

# Vera Institute of Justice

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/fulfilling-the-promise-of-justice-reform>

### Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Over the Thanksgiving week, I reflected on what I'm thankful for. I was reminded by events in Ferguson of all that still needs to be done to ensure equal justice in this country. Vera is committed to this challenge. From our [work with prosecutors](#) on fairer decision making, to [helping law enforcement](#) build bridges with diverse communities, we know how hard this is.

At the same time, I want to take the opportunity to share with you some of the things I'm thankful for, because they remind me as I hope they do you that progress is possible even when it may not have seemed so a few years ago.

As you'll see, they all point to a promising development in our work together that we have unprecedented agreement and momentum behind the idea that our country needs to turn away from our destructive, short-sighted overreliance on incarceration.

**1. I'm thankful to see how folks from the right and left are coming together across the aisle and across the country.** You may have seen this in Vera's ongoing initiative, [Justice in Focus: Crime Bill @ 20](#) (and if you haven't, you should look now!). This conversation about change, justice, and the kind of America we want to be includes Tea Party senator, a member of the Congressional Black Caucus, a Texas fiscal conservative, an evangelical preacher, a former U.S. treasury secretary and chairman of Goldman Sachs, and the man who oversees Pennsylvania's prison system.

After years of unchecked growth in incarceration, this broad range of leaders knows that the cost to our communities in dollars and human suffering is simply too high and how we administer justice should reflect the best of who we are as a nation.

Still, this holiday season, the 2.7 million children who have an incarcerated parent won't be together with their families. We will soon hear more about this on Justice in Focus, when Jeanette Betancourt, vice president for outreach and education at Sesame Workshop, talks about why the show created Alex, a Muppet with a parent behind bars. Sesame Street also offers a toolkit for families and caregivers, and resources for prisons and jails about the needs of children whose parents are in their custody. Muppets and mass incarceration are not often part of the same sentence. And while I wish that millions of children did not need to turn to a Muppet named Alex to help them understand what happened to their parents, it feels like an important step towards recognizing and dealing with the huge impact that too much incarceration is having on our nation's families.

**2. I'm thankful for the ambitious initiatives our Vera team is launching to keep up the momentum.** It's not often we see this sort of alignment. And our team here at Vera is working hard to ensure that we do not squander it. That's why we are advancing several major initiatives in 2015 that will help reduce our reliance on incarceration and build stronger communities. I'm excited about the innovations were incubating here to:

**3. I'm thankful for our community.** Your continued support is one of the things I'm most thankful for. It has been clear as a bell in my first year on the job. Your dedication, engagement, and perspective make what Vera does possible working to improve trust between law enforcement and the communities they protect, and helping more people be with their families instead of in our prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers.

Over the next month, we're trying to raise awareness about why these projects can make a difference as well as raise the funds we need to continue and expand this work. I very much want to hear what you think about this work. Have ideas? Questions? Leave a comment below, and in the coming weeks I'll respond as well as provide more detail about the programs mentioned above.

Thank you for joining us.

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*Inspired by the momentum Nick writes about above, a group of Vera donors is offering to match all gifts up to \$25,000 to help Vera launch our 2015 reform initiatives as quickly as possible. If you'd like to make a tax-deductible donation and have it doubled, just [donate here](#).*

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