

REENGAGING THE JEWISH COMMUNITY IN CIVIL RIGHTS



JCPA | JEWISH COUNCIL
FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS

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CALL TO ACTION

JCPA is launching a racial equality and criminal justice reform initiative. Our aim is to educate and empower the Jewish community relations field and the broader Jewish community on the civil rights movement of today and to activate it at the federal, state, and local levels.

WHY NOW?

The Jewish community has a distinguished track record dating back to the early 1930s in fighting for racial equality and civil rights throughout the United States. Such fights included advancing racial equity in education, ending segregation, and, in more recent years, ensuring enforcement of the Voting Rights Act. The civil rights movement of the 1960s transformed America and brought the principle of equality for all under the law.

More than 50 years later our society still struggles to embrace full equality, and there remains much work to be done, which calls for the involvement of the community at large. Beginning in the 1970s, the U.S. prison population and the rate of incarceration grew dramatically, a phenomenon referred to as mass incarceration. Studies have shown that mass incarceration is a significant contributing factor to poverty, income inequality, and family instability. Mass incarceration compounded with the erosion of the voting rights act, and prevalence of police violence, perpetuate structural inequality that keeps low-income and communities of color at a disadvantage.

BACKGROUND

In 2015, the Jewish Council for Public Affairs (JCPA), consistent with its historic commitment to civil rights, unanimously passed a resolution calling on the Jewish community relations field to engage on mass incarceration and other issues related to racial equality at the federal, state, and local levels.

At the federal level, JCPA maintains its commitment to civil rights as an active coalition partner in the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, which JCPA (then called the National Jewish Community Relations Advisory Council) co-founded with the NAACP and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters. Through JCPA's collaboration with interfaith, secular, and Jewish partners, we advocate in the halls of Congress, work with the White House, and weigh in with the courts.

To assist JCRCs and get the ball rolling, JCPA has created a backgrounder on *Criminal Justice 101* to help inform the Jewish community relations field so it is better prepared to be active partners on criminal justice reform and 21st century policing. We also created a guide to help you determine what criminal justice reform initiatives are taking place in your area in order to help you map out your engagement.

A GROWING CRISIS IN AMERICA

- With just **4.4%** of the world's population, the U.S. houses roughly **25%** of the world's prisoners—over **2.2 million** individuals. We house **30%** of the world's population of incarcerated women.
- **1** in every **15** black men and **1** in every **36** Latino men is incarcerated, compared with **1** in every **106** white men.
- Over **2.7 million** children have at least **one** parent in prison.
- Nearly **half** of all state prisoners are nonviolent offenders and **16%** are drug offenders.
- Despite similar levels of usage, **2/3** of drug offenders are **black** and **Latino**—that is roughly **10X** the rate of **white** users.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

EDUCATE YOURSELF AND YOUR COMMUNITY

Mass incarceration is not just a federal issue. In fact, more people are incarcerated in state and local facilities than federal prisons. Too few in the mainstream Jewish community prioritize this growing crisis and even fewer sit at the policy tables addressing these problems. This is a time to educate our community:

- Research (or investigate) what mass incarceration and criminal justice reform looks like in your state and locale.
- Organize educational forums in your local community, and join in JCPA's Criminal Justice webinar series, Invite leaders and activists from the civil rights and governmental realm to speak to your JCRC or Federation.

STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS WITH COMMUNITIES OF COLOR

The Jewish community relations field has a long-standing tradition of partnering with communities of color, particularly the black community. Over the years, however, we have drifted apart, hampering our ability to face the serious challenges in our collective communities, such as those surrounding criminal justice. Spend the time and effort in identifying and reaching out to the partners of the future.

MOBILIZE AND ADVOCATE

We urge the Jewish community relations field to strengthen its advocacy work at the local and state level by partnering with leaders and organizations already engaged in reforming the criminal justice system in your community.

We look forward to joining you in this crucial work.

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