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Over 60 Elected Prosecutors and Law Enforcement Leaders Advocate to End Extreme Sentences and Provide Second Chances to Those Serving Lengthy Prison Terms

Leaders call on prosecutors and policymakers to implement sentencing review mechanisms to address the humanitarian and fiscal crises of extreme sentences

Today, 64 elected prosecutors and law enforcement leaders – including Attorneys General Thomas J. Donovan, Jr. (Vermont), Keith Ellison (Minnesota), Kathleen Jennings (Delaware), Karl Racine (District of Columbia) and Kwame Raoul (Illinois), as well as District Attorneys, Police Chiefs and Sheriffs from around the nation – issued a [joint statement](#) urging policymakers to create mechanisms to reduce the number of people serving lengthy sentences who pose little or no risk to public safety, including by creating second chances for many in our nation currently behind bars. The statement notes that in order to end mass incarceration, justice system leaders must address the high number of individuals serving extreme sentences and cites decades of research showing that these lengthy prison terms have not deterred crime or promoted public safety. Signatories urge criminal justice leaders to end the use of decades-long sentences and implement mechanisms to review and reduce past extreme sentences.

“Decades of increasingly harsh sentences have left the United States with the dubious distinction of being the world leader in incarceration rates; destroying families and communities without making us any safer,” said **Miriam Krinsky, Executive Director of Fair and Just Prosecution**, the organizer of the statement. “In a criminal legal system plagued by past failed ‘tough on crime’ policies, too many individuals who pose no threat to public safety are behind bars serving excessive sentences, draining resources that would be better invested in building and fortifying communities. We need elected prosecutors and policymakers willing to prioritize rehabilitation over endless punishment and committed to taking action to break the destructive cycle of mass incarceration.”

The statement calls for four concrete steps to reform our nation’s harsh sentencing practices and provide opportunities for release for those who have already served significant time and no longer pose a safety risk:

- **Vehicles for sentencing review** – already created by laws in some states – that recognize people can grow and change;
- **Creation of sentencing review units and processes** in prosecutor offices whereby cases can be identified for reconsideration and modification of past decades-long sentences;
- **Expanded use of compassionate release** and elimination of obstacles and barriers that permeate the process, thereby facilitating release for incarcerated individuals who are eligible, including people who are elderly or terminally ill, have a disability or who have qualifying family circumstances; and
- **High level approval within prosecutors' offices** before recommendations are made for decades-long sentences.

“As prosecutors, our communities entrust us to promote public safety; yet the evidence is clear that extreme sentences do not make us safer, nor do they deter crime,” said **Kings County, N.Y. District Attorney Eric Gonzalez**, a signatory to the statement. “I have a duty to pursue justice, and it is not just – or fiscally responsible – to keep people behind bars after they have proven to be rehabilitated and no longer pose a threat to others. It’s time to correct decades of overly harsh prison sentences and give people a second chance.”

The statement highlights the fiscal concerns of extreme sentences, especially as the average age of those incarcerated grows increasingly older, as well as the humanitarian concerns resulting from denying people the opportunity for redemption: “While prosecutors and judges of decades past may have pursued and imposed harsh sentences with the misguided belief that certain individuals were incapable of rehabilitation, there is simply no justification for maintaining those sentences when a person demonstrates that the opposite is, in fact, true.... There is no reason to conclude that the commission of a crime—no matter the offense—must define a person forever.”

“Excessive sentences that lock people away for decades – and all too often for the rest of their lives – are not in the best interest of public safety,” said **Charlottesville, Va. Chief of Police Dr. RaShall M. Brackney**, another signatory to the statement. “This draconian approach to sentencing has only served to further erode the community’s trust in policing and the criminal justice system. It makes us less safe, destroys families and deprives communities of critical resources that could be invested in enhancing community wellbeing. It is long past time for leaders to identify a new path – one in which we recognize the human capacity for change and second chances.”

Read the [full statement](#) and see the list of signatories below.

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Fair and Just Prosecution is a national network of elected prosecutors working towards common-sense, compassionate criminal justice reforms. To learn more about FJP’s work, visit our [website](#) and follow us on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), and [LinkedIn](#).

List of Signatories

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Prosecuting Attorney, St. Louis County, Missouri

Buta Biberaj

Commonwealth’s Attorney, Loudoun County, Virginia

Sherry Boston

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Chesa Boudin

District Attorney, City and County of San Francisco, California

Aisha Braveboy

State's Attorney, Prince George's County, Maryland

RaShall M. Brackney, Ph.D.

Police Chief, Charlottesville Police Department, Virginia

Chris Burbank

Former Chief, Salt Lake City Police Department, Utah

Vice President of Law Enforcement Strategy, Center for Policing Equity

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Darcel Clark

District Attorney, Bronx County, New York

Jerry L. Clayton

Sheriff, Washtenaw County, Michigan

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District Attorney, Ulster County, New York

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