

Overview of JCPA's Criminal Justice Initiative 2016-2019

JCPA's network of 125 local community relations councils and 17 national Jewish agencies has uniquely positioned us to help create a broad movement to stand with those impacted by the criminal justice system. JCPA's impressive civil rights record and its effective reach across the Jewish communal spectrum lend us unparalleled credibility as a convener, and we have used that credibility to begin bringing the black community and the Jewish community back together to work on critical civil and human rights issues. We are using our policy expertise and strong relationships with elected officials to help build board coalitions to advocate for bold reforms. Both nationally and locally, JCPA and its network are successfully bolstering the voice and influence of movements led by impacted communities calling for change.

Throughout its 75-year history, JCPA has prioritized the advancement of civil rights, working extensively with partners in the black community on school desegregation, voting rights, and discrimination in housing, education, and employment. JCPA led Jewish engagement in the Civil Rights Movement, beginning in the 1950s, when JCPA began building Jewish communal support for the movement, and cofounded and helped guide the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights alongside the NAACP. Through this coalition, JCPA fought hard for—and helped win—critical civil rights legislation like the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Voting Rights Act of 1965, and the Fair Housing Act of 1968.

Today, these issues are again high on our priority list. In 2015, JCPA passed a resolution calling for Jewish leadership and engagement in criminal justice reform. In 2017, we passed a resolution on voting rights and in 2018, we passed a resolution on racial justice within the Jewish community. Ascending leaders in both communities do not have the close relationships of the previous generation that fought together for civil rights. Our current leaders are not proximate to each other as they once were. However, by working together on an issue that matter, we are beginning to bridge that gap and make positive change.

JCPA's Criminal Justice Reform Initiative

In 2016, JCPA launched its Criminal Justice Initiative and began working with our directly impacted staff, consultants, and organizations that serve black communities to help us frame and implement our programming. JCPA Criminal Justice Initiative has a multipronged approach. It includes educating the Jewish community so we are informed and act with intention, advocacy and coalition-building to build relationships, and engaging with diverse faith and African American communities and taking action with our partners for systemic change and helping those who are impacted.

Highlights of our work include:

- We have created educational materials and webinars to prepare our field to join in coalitions and build alliances with people of color working in this area at the state and local level. When we started, only one JCRC was doing work on criminal justice. Since then, we have engaged more than a dozen JCRCs around the country to add criminal justice reform to their policy priority agendas and join local leaders of color and diverse coalitions working on reform.

- JCPA has increased its leadership in federal legislative advocacy and is now a prominent member in our national coalitions—the Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition, the Justice Roundtable, and the Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights’ Criminal Justice Task Force. We also held two Capitol Hill Lobby Days for over 50 of our top leaders to advocate for sentencing reform and other criminal justice priorities.
- JCPA staff spoke at a Congressional briefing on "Quelling the Crisis: The Case for Mandatory Minimum Sentencing Reform" on July 18, organized by the Leadership Conference, ACLU, and The Sentencing Project.
- In 2018, JCPA launched the first national Jewish network on criminal justice reform, convening more than 45 Jewish criminal justice experts and practitioners from 16 states for two days of strategy- and priority-setting in Washington, D.C. This network is working to provide a strong significant Jewish voice on criminal justice reform and help to jumpstart and support grassroots advocacy and coalitional activities.
- For a second year, in 2019, as part of an annual meeting with the Senate Democratic Caucus, JCPA’s executive, along with a number of other national Jewish organization presidents, briefed 22 senators on the priorities of our Jewish organizations. JCPA was asked to again focus primarily on criminal justice and the critical need to reduce mandatory minimums.
- JCPA is part of a national initiative to create a multi-faith, congregational grassroots movement against mass incarceration as part of national strategy team organized by the Auburn Theological Seminary in New York and Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta.

Below is an overview of our programming and achievements over the past several years.

EDUCATE

For the past three years, JCPA has educated the Jewish community relations field on mass incarceration and the injustices of the criminal justice system, including the disproportionate impact on people of color. To this end, we have worked with our community partners to create and widely disseminate a toolkit, organize panels and workshops at our national conferences, and host webinar series.

Highlights include:

Publication of *In Your Backyard: A Toolkit for Addressing Criminal Justice at the Local Level*. JCPA’s [toolkit](#) provides overall guidance, tips, and tools to assist Jewish stakeholders in getting involved in criminal justice reform including: mapping out their local criminal justice landscape, joining coalitions and engaging in legislative advocacy, strengthening partnerships with communities of color, launching direct service projects, and learning best practices from three successful programs implemented by Jewish communities in Philadelphia, Washington, D.C., and Milwaukee.

