

An America that Works for All of Us

Justice System

Quest: We all want to live in safe communities, to be treated with dignity and respect, with a justice system based on equal treatment not stereotypes or bias.

The problem – villains and their threats: We are currently saddled with an outdated, unfair, biased and bloated justice system that drains resources, breaks apart families, ruins lives and disrupts communities.

- Our justice system is biased against people who are poor, and who are Black and Brown, wrecking families and communities, while letting the wealthy and connected get away with almost anything. We need our justice system to uphold our values, based on equality, prevention and treatment, while safeguarding our communities.
- Long prison sentences for non-violent crimes and for young people, a “one size fits all” approach that defies common sense, and campaign contributions from the private prison industry have led to too many people being in prison and too much money being spent to keep them there.
- Too often police departments use racial profiling, which is singling people out because of their race or accent, instead of based on evidence of wrongdoing. That’s against our national values, endangers our young people, reduces public safety and harms our communities.
- Too often the justice system targets Black and Brown men and women for harassment, using bail to lock them up so they can’t pay the rent, denies them effective lawyers, threatens them with years and years of prison and coerces them to agree to plea bargains that leave them with criminal records – so they can’t find work, they can’t get student loans, they can’t vote. That robs them of their futures and destroys their families.
- When people can’t make bail, they may lose their jobs, which means they may not be able to pay the rent or other basics, leaving their families unable to make ends meet and in danger of becoming homeless. All while people with money just walk out of jail.
- Local governments rely on the justice system to raise revenues, telling the police to make as many arrests as possible for traffic and other petty violations, imposing high fines and penalties, forcing people to miss work to go to court. These unfair practices do real harm to families and weaken communities.

Our solution – heroes: We need our justice system to uphold our values, based on equality, prevention and treatment, while safeguarding our communities.

- We should focus our actions and our resources on better education, job training and treatment instead of more prisons, police and judges.

How we get there: We need to rewrite the rules of our justice system to:

- Make greater investment in prevention and treatment: mental health and addiction services, job training, economic opportunity.
- Give people a chance to start over through training, opportunity, and removing arbitrary barriers.

- Assure that law enforcement agencies train their officers to pursue evidence, avoid racial profiling, and treat all communities with respect.
- Focus on community policing, giving communities a vital voice in deciding how they are policed and being sure that police interact with community residents so that they can set aside stereotypes and better protect public safety.
- End cash bail for non-violent charges so people can continue to work and support their families while they wait for their day in court.
- End the practice of using the justice system as a way to raise revenues, by prohibiting quotas, dramatically lowering fines and penalties and ending the practice of putting people in prison when they can't afford to pay fines.
- End the privatization of the prison system and make sure that all prisons are publicly run and accountable.
- Put an end to discriminatory and abusive policing practices and hold law enforcement accountable when they break the community's trust.

Call to action: Together we can create a justice system that supports safe, thriving communities.

- It's up to us to demand that our elected officials create a justice system based on core American values – equal treatment, opportunity and freedom.