

October 10, 2019

LT. GOVERNOR ZUCKERMAN NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 10, 2019

This week the ACLU of Vermont released its *'Blueprint for Smart Justice'* report. This in-depth report looks at the current state of Vermont's prison system. It identifies strategies to; reduce the incarcerated population by 50%, increase the use of community-based alternatives and address our disproportionately high racial disparities. Previous studies have shown Vermonters overwhelmingly support criminal justice reform and believe alternatives to incarceration, like drug treatment, mental health services and restorative justice, would do more to prevent crime than longer and harsher criminal sentences.

'Policies should be pursued in order to create a smarter criminal justice system that prevents avoidable incarceration, returns people to communities without risking public safety, and reduces or eliminates the need for out-of-state prison placements or new prison bed capacity in Vermont.' 2019 Legislative Directive

In 2007, Vermont used a data-driven Justice Reinvestment approach to address the state's rising prison population, reduce corrections spending, and reinvest savings in strategies to improve public safety. This resulted in a nearly 30% decrease in the number of Vermonters in prison. Building on that success, in 2019 Vermont lawmakers charged the Joint Legislative Oversight Committee to continue this work. The *'Justice Reinvestment II Working Group,'* made up of members from all three branches of state government and stakeholders (including the ACLU), are working with the Council of State Governments (CSG) to review and analyze our data. Before the end of December, they will create a report for the legislature that identifies trends and proposes legislative changes that will keep Vermont moving with a smarter criminal justice system for all Vermonters.

Thanks for staying connected.



UPCOMING EVENTS

October 11 10:00AM

Mad River Job Fair. Crossett Brook Middle School, Waterbury

October 14

Indigenous Peoples' Day

October 15 10:00AM

Indigenous Peoples' Day Ceremony, Celebration & Education. UVM, Andrew Harris Commons and Davis Center, Burlington

October 16 5:30PM

VT Women's Fund 25th Anniversary Celebration. UVM, Davis Center, Burlington

October 17 6:00PM

Barre Housing Summit. Elks Lodge, 10 Jefferson St., Barre

October 18 All Day

Climate Encampment: Youth, Migration and Agriculture. State House Lawn, Montpelier

October 22 10:30AM

Leadership Champlain. State House, House Chamber, Montpelier

October 23

3:30 – Turning Point Visit. 141 State Street, Rutland

5:00 - Health Care Town Hall. Rutland Free Library, 10 Court Street, Rutland

October 24 5:00PM

Lake Champlain Regional Chamber Annual Dinner. Doubletree Hotel, 870 Williston Rd., South Burlington

For a complete list of events please visit our website: www.LTGov.vermont.gov

HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE BLUEPRINT REPORT

The report begins, “Over the past five decades, the United States has dramatically increased its reliance on the criminal legal system as a way to respond to substance use disorders, mental illness, poverty, and underfunded schools. **As a result, the United States today incarcerates more people, both in absolute numbers and per capita, than any other nation in the world.** (Emphasis added)” Although past policies have resulted in reductions to our prison population, the number of Vermonters in prison today is still double what it was 30 years ago.

Below are some highlights from the report.

- **Vermont’s prisons have some of the highest racial disparities in the country.** Although Black people made up just 1% of our adult population in 2017, they accounted for 8% of admissions to correctional facilities. Reducing prison population by itself does little to diminish racial disparities.
- **Prison admissions for violations of probation, parole, and furlough are a key driver of mass incarceration** in Vermont. In 2017, an estimated 2 out of every 3 prison admissions fell into this category.
- **Many in Vermont’s prisons are incarcerated past their minimum release date.** As of September 2018, 63% of the sentenced population were incarcerated beyond their minimum sentence, by an average of just over 2 years.
- **As of May 2019, 761 incarcerated people (nearly ½ of the total) were on Medication Assisted Treatment.** This number is a powerful reminder of the need to expand access to alternatives to incarceration, and to make treatment for substance use disorders available to all who need it.

The report also highlights the lack of readily accessible criminal justice data in Vermont as a major barrier to addressing racial and geographic disparities.

Read the full Blueprint: <https://www.acluvt.org/en/blueprint-smart-justice>

JUSTICE REINVESTMENT II WORKING GROUP

The Justice Center of the CSG presented data and proposed focus questions during the first meeting of the Justice Reinvestment II Working Group on August 26, 2019. The focus of reinvestment is; increasing public safety by reducing recidivism, repairing harm, reducing crime and building trust. While data shows Vermont has maintained the second lowest rates of property and violent crime in the USA, our volume of violent crime has continued to increase, and recidivism rates have continued to climb. View the data-filled presentation at: <https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/VT-Launch-Presentation.pdf>

SALVATION FARMS AID NOVEMBER 1ST

Salvation Farms, a Vermont non-profit works with farmers and partners to move wholesome, locally grown foods that have no market to those in need of nourishment - working toward a future where communities are increasingly fed by local farms. This benefit concert is inspired by Farm Aid features some of our favorite Vermont musicians covering the music of past Farm Aid Performers. Join me celebrating this noble cause. Doors open at 7:00 pm, music starts at 8:00 pm. This is a \$20, all ages show. For tickets and more information: <https://www.artsriot.com/events/salvationfarmsaid>