

# TRANSFORMING THE JUSTICE SYSTEM

## REJECTING THE STATUS QUO, SPEEDING THE PACE OF REFORM

America's criminal justice system aspires to provide equal justice to all. Yet the system still has critical issues that it must address including racial and ethnic disparities, prosecutorial discretion, the need for defense counsel, and the high rates of incarceration in the system.

American University School of Public Affairs' Justice, Law, and Criminology Department, and its Justice Programs Office convened a symposium with experts from police, courts, and corrections in December 2018 to take a broad view of the U.S. justice system. Together, practitioners, academics, and students entering the profession agreed on urgently needed steps to transform what many view as a broken system into one that is just and fair.

Symposium attendees, noting that the entire system has no CEO, agreed that too often individuals operate without accountability in their own silos. There was a call for a systemic vision among leaders. Symposium participants pushed for evidence-based practices to be adopted to improve a failed system in which recidivism rates persist at 60 percent.

### 10 TRANSFORMATIONAL VALUES FOR SYSTEM REFORM

To guide their recommendations, 10 transformational values were viewed as crucial to system-wide reform:

- Equality in administration.
- Equity and inclusion in the workforce.
- Public safety at the center.
- Behavioral and mental health issues addressed.
- Research-driven practices incorporated.
- Victims' rights at the forefront.
- Sufficient resources provided.
- Community partnerships.
- Leadership and accountability.
- Education and training.



Attendee recommendations to establish public trust and prompt needed change included the following:

#### POLICING

Embrace equity and inclusion in workforce diversity, provide victim-centered services, and increase transparency and accountability with the community.

#### COURTS

Eliminate cash bail, adopt the practice of presumptive pretrial release for all misdemeanor charges, expand access to diversionary programs, and eliminate incarceration for those unable to pay fine and fees.

#### CORRECTIONS

Place greater emphasis on the reentry process, acknowledge the impact of trauma on incarcerated individuals' behavior and health, and create stronger connections between researchers and practitioners.

The goal of the report is to promote dialogue, inform policy decisions, and serve as a road map to change.



### **TAKING ACTION FOR JUSTICE SYSTEM REFORM**

The recommendations of the report will be used to help launch “Justice for All,” a forthcoming initiative based at American University, later this year. To help build further consensus and participate in efforts to further develop evidence-based criminal justice reform recommendations, the authors suggest sharing the report with colleagues, constituents, and partners. Symposium attendees suggest the following next steps:

- When sharing with your partners and colleagues, please let them know your thoughts on the report’s recommendations.
- Ask your colleagues to consider ways they could help implement recommendations.
- Invite your colleagues to consider partnering with American University to further the work called for in the report.

Sign up for more information, updates, and next steps. Send an email to [spacomms@american.edu](mailto:spacomms@american.edu).

If you have questions, please contact:

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