Webinars. JCPA organizes and broadcasts webinars that go to a mailing of more than 80,000 and are viewed by hundreds of people. Webinars included: [Black/Jewish Relations: Then and Now](#), 2019; [Criminal Justice Reform](#), 2018; and [Senator Cory Booker on Criminal Justice](#), 2017.

Public Speaking - JCPA staff regularly speaks around the country at various venues and programs. Below are highlights of some places where the JCPA team spoke in 2018-19:

- Missouri: ADL program in St. Louis, JCRC Board of St. Louis, 2018
- Pennsylvania: Jewish Federation of Reading, 2018
- Washington, DC: Congressional briefing on Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act, 2018
- Michigan: Detroit Black Jewish summit organized by the David Project, 2018
- Washington DC: Quelling the Crisis: The Case for Mandatory Minimum Sentencing Reform, 2018
- Washington, DC: ADL Leadership Conference 2018
- Washington, DC: JCPA Advocacy Days, March 2018 & October 2018
- Ohio: Cleveland Bail Reform Coalition Advocacy Day, 2018
- Florida: Parkland Students Conference, 2019
- Pittsburgh: Criminal Justice Reform: Working Together Towards a Better Future, 2019

Criminal Justice Panels and Workshops at JCPA’s National Conferences in 2017, 2018, and 2019. JCPA’s conference is a national convening that brings together the professional and lay leaders of the community relations field from around the country. Each conference had more than 300 people in attendance. Highlights of the criminal justice programs at the conferences include:

[JCPA2019 National Conference](#)

Panel Discussions

Movie Screening and Conversation on How Incarceration Impacts Children and Families - Chris Gordon (NBC), Glenn Ivey (Price Benowitz LLP), Cindy Shank (subject of the documentary), and Roy Waterman (JCPA).

Advocacy and Criminal Justice Reform - Paul Fishman (former U.S. Attorney for the District of NJ [2009-2017] / Arnold & Porter), Valentino Dixon (painter / formerly incarcerated), Marc Howard (Georgetown University), and Robin Steinberg (The Bail Project). *Click here to watch [Jewish Advocacy and Criminal Justice Reform 2019](#)*

Workshops:

- How to Jumpstart Your Criminal Justice Advocacy (Part 1) - Shae Harris (D.C. Deputy Mayor’s Office for Public Safety and Justice), Bridgette Simpson (BRIJECTS), LaTonya Tate (Fresh Start Reentry Program). *Click here to watch [How to Jumpstart Your Criminal Justice Advocacy Part 1](#)*
- How to Jumpstart Your Criminal Justice Advocacy (Part 2) - Jessica Cohen (JCRC of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland), Allison Grossman (Religious Action Center for Reform Judaism), and Ariel Levinson-Waldman (Tzedek DC). *Click here to watch [How to Jumpstart Your Criminal Justice Advocacy Part 2](#)*

JCPA2018 National Conference

Panel:

Movements to End Mass Incarceration - Leyla Martinez (Beyond the Box Initiative), Johnny Perez (National Religious Campaign Against Torture), and Topeka Sam (Ladies of Hope Ministries / Cut50). *Click here to watch [Movements to End Mass Incarceration 2018](#)*

Workshops

- Voting Rights and the Census: Determining America's Political Future - Jeff Wice (SUNY Rockefeller Institute of Government), Lurie Daniel Favors (Center for Law and Social Justice), Rabbi Bob Kaplan (JCRC of NY), and Steve Romalewski (City University of New York)
- Workshop on Healing, Restoring, and Forgiving Communities in an Incarcerated Nation - Hernan Carvente (Youth First Youth Leaders Network), Jordyn Lexton (Drive Change), and Andre Ward (Common Justice). *Click here to watch [Healing, Restoring, and Forgiving Communities in an Incarcerated Nation 2018](#)*

JCPA2017 National Conference

Opening Panel:

Criminal Justice Reform: Reengaging the Jewish Community in Civil Rights – Glen Martin (JustLeadership USA), Rabbi Jonah Pesner (Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism) *Click here to watch [Criminal Justice Reform: Reengaging the Jewish Community in Civil Rights Part 1](#), [Part 2](#), [Part 3](#).*

Closing Panel:

Civil Rights in the New Millennium: A Conversation: April Baskin (Union for Reform Judaism), Cornell Brooks (NAACP), and Yavilah McCoy (VISIONS Inc.)

