

An America that Works for All of Us

Criminal Justice

Quest: We all want to live in safe communities, to be treated with dignity and respect, with a criminal justice system based on equal treatment not stereotypes or bias.

The problem – villains and their threats: We are currently saddled with an outdated, unfair, biased and bloated criminal justice system that drains resources, and disrupts communities.

- Long prison sentences for “victimless crimes” and for young people, a “one size fits all” approach that defies common sense, and campaign contributions from the private prison industry have led to too many people being in prison and too much money being spent to keep them there.
- Too often police departments use racial profiling, which is singling people out because of their race or accent, instead of based on evidence of wrongdoing. That’s against our national values, endangers our young people, and reduces public safety.
- Local governments rely on the criminal justice system to raise revenues, telling the police to make as many arrests as possible for traffic and other petty violations, imposing high fines and penalties, forcing people to miss work to go to court. These unfair practices do real harm to families and weaken communities.

Our solution – heroes: We need our criminal justice system to uphold our values, based on equality, prevention and treatment, while safeguarding our communities.

- We should focus our actions and our resources on better education, job training and treatment instead of more prisons, police and judges.

How we get there: We need to rewrite the rules of our criminal justice system to:

- Make greater investment in prevention and treatment: mental health and addiction services, job training, economic opportunity.
- Give people a chance to start over through training, opportunity, and removing arbitrary barriers.
- Assure that law enforcement agencies train their officers to pursue evidence, avoid racial profiling, and treat all communities with respect.
- Focus on community policing, understanding communities and interacting with residents so that police can set aside stereotypes and better protect public safety.
- End the practice of using the criminal justice system as a way to raise revenues, by prohibiting quotas, dramatically lowering fines and penalties and ending the practice of putting people in prison when they can’t afford to pay fines.

Call to action: Together we can create a criminal justice system that supports safe, thriving communities.

- It's up to us to demand that our elected officials create a criminal justice system based on core American values – equal treatment, opportunity and freedom.