



## **NETWORK Lobby Urges Yes Vote on the EQUAL Act**

Our mission at NETWORK Lobby for Catholic Social Justice is to educate, organize, and advocate for economic and social transformation. For almost 50 years, we have been guided by the principles of Catholic Social Justice, which tells us to place the needs of people at the socioeconomic margins at the center of our advocacy. Founded by women religious in the 1970s, we continue their legacy today by building a just society that ensures all people have what they need to live dignified lives. We are proud to have over 100,000 supporters across the country who share our passion for justice.

NETWORK Lobby strongly supports the Eliminating a Quantifiably Unjust Application of the Law (EQUAL) Act. The EQUAL Act (H.R.1693) is faithful, bipartisan legislation that seeks to eliminate the disparity in sentencing for cocaine offenses, a major contributor to mass incarceration, and apply retroactively to those already convicted or sentenced.

Earlier this year on May 12, more than 120 NETWORK members went on 50 lobby visits to urge their Representatives to support the EQUAL Act. We are thrilled to see this necessary legislation reach the House floor and strongly urge all Representatives to vote yes on this critical sentencing reform.

For decades, the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine offenses has contributed to our country's shameful legacy of systemic racism and mass incarceration despite being two forms of the same substance. Science and experience have shown us there is no difference between use of crack or powder cocaine. Neither one is more or less addictive nor produces more violent behavior in the user. The difference is that crack cocaine has historically been used in more urban communities of color, specifically Black communities, while powder cocaine has more often been found in whiter, more suburban communities. The racial implications could not be clearer.

Furthermore, the sentencing disparity between these two drugs has contributed significantly to the growth of mass incarceration in this country. According to FMM, in 2019 alone, 81% of those convicted of crack cocaine offenses were Black, even though historically, 66% of crack cocaine users have been white or Hispanic. It is time to end this racist policy and restore proportionality in sentencing.

The EQUAL Act makes clear and immediate steps towards respecting the dignity of Black lives in our federal policies. NETWORK Lobby affirms that every person is made in the image of God and entitled to dignity and equal justice under law. We call on all Representatives to take a firm stance against institutional racism embedded within the criminal legal system by voting yes on the EQUAL Act so that it can swiftly make its way to the Senate floor.