Break-Out Groups:

- Reforming Police Practices - Barbara Weinstein (Religious Action Center of Reformed Judaism), Kanya Bennett (ACLU Legislative Counsel), Dr. Judy Lubin (Howard University), Hilary Shelton (NAACP Washington Bureau), and Elana Kahn (Milwaukee JCRC). *Click here to watch [Reforming Police Practices Panel 2017](#)*
- Life After Lockup - Bruce Turnbull (Washington D.C.), Nigel Bowe (Philadelphia JEVS Human Services), Susan Frederick (National Conference of State Legislators), and Evan Schuerger (Philadelphia JEVS Human Services). *Click here to watch [Life After Lockup 2017](#)*

- A Movement not a Moment: Civil Rights Challenges in 2017 - Lindsey Mintz (JCRC of Indianapolis), Nicole Austin-Hillery (The Brennan Center for Justice), Amy Cotton (NCJW), and Maggie Garrett (American United for Separation of Church)
- Juvenile Justice - Rabbi Jill Jacobs (T'ruah), Kayla Patrick (National Women's Law Center), and Michael Umpierre (Center for Juvenile Justice Reform)

Published Op-eds

- [The Language of Engagement on Criminal Justice Reform](#)
- [Why We Must Renew Our Commitment to Civil Rights](#)
- [Four Reasons to Re-Engage in the Civil Rights Movement](#)

ADVOCATE

JCPA policy is overseen by its Policy Advisory Committee made up of JCPA board members, member agencies, and JCRC representatives. The Committee monitors the policy and advocacy work of JCPA, sets priorities, and responds to emerging issues. The Policy Advisory Committee also oversees the Criminal Justice Initiative. Below is an overview of JCPA's policy and advocacy engagement on this topic:

JCPA is spending the 2019 summer convening a small working group to develop new policy that will enable JCPA to expand the scope of its work and remain on the cutting edge. We will be reviewing platforms set forth by our partners at The Brennan Center, the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights, the Sentencing Project, and possible a few others. The aim is to update our policy platform on criminal justice reform to ensure our relevancy in this rapidly advancing movement.

JCPA conducts most of its federal advocacy alongside our bipartisan coalition partners. Over the past couple of years, we worked together to lobby for important sentencing reform provisions, some of which were ultimately included in the First Step Act of 2018, including the retroactive application of the Fair Sentencing Act and reduced mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses. We also helped ensure the inclusion of Second Chance Act reauthorization, providing grants for important reentry services for the formerly incarcerated. JCPA's participation in the process was critical to improving problematic language in the First Step Act that would have undermined the separation of church and state by enabling state-sponsored proselytization.

We are now working with Congress and the Administration to facilitate proper oversight and funding of the First Step Act, as well as build support for more robust sentencing reform. We are also working with partners in the education space to garner support for including in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act several bills that would improve education outcomes for currently- and formerly-incarcerated people. JCPA is a leader in the three main national coalitions on criminal justice reform:

- *Interfaith Criminal Justice Coalition of the Washington Interfaith Staff Community*: The majority of our federal policy advocacy is through the ICJC, where we are a top leader.

The ICJC seeks a faithful response to end mass incarceration, promote fairer sentencing, and support restorative reentry programs in our communities and the wider nation. Consisting of roughly 50 national, faith-based organizations in Washington, D.C., participants include the United Methodist Church, National Council of Churches, Jewish Council for Public Affairs, and many others. The coalition is a member of the Justice Roundtable.

- *Justice Roundtable*: The Justice Roundtable is where we engage in policy analysis and strategy-setting with a broad-based coalition of more than 100 organizations working to reform federal criminal justice laws and policies. Founded in 2002, the Roundtable's mission is to bring value to the Justice Movement by coordinating the federal legislative and advocacy efforts of the Washington criminal justice advocacy community. JCPA is a member of the following working groups: Crimmigration (Intersection of Immigration and Criminal Justice), Drug Policy Reform, Faith in Action, Law Enforcement Reform, Prison Reform, Reentry, and Sentencing Reform.
- *Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights' Criminal Justice Task Force*: JCPA is active in the LCCHR's criminal justice task force, which focuses on federal policy and is closely aligned with the Justice Roundtable. LCCHR is made up of 220 civil rights organizations.

These three coalitions were the reason that sentencing reform was included in the FIRST STEP Act.

