

The Episcopal Church, Criminal Justice Reform, and the 114th Congress

“Continue to remember those in prison as if you were together with them in prison, and those who are mistreated as if you yourselves were suffering.” –Hebrews 13:3 (NIV)

The United States accounts for 5% of the world's population, yet it imprisons 25% of the world's prison population. Our current criminal justice system disproportionately incarcerates persons of color at an astounding rate (African Americans are imprisoned at nearly six times the rate of whites), and working to dismantle this system supports Presiding Bishop Michael Curry's mission of advancing racial reconciliation throughout our nation.

Advocacy Initiatives for Criminal Justice Reform in the Episcopal Church

The Episcopal Church Office of Government Relations advocates for policies that restore, sustain, and empower communities affected by the U.S. criminal justice system. Our General Convention and Executive Council resolutions urge support of reentry programs that equip former inmates to secure gainful employment, the repeal of mandatory federal sentencing guidelines, and the restoration of discretion to the federal trial judges. Guided by these principles, our office has pioneered a church-wide advocacy campaign for criminal justice reform with targeted outreach to the 114th Congress, and we look forward to engaging with the new Congress come January 20th, 2017. Two of the main congressional bills for which our campaign advocates include:

- [The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Act](#) (S. 2123): this bipartisan bill would reduce mandatory minimum sentences, restore some discretion to federal trial judges, and make the Fair Sentencing Act (a bill that significantly reduced the sentencing disparity between crack and powder cocaine) retroactive, allowing inmates convicted before the Fair Sentencing Act's passage to appeal for reduced sentences under the new law. S. 2123 would also expand recidivism reduction programming and allow inmates who successfully complete these programs to apply for time credits or other privileges (such as additional telephone time and visitation).
- [The Second Chance Reauthorization Act](#) (S. 1513/HR 3406). This legislation helps ex-offenders to reintegrate into their communities through mentoring, career training, and substance abuse programs. These programs provide support for former inmates and their families in times of great uncertainty, helping them to smoothly navigate a challenging period of transition. Unfortunately, the Second Chance Act expired in September of 2016, and ensuring that Congress swiftly reauthorizes this legislation and continues supporting reentry programming is a priority for the Office of Government Relations.

Criminal Justice Learning Impact Tour

In coordination with partners at the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America and the Mennonite Central Committee, the Office of Government Relations led a *Criminal Justice Learning Impact Tour* for faith advocates in House Judiciary Chairman Rep. Bob Goodlatte's district in May 2016. This educational experience included presentations from local prison ministry and reentry programs, an introduction to the principles of restorative justice with experts at Eastern Mennonite University, and a legislative advocacy training.

Episcopal Policy for Criminal Justice Reform

- [Urge Support for Bipartisan U.S. Commission on Criminal Justice](#)
- [Urge Congress to Repeal Mandatory Federal Sentencing Guidelines](#)
- [Reaffirm Criminal Justice System Reform](#)
- [Urge Advocacy for Policy Changes to End Mass Incarceration Practices](#)

