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Nation's Leading Corrections Administrators Call for 50% Reduction of People on Probation & Parole to Save Money and Increase Public Safety

Van Jones Joins Criminal Justice Experts in NYC to Release 2 New Reports Outlining Why and How to Update Antiquated System

(New York, NY) – Two new reports were [released today](#) – one national in scope and one focused on New York City and State – looking at probation and parole as key drivers of mass incarceration with minimal benefit to public safety or individual rehabilitation. The reports argue that the tremendous growth of people locked up for probation and parole violations – many of which are for minor, technical violations - is financially taxing on the corrections system and should be cut in half. (See AP story [here](#) and Daily News oped [here](#).)

The national report, [Too Big to Succeed](#) was released by the Justice Lab at Columbia University and signed by 20 of the nation's leading corrections administrators. According to the new report, there are nearly five million adults under community corrections supervision in America (more than double the number in prison and jail). The almost four-fold expansion of community corrections since 1980 without a corresponding increase in resources has strained many of the nation's thousands of community supervision departments, often unnecessarily depriving clients of their liberty without improving public safety.

Underfunded and with few alternatives, community corrections officers have learned to default to the most available option they have for those who violate the terms of their supervision -- prison. Many are reincarcerated for nothing more than a technical violation. Regrettably, these punishments fall most heavily on young African American men.

"Probation and parole have grown far beyond what anyone could have imagined when they were created in the 1800s," **stated the lead author of the two reports, Vincent Schiraldi, Senior Research Scientist at the Columbia Justice Lab, former New York City Probation Commissioner and former Washington, DC director of juvenile corrections.** "Instead of serving

as alternatives to incarceration, they actually contribute to mass incarceration by creating trip-wires to revocation and reincarceration. We need to cut the number of people under supervision in half and focus services and supports on those remaining on probation and parole to improve their chances for success.”

The New York report, [Less is More in New York](#), notes that while crime is declining in the City and jail populations have dipped below 9,000 for the first time in 35 years, only one population has increased – those in city jails for state parole violations (by 15%). And 81% of those incarcerated in city jails for parole violations are either in for technical violations, misdemeanors, or non-violent felony arrests.

As state and city leaders agree that the jail complex on Rikers Island should be closed requiring a reduction in the NYC jail population, the report argues that the solution could be reducing unnecessary incarceration of persons on parole as well as to shrink the overall parole population and focus supervision and supports on those who need it the most.

“For years, probation, parole and community supervision have been hidden drivers of mass incarceration,” **said Van Jones, host of the Van Jones Show on CNN and Co-founder of #cut50.** “Now, because of the attention brought by the unjust incarceration of Meek Mill for a minor probation violation, we have an incredible opportunity to create massive change. Meek's story has brought this under-discussed issue into the living rooms of millions of households. Republicans and Democrats have already found resounding agreement that we can't keep trying to solve every problem by putting people in cages. The recommendations in these reports provide a playbook for policymakers and decision-makers across the country. Now is the time to turn this moment into a movement that can reimagine how probation and parole can truly help people reintegrate back into society- rather than simply being a trap that leads to needless reincarceration. When we come together to take a stand on behalf of justice, this movement is capable of incredible things.”

Recommendations: National

Leading probation and parole administrators that signed onto the national report, including: Ana Bermudez, Commissioner of New York City Probation; Jim Cosby, former head of the National Institute of Corrections; Marcus Hodges, President of the National Association of Probation Executives; Michael Jacobson, former NYC Corrections and Probation Commissioner;; and Terri McDonald, Los Angeles County Chief Probation Officer, urge that:

- Probation and parole populations be cut in half
- Revocations to incarceration be sharply curbed
- Probation and parole fines be curtailed, and
- A portion of the savings from this downsizing be funneled into supports and programs for persons under supervision

Recommendations: New York

In New York, City and State leaders agree that Rikers Island should be closed. They also agree that more needs to be done to address parole violations. Toward those ends, the report's authors suggest the following policy approaches, many of which have been found successful in other states:

- Shorten parole terms and incentivize good behavior by allowing people to earn accelerated discharge
- Require a hearing before a judicial officer before jailing someone accused of a technical violation
- Create a high legal threshold for jailing people on parole for less serious offenses and expedite their hearings
- Cap violation terms
- Require the use of graduated sanctions and rewards prior to revoking people under supervision to incarceration
- Reallocate savings to community programs

