

[About](#)[Issues](#)[Our work](#)[News](#)[Donate](#)[Take action](#)

SOLUTIONS

It is un-American to stand idly by and tolerate our government locking up so many people, treating racial and ethnic minorities unfairly and squandering public resources - especially in this economy.

It's time to improve our criminal justice system:

On the front end, by reducing the number of people who needlessly enter prison in the first place;

On the back end, by shrinking the existing prison population by allowing prisoners who have proven they are ready to re-enter society the opportunity to transition out of confinement; and

And in the meantime, by investing in alternative solutions that are more effective than lengthy sentences.

Many state governments have already begun to improve their criminal justice systems by shrinking their prison populations. It's time we do the same – in the interest of public safety, fiscal responsibility and fairness.

Reform #1 - Eliminate incarceration as a penalty for certain classes of low-level, non-violent offenses - especially when these offenses are the result of mental illness, drug addiction or are first-time offenses.

- It is possible to shrink our bloated prisons while protecting public safety.
- Public safety is actually undermined when we waste space and money on imprisoning low-level offenders. We should reserve prisons for those who truly pose significant threats.

Reform #2 - Strengthen cost-effective alternatives to incarceration and drug treatment programs.

- We should strengthen and streamline our parole and probation systems so that those who genuinely pose public safety risks are adequately monitored; this will ensure that the vast majority of those who pose little or no safety risks are not unnecessarily kept in or returned to prisons.
- We should ensure that those who need drug treatment get it, so that they can avoid re-offending and productively re-enter society.

Reform #3 - Distinguish between the people currently in prison who continue to pose threats to safety and those who are ready to re-enter society.

- We should release prisoners who have proven they are ready, who have earned credit for exemplary time served and who have completed job training and education programs.
- We should transition people currently incarcerated into increasingly independent living environments, such as half-way houses.
- These reforms will reduce costs, reduce recidivism, and increase public safety by better preparing people in prison for productive lives “on the outside.”

Reform #4 - Require regular, systemic evaluations of our criminal justice system.

- There is a growing recognition that our criminal justice system - like other government systems - must be evidence-based, meet clear performance measures and withstand the scrutiny of fiscal, cost-benefit and racial impact analysis.
- Convening outside experts to examine our systems and creating or re-invigorating a sentencing or criminal justice commission have proven effective in some states as a way to improve the system with deliberative input from key stakeholders.