



# Decarcerate PA

## HOW TO REDUCE PENNSYLVANIA'S PRISON POPULATION

There are many policy changes that could help reduce Pennsylvania's prison population. These changes would enhance public safety, cut taxpayer costs, and reunite families and communities. Below are just a few recommendations for how Pennsylvania could effectively reduce the number of people in prison.

### Reduce the number of people who are sent to prison:

1. End punitive and racially targeted policing practices such as stop-and-frisk and the Philadelphia curfew on youth.
2. Decriminalize drug use and treat addiction as a public health issue, not a criminal justice issue.
3. End police collaboration with Immigration and Customs Enforcement.
4. End the criminalization of sex work.
5. Ensure adequate representation for people facing criminal charges, including giving defense attorneys access to police reports at bail hearings and giving public defenders caseloads that allow them to dedicate adequate time and attention to each case.
6. Establish community-based restorative and transformative justice programs as an alternative to prison.
7. Provide alternatives to prison outside of DOC custody for women who are pregnant.
8. Mandate probation or parole, rather than prison, for people with sentences of 12 months or less.
9. Reform bail guidelines and practices so that release or community supervision are utilized in place of pre-trial incarceration whenever possible.
10. End the practice of automatically trying youth as adults and holding them in adult jails pre-trial.
11. Defeat anti-immigrant legislation that leads to detention and deportation, attacks immigrant communities and leaves workers more vulnerable to exploitative conditions, increase unemployment, and family separation.

### Reduce the time people spend in prison:

1. Follow the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing's recommendation to "Repeal the Drug Free School Zone mandatory legislation, which is irregularly applied and overbroad geographically," meaning that it disproportionately targets urban residents who are much more likely to be within 1000 feet of school property.
2. Eliminate mandatory minimums and sentencing enhancements for all offenses.
3. Remove state prison as a sentencing option for driving under the influence, marijuana possession, receiving stolen property, drug possession, vehicle theft and grand theft.
4. Eliminate Juvenile Life Without Parole as a sentencing option.
5. Eliminate mandatory Life Without Parole as a sentencing option.
6. In accordance with the recommendation of the 2005 Joint State Government Commission's Advisory Committee on Geriatric

and Seriously Ill Inmates, mandate parole eligibility for anyone who is over 50 years of age and has been incarcerated for more than 25 years.

7. Reinstate and expand the prerelease program.
8. Expand eligibility for compassionate release to everyone over 70 years old and people who are terminally ill or permanently incapacitated.
9. Transfer people determined to be mentally ill from prison to treatment programs.
10. Release women who fall under the definition of "battered women" and who are incarcerated for fighting back against their abusers.
11. Increase access to work release and eliminate the obstacles that slow people's participation in these programs.
12. Pass SB720, a bill that would give people with criminal convictions, after learning of new evidence, up to one year to ask for a new trial.
13. Reform the parole process by providing good time incentives, increasing community participation in the parole process, appointing a civil rights activist to the parole commission, and giving equal weight to rehabilitation and severity of offense.
14. Remove bureaucratic bottlenecks that prevent people who have already been paroled from leaving prison. Such obstacles include the mandatory \$60 Act 85 fee people are required to pay in order to leave prison (even if they are indigent), and provisions that make home plans a mandatory requirement for some prisoners to leave prison after they have been paroled.
15. Revamp the Board of Pardons so that every petition for commutation or pardon receives a fair, meaningful and timely review.
16. Improve access to healthcare, healthy food, and educational opportunities for people while they are incarcerated. Decrease the cost of phone calls and improve access to visitation.
17. End the practice of holding people in long-term solitary confinement.
18. Abolish capital punishment.

## Prevent people from being sent back to prison:

1. Enact and implement policies, such as intermediate sanctions, so that people are not incarcerated for technical parole violations. Expand eligibility for existing programs.
2. Make providing services, rather than supervision, the primary function of parole and probation.
3. Discharge people from parole supervision before their currently established discharge dates.
4. Eliminate parole supervision for persons convicted of offenses classified as "non-serious" and "non-violent."
5. Discharge people on parole who have served 12 months of parole without a violation.
6. Institute community-based reentry programs and fully fund existing community-based programs. Expand services for children with incarcerated parents.
7. Institute a statewide ban on the box on employment applications that asks whether a person has been convicted of a crime.
8. Invest public money in the services that people need, such as quality schools, jobs and job training, community-based reentry, healthcare, stable housing, access to healthy food, and restorative forms of justice that address the root causes of violence in our communities



Decarcerate PA is a coalition of organizations and individuals seeking an immediate and lasting moratorium on all new prisons and prison expansions, county jails, and immigrant detention facilities, and also seeking positive policy changes that will reduce Pennsylvania's prison population and reinvest money into our communities.

[decarceratepa@gmail.com](mailto:decarceratepa@gmail.com) \* [decarceratepa.info](http://decarceratepa.info) \* (267) 217-3372