that dismantle systemic racism, eliminate the wealth and income gap, improve the wellbeing of our communities, and allow all people to thrive — especially those most often left out: women, people of color, people on the economic margins, and those at the intersections of these identities.

Our Legacy of Injustice

Since the end of legal slavery, the U.S. has enacted criminal legal policies that have disproportionately discriminated against Black people and communities of color. Beginning in the 1980s and including the passage of the 1994 Crime Bill, public policies have resulted in over-criminalization, mass incarceration, and police militarization. Harsh mandatory sentencing laws and a focus on punishment rather than rehabilitation took its toll on already vulnerable segments of the U.S. population, deepening the racial divide and creating a situation of structural poverty for many individuals, families, and communities. In order to realize the common good, we must dismantle the legal barriers that prohibit every person from thriving. We know that our criminal legal system is rife with inequities that especially harm people of color. Only through a concerted effort can we establish a system that fulfills its promise to serve and protect all people.

Our Values:

- Catholic Social Justice teaches that all people should be treated with dignity and are entitled to safety, including in their interactions with law enforcement.
- Our criminal legal system must provide fair and equal accountability while also affirming the capacity of human beings for rehabilitation, reconciliation and restoration.

Towards a More Just Society

POLICING REFORM: Despite the outcry over the high-profile murders of Black people in the U.S. by law enforcement — including Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, George Floyd, and Breonna Taylor — police nationwide have shot and killed 1,000 people per year since 2014. Black people in the U.S., who comprise only 13% of the population, are killed at twice the rate of white people, and only three of the 98 officers who have been arrested in these instances have seen their convictions stand.¹ Significant reforms to policing, including guidance on a necessary use of force standard, mandatory body and dashboard cameras, abolishment of the chokehold, and an end to qualified immunity are necessary for a just society.



Cornerstones to Build Our Country Anew

- ☀ Dismantle Systemic Racism
- ☀ Cultivate Inclusive Community
- ☀ Root Our Economy in Solidarity
- ☀ Transform Our Politics

In the face of growing disparities and divisions, we call for policies that allow all people to thrive. We must build our country anew by prioritizing racial equity, caring for the Earth, and improving the wellbeing of all people and communities through legislation.

SENTENCING REFORM: Sentencing should be commensurate with the severity of the crime and applied equitably. Years of “tough on crime” policies and extreme sentencing measures such as mandatory minimums and “three strikes” laws has led to the U.S. having the highest percentage of incarcerated people in the world, 655 per 100,000.² Even nonviolent offenses can result in years in prison and subsequent restrictions on reentry into society.

BARRIERS TO REENTRY: A person convicted of a crime in the U.S., whether or not they serve time in prison, suffers long-term discrimination in employment, education, and public services. These impacts are especially harmful for communities of color. “Checking the box” on an employment application and prohibitions against licensing in certain fields cost formerly incarcerated men an average of nine weeks of employment per year and \$179,000 in lost earnings by age 48.³ Returning citizens face restrictions on federal student aid, health care, nutrition programs, the right to vote, and public housing, which affects family reunification. The loss of a wage-earning adult contributes to the cycle of poverty by limiting options for housing, education, and employment for other family members. Every person, including those with criminal convictions, should be allowed to exercise their right to vote and have access to the social safety net.

It Is Time for Moral Leadership to Reform Our Criminal Legal System

The murders of George Floyd and too many others have illuminated the systemic inequalities in our country’s criminal legal system and compelled our people to cry out for change. We cannot continue to tolerate racial profiling, police brutality, the loss of another generation to mass incarceration, or the perpetuation of unnecessary poverty. It is time to affirm that each person, regardless of their past, is a child of God and entitled to respect, forgiveness, dignity, and equal justice under law. **NETWORK calls on Congress to take a firm stance against the systemic racism embedded within the criminal legal system and hold law enforcement accountable for protecting and serving everyone in society.**

What Congress Can Do to Build a New Criminal Legal System

EQUAL Act (H.R.1693/S.79)

This bipartisan and bicameral bill introduced by Rep. Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), Kelly Armstrong (R-ND), Bobby Scott (D-VA), and Don Bacon (R-NE) in the House and Senators Cory Booker (D-NJ) and Dick Durbin (D-IL) in the Senate, seeks to eliminate the disparity in sentencing for cocaine offenses, a major contributor to mass incarceration. The legislation would also apply retroactively to those already convicted or sentenced.

NETWORK calls on the House and the Senate to pass the EQUAL Act immediately.

George Floyd Justice in Policing Act (H.R.1280)

This bill, introduced by Rep. Karen Bass (D-CA) and passed by the House on March 3, 2021, seeks to require a federal standard that use of force only be used as a last resort, prohibits chokeholds, prohibits racial profiling, and requires robust data collection on police community encounters and law enforcement activities. The legislation also seeks to eliminate federal programs that provide military equipment to law enforcement, prohibit no-knock warrants, and will create a national public database to compile names of officers who have had their licenses revoked due to misconduct.

NETWORK calls on the Senate to pass the Justice in Policing Act immediately.

¹ “Fatal Force,” Washington Post, (accessed March 2, 2021) available at <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/investigations/police-shootings-database/>; NAACP, “Criminal Justice Fact Sheet,” (accessed March 2021) available at <https://www.naacp.org/criminal-justice-fact-sheet/>

² Statista, “Countries with the Largest Number of Prisoners per 100,000 of the National Population, as of June 2020” (2021), available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/262962/countries-with-the-most-prisoners-per-100-000-inhabitants/>

³ The Pew Charitable Trusts, “Collateral Costs: Incarceration’s Effect On Economic Mobility” (2010), available at http://www.pewtrusts.org/~media/legacy/uploadedfiles/pcs_assets/2010/collateralcosts1pdf.pdf.