

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/blog/womens-voices/a-seat-at-the-table-for-women-living-with-convictions-for-violent-offenses>

Public Facing Advocacy Writing

Within the reentry, criminal legal system reform, and abolition movements, women living with convictions for violent offenses are often overlooked and underrepresented.

The time is now to be inclusive of women and their struggles around living with convictions for violent offenses. The criminal legal system reform movement too often fails to include these voices in policy changes and program creation.

I speak from experience. Growing up, my community included those who lived in poverty and struggled with substance use issues. Unfortunately, I became a product of my environment and ended up in prison. I never thought I would end up in that situation, and yet, I did. I spent a total of 13 years of my life incarcerated.

Now, I am well aware of the pain and problems of being left out of conversations about reentry as a woman living with a conviction for a violent offense. I have been denied access to important programming, discriminated against within the criminal legal system, and discriminated against in the workforce.

The first act of discrimination I encountered while living with a conviction for a violent offense was in the Federal Correctional Institution, Danbury in Connecticut. I was not allowed to go to the camp lower-security facility enroll in the drug program, or even be a hospice volunteer because I had a conviction for a violent offense. At that moment, I knew: due to the violent nature of my crime, my life would never be the same.

Even outside the prison system, my sentiment that my life will never be the same as a woman living with a conviction for a violent offense was confirmed more than a year ago. I was recruited by a second-chance municipality mayoral initiative focused on reentry for a position as a director of a reentry center in my state. I was in the running for the job until the nature of my crime became an issue. Eventually, I was phased out of the hiring process. Traditional reentry does not put you in the winning seat when you are a woman living with a conviction for a violent offense.

I am not an anomaly. There are far too many women and girls who have walked similar paths due to the deadly combination of racism, poverty, trauma, and substance use issues. Since the system is not designed to give us the support we need to survive, we will rise to the task.

This is why I founded [Women Against Mass Incarceration \(WAMI\)](#), a grassroots nonprofit organization that creates a forum within the criminal legal system reform and abolition movements for women living with convictions for violent offenses. WAMI empowers women and girls who have been affected by incarceration to use our voices. When we tell our stories and speak boldly about our plight, we reframe our narratives and show how incarceration results in the destruction of our families. We work to change the systems that lead to the loss of hope and cycles of violence. These valuable perspectives of women living with convictions for violent offenses need to be included in reshaping the criminal legal system and the paths of reentry. There can be no real reform if it excludes people convicted of certain offenses.

[Read more from our Womens Voices series.](#)

Tiheba Bain is executive director of Women Against Mass Incarceration. She is co-author of Race, Education, and Reintegrating Formerly Incarcerated Citizens: Counterstories and Counterspaces and a 2020 Great 8 inductee into the Connecticut Hall of Change.

Vera believes in using our platforms to elevate diverse voices and opinions, including those of people currently and formerly incarcerated. Other than Vera employees, contributors speak for themselves. Vera has not independently verified the statements made in this post.

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