

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/governor-cuomo-highlights-need-for-justice-reform-in-all-jurisdictions-not-just-new-york-city>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Across New York, momentum is building to end mass incarceration. Yesterday, [Governor Andrew Cuomo announced in his State of the State address](#) that he will propose the elimination of cash bail in certain cases, as well as several other criminal justice reforms including speedy trial and improved due process during the 2018 legislative session.

Here in New York City, advocates for reform are not only celebrating the Governor's announcement, but also that of Mayor Bill de Blasio earlier this week that the city will close the first of ten jail facilities on Rikers Island this summer. Long considered a stain on the city, an independent [commission studying Rikers Island published a report](#) last year recommending the complete closure of the jail complex, and Mayor de Blasio endorsed that recommendation as official city policy. A recent drop to all-time lows in both the city's [crime rate](#) and its [jail population](#) added more fuel to the fire to close Rikers Island.

However, the statewide proposals for criminal justice reform in the Governor's address remind us that mass incarceration is an issue that extends well beyond major cities. In fact, research at Vera reveals that who is incarcerated in local jails has shifted dramatically over the last 30 years: rural areas, as well as small and mid-sized towns, are the places actually driving incarceration growth, while the jail population in many major cities has declined.

Governor Cuomo's announcement also comes at a pivotal time in the fight against mass incarceration in all corners of New York. In [Empire State of Incarceration](#), Vera recently explored what this phenomenon means for small and mid-sized places across the state. Today, three out of five New Yorkers in jail on any given day are held in facilities in the 57 counties outside New York City. *Empire State* highlights several of the criminal justice reforms needed in upstate and rural New York—namely bail, due process, and speedy trial—and how counties both big and small can take steps to end the overuse of jail.

As New York looks to create a criminal justice system that embodies fairness, safety, and due process for all, we must remember to include all places—cities, towns, and villages—in our conversations on reform. Learn more about incarceration rates in your county, and join this conversation, at www.vera.org/state-of-incarceration.

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