

# Vera Institute of Justice

## Criminal Justice Issues and Prisoners' Rights

<https://www.vera.org/about>

### Mission Statement

Founded in 1961 to advocate for alternatives to money bail in New York City, Vera is now a national organization that partners with impacted communities and government leaders for change. With [offices in four major cities](#), and a [team of hundreds of advocates, researchers, and policy experts](#), we work to transform the criminal legal and immigration system so that money doesn't determine freedom; fewer people are incarcerated; and everyone behind bars is treated with dignity.

To end the overcriminalization and mass incarceration of people of color, immigrants, and people experiencing poverty.

Safe, healthy, empowered communities and a fair, accountable justice system.

In 1961, Herb Sturz, a magazine editor, and Louis Schweitzer, a philanthropist, recognized the injustice of a bail system in New York City that locked people up simply for being poor. They believed that with research, evidence, and advocacy, they could help end the injustice of money bail.

Working with criminal justice leaders, they explored the problem from many angles, setting their sights on developing a practical, innovative solution to NYC's overreliance on cash bail. Within a few years, they had demonstrated that New Yorkers too poor to afford bail but with strong ties to their communities could be released and would still show up for trial.

The experiment called the Manhattan Bail Project resulted in dozens of similar projects in cities around the country and in landmark legislative reform of the federal bail system. It also led to the founding of the Vera Foundation, now the Vera Institute of Justice, [named for Schweitzer's inspiring mother](#) to pursue similar initiatives.

Today, Vera works to ensure dignity and justice for people impacted by the criminal legal system. More than 60 years after the Manhattan Bail Project, Vera is using new tools and strategies from federal, state, and local advocacy and communications campaigns to expert data analysis and research to develop just, antiracist solutions that today's challenges call for.

Vera's founding charter states that Vera exists to seek and further the equal protection of the laws. We are now carrying this mission and the legacy of our founders forward at a larger scale, with more than 60 years of experience and an unwavering commitment to justice for all. For a look back at milestone moments in Vera's six-decade history, visit the timeline at [Innovation and Impact: 60 years of the Vera Institute of Justice](#).

Join Vera to end mass incarceration

Actions and updates sent direct to your inbox.

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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