



GAMALIEL



Decarceration Good Policy Now and After!

In this time of pandemic, the fragility of our democracy, the predatory nature of our economy, and the precarious condition of our communities—especially low income communities and communities of color—are being laid bare.

The coronavirus is infecting and killing black people in the United States at disproportionately high rates, according to data released by several states and big cities. For example in Chicago, African-Americans account for more than half of those who have tested positive and 72 percent of virus-related fatalities in that city, even though they make up a little less than a third of the population. Their susceptibility is not, however, tied to individual behaviors; rather, their susceptibility to the virus and death during this pandemic is tied to the racial character of inequality in the United States.

Debunking the myth that increasing imprisonment reduces crime

Between 2007 and 2017, 34 states reduced both imprisonment and crime rates simultaneously, showing clearly that reducing mass incarceration does not come at the cost of public safety. The total number of sentenced individuals held in state prisons across the U.S. also decreased by 6 percent over the same decade. And these drops played out across the country.

—Cameron Kimble/James Grawert, *Analysis for the Brennan Center for Justice*, August 6, 2019

In spite of the narrative that we live in a post-racial society, racial inequality is still seen in all aspects of life in this country. From type of and access to employment (and lack thereof) to inadequate healthcare and housing, people of color—through centuries of racially inequitable public policy—continue to lack the wealth and opportunity to protect themselves from the ravages of this pandemic.

This is being played out in our jails, prisons, and detention centers which are also disproportionately populated by people of color. For those confined to these places, especially those that are overcrowded, it is impossible for inmates to adhere to the kinds of “social distancing” measures that public health experts recommend in order to stop or slow the spread of this dangerous and highly infectious virus.

As a nation-wide network of people of faith and people committed to racial and economic justice, Gamaliel is concerned for the public health and safety of all people across this globe and, in particular, the most vulnerable among us. To that end we call on our decision-makers to take aggressive and immediate steps to reduce the number of people being held in our prisons, jails, and detention centers. **It is good public policy now in the midst of a pandemic, and it will be good public policy after the pandemic ends.**





Adapting for the health and safety of all

The Gamaliel Transformational Justice Campaign from its inception has included a range of decarceration issue cuts (see demands for decision-makers on this page). The coronavirus pandemic, however, has increased the urgency of making sure these demands are being met in communities and states across this country. The challenge, of course, has been making a shift from traditional face-to-face organizing methods to technological and social media-based organized methods while maintaining a relational focus. To make that shift, we have:

- hosted trainings for our organizers focused on using new technologies and social media platforms, e.g., Zoom, Facebook Live, Instagram, Relational Voter Program, virtual phone banking, etc.; and
- held and scheduled a number of virtual public actions, i.e., a virtual rally and a virtual town hall on decarceration, a press conference focused on the release of the Gamaliel Religious Leaders theological statement on Hate Crimes and White Nationalism and its connection to the impact of COVID-19, building an EXPO (Ex-Incarcerated People Organizing) chapter virtually.

To view the Decarceration Virtual Rally, which includes partner Dr. Cornell Brooks, go to: <https://gamaliel.org/featured/decarceration-rally/>

To view the Decarceration Virtual Town Hall, which includes partner Nicole Porter from the Sentencing Project, go to: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mk3-sNwFSQA&feature=youtu.be>

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Decision-makers must act aggressively and immediately to decarcerate

1. Immediately process, with a presumption of release, every person in prison or jail and immigrant detention center over the age of 65, and everyone over 50 in a high-risk category, for "compassionate release." These, and those with serious health conditions are the most at risk in the current crisis. They need to be allowed to relocate to a safer place.
2. Parole Boards should immediately release every parole-eligible person with a deferment of 6 months or less, and to rapidly review every case with a deferment of between 6-12 months, with a presumption of release.
3. Departments of Corrections should immediately instruct that no person should be detained for a "technical violation" of rules of Probation, Extended Supervision or Parole. Furthermore, all people currently in detention for a "revocation holds" should be released.
4. Departments of Corrections to move to immediately release all people in prisons who are scheduled to be released within the next six months. This step can reduce prison overcrowding and can help to mitigate the potential public health disaster that could take place in our prisons.
5. Eliminate all pretrial, parole, probation check-ins, ICE check-ins and mandatory appearances at court continuances
6. Immediate suspend all ICE detentions, and release to the community all who are in detention centers awaiting a decision on their status.
7. People awaiting trial need to be released immediately, with no need to post any cash bail.
8. Police and Sheriff's departments need to minimize arrests, and bring no one into custody unless it is an urgent matter of public safety.
9. Family Courts and Juvenile Divisions need to release all youth from juvenile detention centers who are awaiting detention and adjudication hearings to the care of family and community.
10. Youth who must remain detained must be given increased access to fresh air space while maintaining health and safety protocols. Recommended cleaning and sanitation protocols must be implemented immediately.
11. Family Courts and Juvenile Divisions must cease all in-person hearings immediately, rescheduling when possible or moving to phone or video conference.
12. Most people in detention centers, jails and prisons have family and friends who would take them in. Some, however, do not. State and federal agencies should utilize emergency money to help secure safe housing for those people who will be released that do not have a safe place to live.

