

Vera Institute of Justice

Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/securing-equal-justice/promoting-racial-equity-in-prosecution>

Campaign and Advocacy

Prosecutors (also known as district attorneys or states attorneys) are government lawyers at the local, state, and federal levels who review or approve arrests, offer plea deals, and hold trials. They play a critical role in our criminal legal system because they have the ultimate power to charge people with crimes.

Prosecutors have played a significant role in the creation and perpetuation of our mass incarceration system and its impact on communities of color. Law enforcement, elected officials, and other government entities have often measured prosecutors success by the number of convictions and lengths of sentences they deliver instead of their impact on safety.

But prosecutors can choose a different path to build safer communities. Vera believes that communities will be safer if fewer people enter the criminal legal system. **We call on prosecutors to reduce racial disparities and end mass incarceration through smart, evidence-based decision-making and community involvement to achieve transformative change with measurable outcomes.**

Prosecutors have played a central role in perpetuating racial injustice as enforcers of racially discriminatory laws and practices. Their ability to decide who to charge with a crime, what crime to charge, whether to request bail, what plea to offer, and what sentence to seek means they have a direct hand in how people engage with the criminal legal system.

Prosecutors have used this power to perpetuate a system that imprisons more people than anywhere in the world, [notably including](#):

sending formerly enslaved Black people to jail in the late-19th century for [walking without purpose](#);

enforcing the segregationist Jim Crow laws of the Civil Rights Era; and

increasing sentence lengths for some classes of drugs, which perpetuated racial discrimination during the War on Drugs.

Recently, some prosecutors have begun instituting important criminal legal system reforms. Yet, **prosecutors must do more** and decisively change their policies and practices to decrease the impact of mass incarceration on communities of color.

In 2021, Vera launched [Motion For Justice](#) in collaboration with the Institute for Innovation in Prosecution to provide policies prosecutors can adopt to reduce systemic racial disparities in partnership with local communities.

Join the movement for prosecution reform

Help us ensure racial equity

Thank you
for signing
up!

Join us in the
fight for justice.

Help us spread
the word!

Transformative change, sent to your inbox.

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