

Resolution on Criminal Justice Reform During A Public Health Crisis
Adopted by the Delegates Assembly, 2020

In the context of our criminal justice system, the novel coronavirus pandemic has exposed the very real and highly concerning overlap between public health and the way in which our incarceration system operates. Jails and prisons have been described as petri dishes for development and spread of the virus. While residents of those institutions are very much at risk, as demonstrated by the high percentages of infections in some prisons, the petri dish effect also clearly places the surrounding communities at equal or greater risk of infection. These risks have been widely publicized in media across the country. The ACLU, moreover, has released [a study](#) demonstrating catastrophic level effects unless significant population reduction is achieved in jails and prisons across the country.¹

The Jewish Council for Public Affairs believes that:

- In the context of the current pandemic crisis and in any similar future crises, the Jewish community relations field should work with organizations and coalitions, including those representing affected communities, to support policies and take action:
 - To reduce significantly the population of incarcerated individuals sufficient to provide for adherence to CDC guidelines in the context of the crisis, both within the facilities and in the general community, including by releasing segments of the existing population (e.g., by age, health condition, individuals in jail pre-trial or due to technical parole violations, or nearness to conclusion of their sentence) and by taking actions to avoid increasing the population (e.g., through elimination of retaining individuals solely due to the failure to pay cash bail, through elimination of detaining individuals due to technical parole violations, through changes in policing with respect to detention of individuals engaged solely in petty crimes, or similar actions);
 - To provide reentry support for essential needs and to prevent recidivism, such as through government programs applicable to those who are released from incarceration, including housing, healthcare (including mental health and substance use disorder treatment), food, and other life necessities, including waiving any restrictions on funding for those programs with respect to those with criminal convictions; and

¹ “Flattening the Curve: Why Reducing Jail Populations is Key to Beating COVID-19.” American Civil Liberties Union: www.aclu.org/report/flattening-curve-why-reducing-jail-populations-key-beating-covid-19.

- To provide essential hygiene and medical care for those working or remaining in incarceration institutions sufficient to meet guidelines and requirements adopted by the Center for Disease Control and other government authorities (including where those guidelines and requirements are specific to non-incarceration situations)
- The Jewish community relations field should work with organizations and coalitions, including those representing affected communities, to support policies and associated activities subsequent to the pandemic crisis or other future similar crises that consider whether the actions taken during the crisis should be retained or modified for the period following the crisis.