Resources for Understanding Police Reform 101

The call for equity and justice is not new for Jews and Jewish organizations. In recent years, JCPA and our constituent organizations have worked for civil rights in a variety of ways and supported policies at the local, state, and national level to address injustices and inequities in the criminal legal system.

At the JCPA2020 national conference in February, our national and local member agencies voted to adopt a Resolution on Restorative and Rehabilitative Justice. The resolution highlights that reorienting our criminal justice system to reflect an approach to public safety that respects the humanity, dignity, and human rights of all people is essential to creating a just society. It recommends that the U.S. invest in noncarceral programs and social services, including additional resources for education, housing, employment, health care, and other public benefits, which will make our communities safer and more equitable.

The recent incidents of police brutality and the protests across the country highlight the critical need to reform policing. The criminal legal system, including law enforcement, suffers from "institutional" or "systemic" racism that often victimizes and traumatizes people of color in the U.S. This refers to racism built into the policies, practices, and cultures across systems or institutions that, *intentionally or not*, chronically advantage or disadvantage a racial group. Understanding that policing suffers from systemic racism is a useful framework because it forces us to examine root causes and long-term solutions. It is not that all individuals are racist—though some clearly are, it is that our systems are set up in ways that harm certain racial groups regardless of the intent of those working in them.

Transforming the role of law enforcement is not a simple task. Many in the Jewish community view the police as essential protection from antisemitic hate crimes and violence, which have increased significantly in the past few years. At the same time, we know that the criminal legal system has disproportionately harmed people of color in our country, including Jews of color. Our work, therefore, must seek to both advance security and reform.

It is important to remember that police and law enforcement agencies are governed by state and local laws and regulations, which means that the vast majority of reform efforts are also concentrated at the state and local level. This provides an opportunity for the Jewish community to engage with civil rights leaders on envisioning safer, healthier communities and advocating for local reforms in partnerships with diverse coalitions.

To help you understand some of the current thinking in the civil rights community and various reform paradigms, we have compiled the following articles, studies, and op-eds. Please note that JCPA does not necessarily endorse the positions set forth in these materials.

RESOURCES

If you only have time to read one article, consider reading: Dismantling the Minneapolis Police Department

Testimony of Vanita Gupta, President and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights, at the U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary's Oversight Hearing on Policing Practices and Law Enforcement Accountability

You Don't Have to Choose Between Black Lives Matter and Israel

Why Most Americans Support the Protests

What is the problem?

There's overwhelming evidence that the criminal justice system is racist. Here's the proof.

How Do the Police Actually Spend Their Time?

America's Long Overdue Awakening to Systemic Racism

Understanding Police Reform Efforts Currently Underway

A discussion about how to reform policing.

What does "defund the police" really mean?

Facts about defunding police departments

How Do We Change America?

What the data say about police brutality and racial bias — and which reforms might work

Why Police Abolition Is a Useful Framework — Even for Skeptics

Research Papers for In-Depth Analyses

A large-scale analysis of racial disparities in police stops across the United States

Police Reform and the Dismantling of Legal Estrangement

Disaggregating the Police Function