National Jewish Network on Criminal Justice Reform

JCPA launched a national Jewish network on criminal justice reform last December. The network includes more than 45 prominent Jewish experts in criminal justice reform from 16 states. At their first meeting they framed a national Jewish agenda around which the Jewish community can organize its advocacy. The meeting included surveying the landscape of Jewish leadership existing efforts on justice reform; sharing principles of Judaism that move us to engage on criminal justice reform; and beginning to develop strategy and charter for Jewish advocacy. The meeting was chaired by former U.S. District Attorney for New Jersey Paul Fishman and featured the Hon. Stuart Rabner, Chief Justice of the New Jersey Supreme Court. The attendees are listed [here](#). [The Network met during JCPA's February conference and is currently planning its next](#) national gathering for the late fall.

Currently the network is organizing a speaker series with non-Jewish leaders of color to learn first-hand how the Jewish community can make a significant contribution to the movement to end mass incarceration. Invited speakers include: Mariame Kaba, Project NIA, Prison Abolition; Rashad Robinson, Color of Change; Topeka Sam, The LOHM; Sherrilynn Ifill, NAACP Legal Defense Fund; Derrick Johnson, NAACP; Van Jones, REFORM; Khalil Cumberbatch, New Yorkers United for Justice; John Vaughn, Auburn Theological Seminary; and Darren Walker, Ford Foundation

The network is also launching a national heat map with an eye towards increasing the footprint of the Jewish community in criminal justice reform. The map will provide information about

where national Jewish and non-Jewish criminal justice reform organizations are working, what issues they cover, and their contact information. See a beta version of the map [here](#).

MOBILIZE

Local Mobilizations and Becoming Proximate:

JCPA's field facing efforts focus on facilitating JCRC engagement in local criminal justice reform efforts and relationship-building. In April, we led a group of 56 community relations leaders, including seven JCRC directors, to Georgia and Alabama to mark the first anniversary of the National Memorial for Peace and Justice, remembering the thousands of victims of racial terror lynchings in the United States. Participants left with deeper relationships and even more commitment to working on criminal justice and voting rights.

A Snapshot:

- Milwaukee, WI: JCRC of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation is a lead organization (along with the League of United Latin American Citizens and the NAACP) in the Community Coalition for Quality Policing, a broad and growing coalition of advocacy, faith, and service organizations that come together with the purpose of driving for change in Milwaukee's policing practices. CC4QP raises public awareness and creating pressure for a change in police practices through testimony at public meetings, private meetings with public officials, public education programs, and media coverage. In a major victory, the Milwaukee police chief last year to develop regular contact between the coalition and the Milwaukee Police Department and has agreed to meet with outside experts.
- Cleveland, OH: The Jewish Federation of Cleveland, along with several coalition partners, have been engaged in bail reform efforts in Ohio over the course of the last year. In 2018, JCPA participated in a local advocacy day on bail reform organized by the CRC of the Jewish Federation of Cleveland, which brought together 25 Jewish, black, and Latino leaders to lobby state lawmakers and influencers as part of an interfaith coalition of Cleveland-based community organizations. The Federation cohort was joined in Columbus by several community groups including Lutheran Metropolitan Ministry, the United Black Fund, Hispanic Alliance, Inc, Towards Employment, the NAACP of Greater Cleveland. We met with several state legislators to voice concerns and recommend changes to a pending bill. [Click here to read the news coverage.](#)
- Baltimore, MD: The Baltimore Jewish Council has joined in efforts to support expanded expungement opportunities for minor offenders, as well as the development of reentry programs for those who are returning to our neighborhoods from prison sentences. More recently, they have worked to develop a policy on juvenile justice reform that aims to limit the impact that non-violent criminal actions can have on people's educational and employment futures.
- St. Louis, MS: The JCRC of St. Louis has convened a Racial Justice Task Force, recruiting key members of the Jewish community who work in fields relating to racial justice. Members of the task force worked over the summer in 2018 to draft a Racial Justice Policy for the JCRC that the community passed. In December 2019, JCRC joined

the Missouri Smart Sentencing Coalition, staffed by Empower Missouri. Through this collective effort and because of many years of groundwork, several pieces of legislation passed through both chamber of the Missouri General Assembly. Coalition partners are meeting in June to begin discussion 2020 Legislative Agenda. In March 2019, the JCRC received a \$5,000 Staenberg Anything Grant to support a year-long effort to educate the Jewish Community around Criminal Justice Reform. They have also contributed \$5,000 in-kind toward this effort.

