

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/a-monumental-call-for-justice>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Just over three years ago, in response to Congress passing the Fair Sentencing Act of 2010 (which reduced the disparities between mandatory crack and powder cocaine sentences and eliminated the five-year mandatory minimum for first-time possession of crack), I wrote a [blog post](#) for Vera outlining why this bill was monumental on many fronts.

Earlier this month, Attorney General Eric Holder confronted another significant imbalance in the federal justice system when he called on U.S. Attorneys across the country to no longer charge certain low-level, nonviolent drug offenders with offenses that impose draconian mandatory minimum sentences. The reasons cited by the Attorney General for this reform, and several other significant policy changes, are neither complicated nor new. In addition to the pragmatic reasons of cost and efficiency, the Attorney General appealed to notions of justice and fairness. Its about who we are as a people. [I]t has the potential to positively impact the lives of every man, woman, and child in every neighborhood and city in the United States, Holder emphasized to his audience. We must declare that we will no longer settle for such an unjust and unsustainable status quo. This is our promise to forge a more just society.

While many states are [taking a bite](#) out of the mass incarceration apple on the state level, these policy changes, combined with the introduction of and bipartisan support for the Smarter Sentencing Act of 2013 (which would expand a judges ability to sentence below a mandatory minimum, lower mandatory minimum sentences for certain offenses, and make the Fair Sentencing Act retroactive), have the potential to truly reduce the federal governments reliance on mass incarceration. Although policies based on fairness, justice, and equality may not seem remarkable, in light of the last 40 years of sentencing law in the United States, they are positioned to bring long overdue reform that will touch the lives of many individuals. And that is monumental.

This post is part of a series in which Vera experts respond to Attorney General Eric Holders recent address to the American Bar Association calling for comprehensive criminal justice reform. Share your thoughts in the comments section below and search for the hashtag #VeraResponds on Twitter to join the conversation

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