

Statement on the Future of Probation & Parole in the United States

REVISED 11/13/20

THE PROBLEM

Every day in the United States, [4.4 million people](#) are under probation or parole supervision, around twice as many people as are incarcerated. This figure is more than a [three-fold increase](#) since 1980 and represents more people than *live* in half of all U.S. states. [Originated](#) in the 19th century as a rehabilitative front-end alternative to incarceration (probation) or back-end release valve for incarcerated individuals who were believed to be rehabilitated (parole), community supervision has now become overly burdensome, punitive and a driver of mass incarceration, especially for people of color.

Mass supervision has taken an enormous human and fiscal toll. Close to half ([45 percent](#)) of people entering prison in America were on probation or parole at the time of their current incarceration. Meanwhile, a quarter of those entering prison are incarcerated for technical violations, like staying out past curfew or missing appointments, disrupting their lives and costing taxpayers [\\$2.8 billion](#) annually. Community supervision and revocations disproportionately affect people of color. For example, while one in 58 adults in America are under probation and parole supervision, that proportion jumps significantly for black people, [one in 23](#) of whom are under supervision.

Probation and parole have grown far too large because people are being supervised who should not be and are being kept on supervision for far too long. For those under community supervision, it is often too punitive and focused on suppression, surveillance, and control, rather than well-being and growth. Far from being an aid to community reintegration as originally designed, community supervision too often serves as a tripwire to imprisonment, creating a vicious cycle of reincarceration for people under supervision for administrative rule violations that would rarely lead someone not under supervision into prison.

OUR CALL FOR TRANSFORMATION

As people who run or have run community supervision throughout the country and other stakeholders concerned with mass supervision, we call for probation and parole to be substantially downsized, less punitive, and more hopeful, equitable and restorative.

WHAT WE STAND FOR

1

We stand for a community supervision system that has a smaller and more focused footprint and values dignity, fairness, race and gender equity, community, and reintegration. We affirm that justice-involved people have inherent value and worth. Our system should provide hope for the future, not a pathway to incarceration.

2

Probation and parole systems should be less punitive, more effective, and focused solely on the individuals who need support in lieu of confinement in order to keep our communities safe and healthy. Some people do not need supervision to build safe and healthy lives for themselves after an interaction with the justice system.

3

Probation and parole should promote development and success rather than trying to find failure. As numerous states around the country have already shown, we can significantly reduce the footprint of community supervision while increasing public safety and well-being. Probation and parole should practice procedural justice — treating people under supervision and their families with fairness and dignity. We must support the transformation of our field to focus on supporting people's success on probation and parole.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO

As leaders invested in the success of probation and parole from across the country, we call for the following reforms:

Reduce the footprint and punitiveness of supervision

- 1 / *Divert from probation and parole, individuals for whom the purposes of sentencing can be achieved without supervision, prioritizing services and supports above surveillance and supervision.*
- 2 / *Eradicate racial disparities in supervision, revocations, and sentencing recommendations.*
- 3 / *Establish reasonable probation and parole terms that are not unnecessarily long (generally no longer than 18 months), and are measured by a balance of safety concerns and an individual's goals.*
- 4 / *Allow people on probation to earn time off supervision through good behavior and by achieving certain milestones, like high school graduation, program completion, enrollment in college, and job retention.*
- 5 / *Tailor conditions of probation and parole to the needs and goals of each individual. Conditions should never be imposed unless they specifically relate to the person's offense behavior.*
- 6 / *Eliminate supervision fees. If fees are levied, they should always be within the person's ability to pay and the person should have the option of performing reasonable community service as an alternative.*
- 7 / *Eliminate incarceration for technical violations, and reduce reincarceration for low-level new offenses by those under supervision.*

The logo for EXIT, featuring the word "EXIT" in a stylized, orange, sans-serif font. The letter "X" is formed by two intersecting lines, and the "I" has a vertical bar on its right side. The logo is centered within a large, orange, trapezoidal shape that tapers towards the bottom.

WHERE WE WANT TO GO (cont.)

Improve community reintegration

- 1 / *Capture the savings from reducing the number of people under supervision and reducing incarceration for violations and reinvest them into smaller caseloads, evidence-based practices and enhanced community-led services and supports.*
- 2 / *Expand and improve community services, supports, and opportunities provided to people on probation and parole.*
- 3 / *Seek, hear, and honor the voices of community members, families, and justice-involved individuals as equal partners in system reform.*
- 4 / *Support probation and parole staff as a cornerstone of systemic change. Staff should be heard, supported and appropriately trained to embrace the principles of procedural justice.*
- 5 / *Address the statutory restrictions that inhibit reentry into the community, such as restoration of voting rights, access to college funding, driving privileges, and safe housing.*

The logo for EXIT, featuring the word "EXIT" in a bold, sans-serif font. The letter "X" is stylized with a diagonal slash through it. The logo is positioned on a yellow and orange geometric background.