

Legislative Advocacy:

Below are 15 issues that you can advocate on that would make a difference for people of color in our community.

1. Write to your state legislators to end cash bail. Our current cash bail system means that someone who is legally innocent is put in jail because they can't afford bail. It means that a defendant can be released pre-trial because of their wealth, not how much of a flight risk they are. It puts more people in detention (which tax payers pay for) and affects a defendant's ability to maintain employment, access mental and physical healthcare, and be in communication with their family and friends, etc. Housing the approximately 500,000 people in jail in the US awaiting trial who cannot afford bail costs US taxpayers \$9 billion a year.
2. Attend town halls, candidate meet-and-greets, etc. for political candidates and ask about ending mass incarceration, reducing mandatory minimum sentences, reducing or ending solitary confinement, ending cash bail, divesting from private prisons, etc.
3. Call or write to state legislators, federal legislators, and your governor to end solitary confinement in excess of 15 days. It is considered torture by the UN, and it is used more frequently on black and Hispanic prisoners. For more information on solitary, two good overviews can be found [here](#) and [here](#).
4. Research and contact your local prosecutors. Prosecutors have a lot of power to give fair sentences or Draconian ones, influence a judge's decision to set bail or not, etc.
5. Find out whether your local police department currently outfits all on-duty police officers with a body-worn camera and requires that the body-worn camera be turned on immediately when officers respond to a police call. If they don't, write to your city or town government representative and police chief to advocate for it. The racial make-up of your town doesn't matter — This needs to be standard everywhere. Multiply your voice by soliciting others to advocate as well, writing on social media about it, writing op-eds, etc.
6. Find out whether your city or town currently employs evidence-based police de-escalation trainings. The racial make-up of your town doesn't matter — This needs to be standard everywhere. Write to your city or town government representative and police chief and advocate for it. Multiply your voice by soliciting others to advocate as well, writing on social media about it, writing op-eds, etc.
7. Call or write to your state and federal legislators and governor about criminal justice reform, including reducing mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent drug crimes. Study after study shows that racism fuels racial disparities in imprisonment, and most of the US prison population are at the state and local level.

On a Federal Level:

8. Ask legislators to support the bipartisan which reduces the length of federal mandatory minimum drug sentences by half, makes the Fair Sentencing Act's crack sentencing reforms retroactive, and expands the "safety valve" exception to mandatory drug sentences.
9. Ask legislators to support the bipartisan, which would allow judges to give sentences other than the mandatory minimum sentence for any federal crime.
10. Ask federal legislators to support legislation, which would make reduced sentences for crack convictions from the previously passed Fair Sentencing Act retroactive, reduce mandatory minimums for people convicted more than three times for drug crimes from life without parole after the third offense to 25 years, reduce mandatory sentences for drug crimes from 15 to 10 years, limit the use of solitary confinement on juvenile prisoners, etc.

On a State Level:

11. Ask legislators and the governor to make policing standards recommended by former Governor Kasich's task force into law and to support state-wide criminal justice reform including reducing mandatory minimum sentences, reducing sentences for non-violent drug crimes, passing "safety valve" law to allow judges to depart below a mandatory minimum sentence under certain conditions, passing alternatives to incarceration, etc.
12. Ask legislators to require racial impact statements be required for all criminal justice bills. Most states already require fiscal and environmental impact statements for certain legislation. Racial impact statements evaluate if a bill may create or exacerbate racial disparities should the bill become law. Check out the status of your state's legislation surrounding these statements here.
13. Ask State Senators to support legislation that would make racism a public health issue.
14. Ask legislators to support changing laws governing traffic law enforcement.
15. Write to the US Sentencing Commission (PubAffairs@ussc.gov) and ask them to:
 - reform the career offender guideline to lessen the length of sentences
 - change the guidelines so that more people get probation
 - change the criminal history guidelines so that a person's criminal record counts against them less
 - change guidelines to reduce mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent crimes
 - conduct a study to review the impact of parental incarceration on minor children. With more data, the Commission could modify the Sentencing Guidelines and allow judges to take this factor into account when sentencing individuals for non-violent crimes.
 - conduct a study to review whether the Bureau of Prisons is following the Commission's encouragement to file a motion for compassionate release whenever "extraordinary and compelling reasons" exist.
 - consider amending the guidelines to reduce sentences for first offenders.