

NEW REPORT: CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM MUST ADDRESS THE NEEDS OF WOMEN

Women Have Not Benefited From Criminal Justice Reform to the Same Extent as Men

ADDRESSING THE NEEDS OF JUSTICE-INVOLVED WOMEN WILL RESULT IN A FAIRER AND MORE EFFECTIVE SYSTEM

(March 8, 2017 – NEW YORK, NY) The number of women in the American justice system has grown exponentially in recent decades, by more than 700% from 1980 to 2014, as the rate of imprisonment for women increased by 50%. In New York City, arrest numbers have declined significantly for men in the past five years, but women have not experienced the same rate of decline.

While New York City has embarked on a series of reforms to divert people from jails and prisons and provide community supervision and community rehabilitation, reforms have primarily focused on men. A new report, [***Women InJustice: Gender and the Pathway to Jail in New York City***](#), concludes that equal justice is not possible using a one-size-fits-all approach. Because women have not benefited from criminal justice reform to the same extent as men, the report urges that reforms must meet the gender-specific needs of the people who enter the system.

The report from [***The Prisoner Reentry Institute of John Jay College of Criminal Justice***](#) (PRI) and commissioned by [***The New York Women's Foundation***](#), provides an in-depth academic exploration of the journeys that lead women to Rikers; the needs of women in the system; and gender-specific system reforms.

Ana L. Oliveira, President & CEO of The New York Women's Foundation, said, "As the number of women involved in the justice system continues to increase in New York City, we must develop a multifaceted gender-specific strategy that not only connects them to the care and services they need, but that diverts them from entering the system in the first place – allowing them to live safely and productively in the community with their families in their home communities. This exhaustive report lays out a road map for a system that is both fairer and more effective, and one that will reduce recidivism and improve the prospects of justice-involved women."

Ann L. Jacobs, Director of the Prisoner Reentry Institute at John Jay, said, "Our focus on women does not mean that we think that the criminal justice system is currently doing a good job of meeting the needs of men. Rather, by focusing on the needs of women, we come closer to creating an equitable and fair system that treats people with dignity and addresses them as individuals with unique needs. This is the path to turning gender injustice into a deeper consideration of the role of gender in justice."

Research shows that women arrive at the doors of the criminal justice system with deep social service needs. They are likely to have histories of abuse, trauma, and poverty which causes mental health, health, and substance use problems. Their histories also intersect with the struggles of poverty, increasing homelessness and lack of employment. Involvement with the criminal justice system often

re-traumatizes women and fails to provide the services needed to move them away from the pathways that are associated with recidivism.

The report, authored by Alison Wilkey, PRI Policy Director, also found that serious harm comes to incarcerated women from stigma, physical and sexual assault, and disruption to health, family, housing, employment, and services. Women also face tremendous social stigma after criminal justice system involvement, confounding efforts to help them take advantage of opportunities for stability and success.

Significantly, the report recommends that critically-needed social services should be *accessible* through the criminal justice system, but not *mandated* by it. Neither should the criminal justice system bear the burden of funding social services. Rather, other social service systems must collaborate with criminal justice system entities that have ongoing contact with individuals, using it, in essence, as a hub for delivering services to those in need on a voluntary basis.

Among the report's key gender-responsive targeted interventions are:

- Divert offenses common to women with behavioral health needs;
- Increase the use of non-monetary release mechanisms;
- Expand pretrial alternatives to individuals charged with certain serious crimes;
- Increase defender-based pretrial advocacy capacity;
- Increase alternatives to short jail sentences for misdemeanors;
- Ensure that gender-responsive services are allocated system-wide; and
- Facilitate community connections.

Oliveira added, "Dramatically reducing the number of women held at Rikers will require a multifaceted strategy, but the end result will be a system that is both fairer and more effective, while also reducing recidivism and improving the prospects of justice-involved women. Reforms must be gender-responsive, faithful to the principles of proportionality and parsimony, and engage social services to better serve individuals with criminal justice system histories."

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About The New York Women's Foundation: The New York Women's Foundation is a voice for women and a force for change. We are a cross-cultural alliance of women catalyzing partnerships and leveraging human and financial capital to achieve sustained economic security and justice for women and girls. With fierce determination, we mobilize hearts, minds and resources to create an equitable and just future for women, families and communities in New York City.

About The Prisoner Reentry Institute: The mission of the Prisoner Reentry Institute, founded in 2005, is to spur innovation and improve practice in the field of reentry by advancing knowledge, translating research into effective policy and service delivery, and fostering effective partnerships between criminal justice and non-criminal justice disciplines.

About John Jay College of Criminal Justice: An international leader in educating for justice, John Jay College of Criminal Justice of The City University of New York offers a rich liberal arts and professional studies curriculum

to upwards of 15,000 undergraduate and graduate students from more than 135 nations. In teaching, scholarship and research, the College approaches justice as an applied art and science in service to society and as an ongoing conversation about fundamental human desires for fairness, equality and the rule of law. For more information, visit www.jjay.cuny.edu and follow @JohnJayCollege on Twitter.

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