- Washington, D.C.: A long-time sponsor of Tzedek DC, a local Jewish nonprofit that provides pro bono legal representation, the JCRC of Greater Washington passed a criminal justice resolution in 2017. Since then, the JCRC has been participating in an extensive outreach program by Montgomery County to solicit suggestions from the community on ways in which the government can promote racial equity. JCRC has also testified in support of legislation (since enacted) that would eliminate rules that bar persons with debt obligations from obtaining or renewing drivers' licenses. Members of the JCRC are also on Tzedek DC's advisory board and aid Tzedek's efforts to reform DC laws that similarly bar those with various debt obligations from renewing their professional licenses. The JCRC is in contact with the Maryland Attorney General's office about bail reform efforts and is currently working to identify areas where the JCRC can push criminal justice reform in next year's Maryland legislative session.
- New York, NY: JCPA, UJA-Federation New York, and JCRC/NY are co-sponsoring a one-day Conference on "Criminal Justice Reform: A Jewish Call to Action." The aim of the conference is to raise awareness of mass incarceration to the larger Jewish community and to build a coalition and common table for the diverse Jewish community to work together on reform in New York. The Conference will include: an overview of criminal justice reform from prominent leaders; interactive conversations with advocates, Jewish leaders and those who have been previously incarcerated and leading the reform; a panel on Jewish principles and national engagement on reform; hearing from government officials and law enforcement; and break out groups on different areas that are specific to New York.
- Silicon Valley, CA: Silicon Valley JCRC has been part of the Santa Clara County Faith Based Coalition, which tables at the county jail and provides information for people recently released and has regular meeting to update the membership on current issues. The JCRC has also participated in resume writing support for recently released men and women and attended Beloved Community (the local Black Lives Matter group) for Police & Community Relations Improvement. Recently, the JCRC hosted Aaron Zisser, who was the previous San Jose Police Auditor, for a lecture and question and answer session. In 2019, the JCRC Board decided to have three task forces, including criminal justice reform. They encouraged their members to watch '13TH' and to acquaint themselves with JCPA's criminal justice toolkit. The JCRC is meeting with local partners to assess where they can be most helpful.
- Atlanta, GA: During the last election cycle, the JCRC of Atlanta partnered with local synagogues, New Georgia Project and URJ RAC to host and promote voter registration and get out the vote training. JCRC also worked with Spread the Vote Georgia and

Spread the Vote Atlanta to inform people what forms of IDs can be used to vote as well as connecting partners for ID registration events. More recently, JCPA has worked with the JCRC to expand into the criminal justice space. The JCRC is now a member of the national strategy team working on an initiative of the Ebenezer Baptist Church and Auburn Theological Seminary to bring together congregations across the country to work against mass incarceration. The group just kicked off with a large conference, which JCPA co-sponsored.

- Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh JCRC partnering with the Aleph Institute on visits to jails and prisons as well as volunteering as mentors to people who are incarcerated. Pittsburgh is also partnering with rabbis and emerging black leaders, which included sponsoring a cohort to participate in JCPA's recent Civil Rights Mission. During election cycles, Pittsburgh also runs #BeOurVotePgh, a nonpartisan civic engagement initiative that educates Pittsburgh-area high school students about the importance of voting. The name "BeOurVote" was chosen because most of the participating students are not old enough to vote, so they are asking those who are of age to vote on their behalf.
- Miami, FL: During the last election cycle, the Miami JCRC worked with their local black-Jewish coalition to advocate for Florida's Amendment 4, which restored the vote to formerly incarcerated people.

Taking a Deeper Dive into Civil Rights: Engaging the Jewish Community:

JCPA led a Civil Rights Mission to Georgia and Alabama on April 28-30, 2019, with 56 people participating. Through visits to the newly opened National Memorial for Peace and Justice and historic sites, participants grappled with the struggle for civil rights in America, then and now, through a Jewish prism and why Jews must care and act. Participants journeyed through Atlanta, Selma, Montgomery, and Birmingham. For highlights of the Mission, you can read the [agenda here](#). To read op-eds written by Mission participants: See Melanie Roth Gorelick ([click here](#)), JCPA Senior VP, Josh Sayles Pittsburgh ([click here](#)), NJ

JCPA is working with to launch a joint initiative to bring our networks together with the aim of ramping up coordinated efforts to achieve comprehensive criminal justice reform at the state and national levels. The initiative also aims to strengthen ties between the Jewish and African American communities in building a common vision of a just society. A first tier meeting was held in St. Louis.

Building Partnerships:

Some of the organizations we work with that primarily serve communities of color:

Advancement Project

#Cut50

Families for Justice as Healing

JustLeadershipUSA

Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law

Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
Mexican American Legal Defense and Educational Fund
NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund
National Action Network
National African American Drug Policy Coalition
National Association of Blacks in Criminal Justice
National Association for the Advancement of Colored People
National Black Police Association
National Conference of Black Lawyers
National Council of Incarcerated and Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls
National Urban League
United Methodist Church General Board of Church and Society