

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-new-view>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Im writing this having pulled my laptop out of the boxes piled up around my new desk in Veras new headquarters. Over my shoulder, you can see the Statue of Liberty in New York Harbor. Weve moved, and today is day one.

After almost two decades of working near City Hall in the Woolworth Building and almost six decades since our founding with the Manhattan Bail Project the Vera Institute of Justice has up and left Manhattan and moved to the real center of gravity in New York: Brooklyn. Our new home, at Industry City in Sunset Park, reflects some of the things moves often mean for organizations. Weve grown; we need more room. Our old space no longer served the needs of our workforce or the way we work, which meant that we were squandering further opportunities to do more good in the world. Were also being smarter with money. Our move means were saving \$15 million in costs over 15 years critical resources that can go to mission and not rent. That, in itself, is reason enough to move. I could stop writing right now.

But this move means far more. At a time of increased momentum for justice reform, Veras new offices are designed to provide inspiration and to foster the collaboration and bold thinking necessary to reimagine the American justice system and drive its needed transformation. On the walls are works of art by formerly incarcerated artists and Brooklyn-born artists who have dedicated their work both themes and actual production to social justice. Heroes from John Brown to Linda Brown, from Rodolfo Corky Gonzalez to Kitty Cone, from Marsha P. Johnson to our own founder Herb Sturzurge us on.

Our relocation to Brooklyn also reflects Veras expansion in scope: mass incarceration is a national problem, and we work to end it alongside allies in more than 40 states and in four offices across the country here and in Washington DC, New Orleans, and Los Angeles. No longer is all our business New York-centric, necessitating proximity to City Hall and the Municipal Building.

Given our own transformation, it makes a lot of sense to locate ourselves in Industry Citys sturdy 20th century warehouse infrastructure, repurposed for 21st century use. We, too, are building a new Vera repurposing yet buttressed by the sturdy bones of the past.

Today the public engagement with our mission is different than it was even five years ago, and so is Vera. The racism infecting the criminal justice and immigration justice systems is widely acknowledged, or there are at least fewer deniers out there. Mass incarceration is finally recognized by the mainstream for the problem it is. Vera is fighting for change and is explicit about racial justice sitting at the very core of our work.

So, I love that today we begin fighting from a space that features artists from our new community, in work that lifts up Black and Latinx leaders and heroes, as well as their allies. I love that were fighting from a space that looks out on the Statue of Liberty and reminds us of her message of welcome. And I love that there is, for me, more than a little personal resonance. My Dad grew up in Bed-Stuy and I spent a childhood visiting family in the borough I have now called home for almost 25 years.

Along with our allies, were fighting for our mission to drive change in the justice system and its a fight that, together, we know we can win.

As we say here in the County of Kings, Spread love, its the Brooklyn way.

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