

DAY 14: Injustice in Our Justice System

“In no area of American society are the legacies of slavery and racism more evident than in the criminal legal system. Despite making up only 12 percent of the U.S. population, Black people make up 50 percent of the country’s prison population.”- Multifaith Movement to End Mass Incarceration

Criminal justice reform addresses structural issues in criminal justice systems such as racial profiling, police brutality, overcriminalization, mass incarceration, and recidivism. These structural issues result in Black and brown people, people with low incomes, and people with mental illness being incarcerated at higher rates as compared to the general population.

Why criminal justice reform? The United States incarcerates its citizens more than any other country ([source](#)). Today, nearly 10 million Americans—including millions of children—have an immediate family member in jail or prison. More than 4.5 million Americans can’t vote because of a past conviction. And each year, we lose \$87 billion in GDP due to mass incarceration.

In Washtenaw County, those numbers are smaller, but the impact on opportunity and life potential is real. According to recently available data, nearly 1,900 people are incarcerated in our local jail; these individuals are predominantly Black and brown. While Black and Latinx people make up 12% and 6% of our population, respectively, they are (in addition to people with low incomes) overrepresented in our County’s jail population, at 48% and 29%, according to data from the [Prison Policy Initiative](#). So too are Black youth, who are incarcerated at higher rates than White counterparts. [Sisters United Resilient and Empowered \(SURE\) is a peer local support group for mothers of youth within the juvenile justice system in Washtenaw County](#). That serves as a vehicle for family engagement and feedback to the justice system.

Did You Know? Over the past 30 years, the trend of confining more women to federal, state and local correction facilities has exploded at an increase of 700%. Over 60% of imprisoned women are mothers of children under age 18. ([source](#))

Our Challenge today explores bias in policing and the criminal justice system, as well as criminal justice reforms for which people are advocating.

Today’s Challenge:

Option 1: Bias here? Yes. [A 2020 report](#) found that in Washtenaw County, one of Michigan’s most populous, and progressive, counties, Black people are charged with felonies at rates between two and 29 times higher than white people charged with the same crimes. [Listen to the story here](#). Then, [check your own implicit associations by taking one or more of these tests](#) by Project Implicit at Harvard University.

Option 2: Formerly incarcerated people are unemployed at a rate of over 27% - higher than the total U.S. unemployment rate during any historical period, including the Great Depression. [Read this article which outlines the barriers formerly incarcerated people face when looking for unemployment.](#) Then, [check out the work of A Brighter Way](#), a Washtenaw County nonprofit that helps returning citizens reintegrate successfully into their communities.

Option 3: Stanford University researchers found that, in an analysis of 100 million traffic stops, Black and Latinx drivers were stopped more often than white drivers, based on less evidence of wrongdoing. [Read this study to uncover the extent of this evidence, which is driven by racial bias.](#)

Option 4: One proposed way to advance criminal justice reform is by defunding the police--reallocating funding away from police departments to other sectors of government. [Read this article from the Brookings Institution to better understand what advocates mean, and the data say, about this policy.](#)

Option 5: If you cannot make bail, you must wait in jail for your pretrial hearing. [On any given day, nearly half a million people languish in jail cells across America, waiting for their criminal cases to move forward and severed from their lives and communities even though they have not been convicted of a crime.](#) The practice of requiring cash bail has recently been abolished in Washtenaw County by Prosecutor Eli Savit. [Read more about this reform to our criminal justice system here.](#)

FAMILY FRIDAY

Option 7 Are you a parent or caregiver of children? [Click here for this week's Family Friday content](#), which is focused on communicating key terms, like race and racism, to young children.

Share your reflections on today's topic on social media using the hashtag **#unitedforequity** and tag **@uwwashtenaw**.