

Criminal Justice Policy Initiatives  
NJ Coalition of Religious Leaders

*“I am the Lord. I have called you in righteousness. I have taken you by the hand and kept you; I have given you as a covenant to the people, a light to the nations, to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness.”*

- Isaiah 42:6-7

*“‘For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.’ Then the righteous will answer him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? And when did we see you a stranger and welcome you, or naked and clothe you? And when did we see you sick or in prison and visit you?’ And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.’”*

- Matthew 25:35-40

*“The scope of Divine forgiveness, as depicted by the Qur’an, is vast and unlimited. However serious the sin committed, whatever the nature of one’s wickedness and whatever the period in which one has lived in sin, the moment one feels repentant and sincerely knocks at the door of mercy, the response is forgiveness.”*

- Abul Kalam Azad

*“Life imprisonment, as well as those sentences which, due to their duration, render it impossible for the condemned to plan a future in freedom, may be considered hidden death sentences, because with them the guilty party is not only deprived of his/her freedom, but insidiously deprived of hope. But, even though the criminal justice system may appropriate the guilty parties’ time, it must never take away their hope.”*

- Pope Francis

**Criminal Justice Policy is a moral issue.**

New Jersey’s criminal justice policy record is quite bipolar. We are leading in certain categories and failing in others. Let’s make our state a true leader in smart and effective justice, through education, advocacy, and mobilization.

**Strengths:**

- Office of the Corrections Ombudsperson
- NJ LEADS funding for reentry providers
- Bail Reform
- NJ-STEP educational opportunities
- Progress on juvenile and women’s issues

**Failures:**

- Poor implementation of progressive laws
- Worst racial sentencing disparity in USA
- Broken parole system
- NERA sentences
- Inadequate staffing, inhumane condition

## ISSUES & ACTIONS

### **Rehabilitative Release for Incarcerated Senior Citizens**

#### Facts:

- NJ has the 4th highest percentage of elderly “lifers” (those serving what amounts to life sentences).
- Incarcerated senior citizens are the least likely demographic to reoffend or recidivate.
- Elderly people are at greater risk of infection, disability development, and medical neglect; also cost the state about 4x more than younger people in prison.
- Mandatory minimums and broken parole system has offered very little relief to those serving lengthy sentences.

#### Legislation:

S2338 (Mukherji): *Provides for resentencing hearings to consider rehabilitative release for elderly incarcerated persons.*

#### Actions:

Sign on to our Second Look Petition: [www.secondlooknj.org/petition](http://www.secondlooknj.org/petition)

Register for Second Chances NJ Conference (June 3, 2024): [www.secondlooknj.org/conference](http://www.secondlooknj.org/conference)

### **Free Communications for Incarcerated People and Loved Ones**

#### Facts:

- Communication with family members strengthens and maintains support systems for incarcerated people, which, in turn, corresponds to greater outcomes for individual and community health, safer prison conditions, and successful reentry.
- New Jersey families spend an average of over \$400 per year to stay connected with loved ones. Families are charged between \$0.66 and \$0.76 per 15 minute call, while incarcerated people make a minimum wage of \$1.31 per day. Families are forced to bear the burden of expensive communications, and 87% of this burden is borne by women.
- These costs, in turn, create imbalanced dependency systems with the loved ones of incarcerated people, requiring them to keep paying to remain in contact with their incarcerated loved ones. For already strained family systems, this can be a point of relational disintegration.

#### Legislation:

A3988 / S2526 (Morales, Conaway, Rodriguez, Ramirez / Stack, Johnson, Turner) *Provides free telecommunication services for incarcerated persons at state, county, and private adult and juvenile correctional facilities.*

#### Actions:

Join our Connecting Families Coalition: Contact Andrew at [alama@worthrises.org](mailto:alama@worthrises.org) or 973-508-8601. He will connect you with efforts to support the legislation.