"I am heartened by the research from Columbia University that shows us without a doubt that parole reform is not only possible, it's the smart move to make," **said. New York Assemblyman Walter Mosley.** "Our state currently has one of the highest rates of parole failure, but there are ways for our parole system to become more effective, while making life easier for people on parole. By incentivizing good behavior, preventing re-incarceration for technical violations, and creating a higher threshold for less serious offenses, our state can save money, and reform our criminal justice system. Rarely are we given the opportunity to do something that is not only the smart thing to do, but the right thing to do, and it is my hope that the state of New York puts these reforms into practice as soon as possible."

Quotes from Leading Community Corrections Officials who Signed Onto National Report:

"The ability to focus on those more in need of supervision and support is critical to reducing unnecessary incarceration and supervision," stated **Ana M. Bermúdez, Commissioner, New York City Department of Probation.** "Our justice system-wide retooling, which has included a significant reduction in arrests, has paved the way for New York City for a more impactful engagement of those being supervised in the community, and has also created the opportunity to expand the role of probation in new ways to achieve even further reductions in the jail and prison populations. The essence of our 'whole justice' approach necessarily requires a one-size-fits-one pathway to successful completion for those under supervision, an intense focus on community engagement and the dedication and professionalism of a cadre of sworn probation officers who are second to none in carrying out this important work."

"Moving probation and parole agencies in the direction of smaller caseloads, incentivizing client progress, reducing reliance on supervision fees, and more effective rehabilitative efforts will

improve public safety and reduce the social costs the system currently imposes.” **Jim Cosby, JLC Executive Coaching & Consulting; former Director of the National Institute of Corrections; former Assistant Commissioner, Tennessee Department of Correction; former State Director, Tennessee Board of Probation & Parole**

“For decades the numbers of people under probation and parole supervision have increased geometrically with only marginal increases in resources. As a result, community corrections services have been stretched to the breaking point in an attempt to deal with ever increasing numbers of low level people placed under supervision as well as huge numbers who are under supervision for far longer than makes any sense in terms of public safety.” **Michael Jacobson, Director, Institute for State and Local Governance, City University of New York (CUNY); Professor, Sociology Department, CUNY Graduate Center; former New York City Probation and Correction Commissioner.**

“The massive number of people on probation and parole is a waste of resources and not only unnecessarily impedes individuals from being successful, it also distracts community corrections professionals from effectively supervising and engaging those who should be under supervision.” **David Muhammad, Executive Director, National Institute for Criminal Justice Reform; former Chief Probation Officer, Alameda County (Oakland), CA; former Deputy Commissioner, New York City Probation.**

Quotes from people with personal experiences of probation / parole:

"Probation and parole are creating a new layer of law enforcement control, intrusion and surveillance into communities of color which are already heavily policed and monitored.

"Community corrections" has become "community control" where uniformed probation/parole officers can enter our home and intimidate our family, inform neighbors of an individual's conviction status and appear unannounced at a workplace. It's time to bring real accountability to parole and probation practices, here in New York and across the country." **Topeka K. Sam, Executive Director The Ladies of Hope Ministries and the Probation and Parole Accountability Project**

"When women on parole and probation are struggling with issues related to poverty, mental health addiction, or abuse and violence, they too often get punishment instead of help. Where does punishment end and treatment begin? As these reports show, harsh surveillance and punishment does not serve public safety and exacerbates the problems people are struggling with to survive and get on their feet. By investing in supporting people and addressing root causes, we can reduce incarceration and improve people's live and promote safety and justice." **Donna Hylton, Founder, From Life to Life**

"As someone currently on probation I feel as if I'm walking on glass on top of heated coals. Every step I make has to be methodically thought out and I must watch my every surrounding. The stress it causes feels the same as imprisonment just not as physical. It's definitely mentally straining knowing that if you make even a small mistake, like showing up late to a meeting, then you could find yourself back in jail, maybe even losing your job or housing. As these reports

show, parole and probation periods are too long and reincarceration for technical violations is used too often. That's why we're launching the #LessIsMoreNY campaign today, to fight for needed reforms in New York. I am working to improve my community and want to tell New York: #DontViolateMe." **Valdez Heron, Community Organizer, Katal Center for Health, Equity, and Justice**