

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

[**https://www.vera.org/publications/empire-state-of-incarceration**](https://www.vera.org/publications/empire-state-of-incarceration)

Policy Issue Resources

Publication

For decades, thousands of New Yorkers, primarily people of color, were held in jail pretrial sometimes for years simply because they could not afford to pay bail. Bail reform ushered in a period of considerable decarceration across New York State, and the number of people in jail dropped even further as authorities responded to the COVID-19 pandemic. The state's nearly 40 percent decline in jail populations proved that New York can reverse its decades-long investment in mass incarceration.

But bail reform was only the first step one that New York should protect and expand. Next, the legislature must reach beyond jails to New York's prisons which incarcerate over 30,000 people by implementing parole and sentencing reforms. Vera's Empire State of Incarceration report offers tools and data to track progress on reducing New York's reliance on jails and prisons.

Bail reform had an immediate and dramatic impact on jail populations across New York State. The state now has an opportunity to build on bail reform and other policy changes to reduce not just jail populations, but the racial disparities that have plagued jails and the broader criminal legal system since the United States was founded.

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