



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 engaged in criminal legal policies that have disproportionately affected Black people and communities of color. Starting in the 1980's and including the passage of the 1994 Crime Bill, public policy in this area has 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 Justice 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 every person, regardless of race, gender, sexual orientation, or class should not fear for their safety, including in interactions with law enforcement.
- Pope Francis has placed a focus on "bringing good news to prisoners" from the beginning of his papacy. Reforming the U.S. criminal legal system will bring "good news" to those engaged with it.

Towards a More Just Society

POLICING REFORM: Despite the outcry over the high-profile murders of Black Americans 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 Americans, who comprise only 13% of the population, are killed at twice the rate of white Americans, 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 and the establishment of a national use of force registry, mandatory body and dashboard cameras, abolishment of the chokehold and no-knock warrants, 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 well-being of all people and communities through legislation.

SENTENCING REFORM: Sentencing should be commensurate with the severity of the crime and applied equitably, while acknowledging their sacred worth, their ability to be rehabilitated and reconciled back into community. 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, disproportionately impacting communities of color, 655 per 100,000.² Even nonviolent offenses can result in years in prison and subsequent restrictions on re-entry into society. The U.S. ranks sixth in the world in executions, as of February 2021, 33 of the nearly 2,500 people on death row in the U.S. were scheduled for execution.³ The death penalty, which is state-sponsored murder, must be abolished.

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 48.⁴ Returning citizens face restrictions on federal student aid, healthcare, 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's 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 and dignity. **NETWORK calls on Congress to act and take a firm stance against the systemic racism embedded within the criminal justice system and hold law enforcement accountable for protecting and serving everyone in society.**

What the Senate Can Do to Build a New Criminal Legal System

Eliminating a Quantifiably Unjust Application of the Law (EQUAL) Act of 2021 (S.79)

Introduced by Sen. Corey Booker (D-NJ) on January 28, 2021, this bipartisan legislation seeks to eliminate the disparity in sentencing for cocaine offenses established in the Anti-Drug Abuse Act of 1986 – a major contributor to mass incarceration – and would apply retroactively to those already convicted or sentenced.

First Step Implementation Act (S.1014)

Introduced by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) on March 25, 2021, this bill would further the goals of the First Step Act of 2018 (FSA) by correcting unfairness that has resulted in implementation and interpretation errors that contravene the spirit of the FSA.

COVID-19 Safer Detention Act of 2021 (S.312)

This bill would clarify and expand the eligibility for the Elderly Home Detention Pilot Program (introduced by the FSA), including explicitly naming COVID-19 vulnerability as a basis for compassionate release under this program.

Prohibiting Punishment of Acquitted Conduct Act of 2021 (S.601)

Introduced by Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) on March 4, 2021, this bill would end the perverse practice under which federal courts consider acquitted or dismissed charges as aggravating factors when imposing sentences for convictions.

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 Death Penalty Information Center, “Executions Around the World” (2021), available at <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/policy-issues/international/executions-around-the-world>

⁴ 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/collateralcosts1.pdf.