



**UU FaithAction
Criminal Justice Reform/End the New Jim Crow
Task Force Annual Report, April 16, 2016**

During the year since the 2017 Annual Conference, the Task Force has continued its work to effect the passage of bills that move in the direction of alleviating and ending the injustices of the criminal justice system. Our attention has also focused on the impact of legislation in addressing the greatly disproportionate victimization of people of color. This has been a central factor in the creation of mass incarceration and plays a key role in putting an end to it.

In the last legislative session (2016-2017) many of the bills that this Task force supported, including key ones such as the Parole Reform and the Special Prosecutor bills, were conditionally vetoed by Gov. Christie, and not amended in time for an end of year vote. One notable success was the passage and enactment of the Racial and Ethnic Impact Statement bill, which Christie signed late in the year.

For the new legislative session (2018-2019), nearly every bill which died at the end of last legislative session has been reintroduced. Among these are legislation for:

- Restricting the use and abuse of solitary confinement;
- Restoring voting rights to those on probation and parole, and also those currently incarcerated.
- Requiring special prosecutors in cases of police killings and charges of criminal abuse (up for a full vote at the end of March);
- Parole reform to release many prisoners unnecessarily held beyond their time of parole eligibility;
- Legalizing and regulating marijuana to end mass incarceration for drug use and help establish drug remediation programs;
- Ending prison gerrymandering that concentrates prisoners in distant counties which then unfairly gain political and economic benefits denied to home areas which are most in need;
- Requiring use of body cameras;
- Prohibiting the restraint of women during labor and childbirth.

LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES: The legislative priorities chosen at the October 2017 Issues Conference were to advocate specifically for the Solitary Confinement Restriction bill, Racial and Ethnic Impact Statements, Parole Reform, and the Special Prosecutor bill for the coming year. REIS was enacted as stated above, and the others were either vetoed, or conditionally vetoed, and died at the end of the legislative session. In November 2017, the Task Force chair conducted a survey of all people on the TF email list (80+) to gauge how involved people might be for the coming year, and to determine which issues/bills were of most interest. There were 23 responses. From these the greatest interest was in Restoring Voting Rights, Marijuana Legalization, and Juvenile Justice Reform. (Note: while the issue of juvenile justice does not have related bills as yet, this

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movement has become quite strong thanks to the 150 Years is Enough Campaign by the NJ Institute of Social Justice to close

the boys' and girls' residential facilities in favor of small, community based facilities. Governor Christie acted just prior to leaving office to order these facilities to be closed. We expect that there will be one or more legislative bills associated with this movement towards less restrictive community-based settings for court-adjudicated juveniles.) The priority interests identified from the survey are different from those selected last October.

October, and there is some work to be done to determine how best to address this. The chairs will continue to monitor bills that are active at any given point in time, and to alert member congregations of important milestones for which their action, by way or letters and phone calls, is needed. For example, the Special Prosecutor bill may be passed and enacted shortly, and the Parole Reform bill is progressing well out of key committees in both chambers.

While not a selected legislative priority for 2017, the CJR Task force and Reproductive Task Force chairs worked together on an event to highlight the experience of women in NJ prisons, and to educate on the bill to prohibit restraint of women in labor and during childbirth. This event, held in February 2018 at UU Congregation of Monmouth County in Lincroft, was very well attended.

All of these are examples of how legislation can make real change for racial and social justice; as well have direct, life changing impact on the lives of tens of thousands of New Jersey men, women and children. Criminal Justice Reform Task Force members help make this happen by tracking and researching legislation; working on fact sheets and action alerts; and by spreading the word in their congregations and communities.

For more information and a full listing of legislative activity contact Task Force Chair Susan MacDonnell at susmacdonn@gmail.com.

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