

# APS Session #5 Advocacy in Peer Support

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**“Advocacy for criminal justice reform is not just a call for change; it is the resounding voice of hope, compassion, and equity. Through our relentless pursuit of justice, we shape a society that embraces healing, fairness, and second chances for all.”**



# What is advocacy?

“Advocacy is the act of actively **supporting, promoting, and speaking** up on behalf of a particular cause, issue, or group of individuals in order to create positive change, influence decision-making, and bring about desired outcomes.”

# What is advocacy?

## Micro-Level

Micro-level advocacy focuses on individual and small-scale interventions. It involves working closely with individuals, families, or small groups to address their specific needs and concerns. It aims to empower individuals to advocate for themselves and navigate systems to access resources and services.

- One-on-One Support
- Skills Building
- Resource Navigation
- Empowerment
- Coordination
- Collaboration

# What is advocacy?

## Macro-Level

Macro-level advocacy focuses on larger-scale changes within systems, policies, and institutions that can have a broader impact on entire communities or populations. It involves addressing systemic issues, promoting social justice, and influencing policies to create more supportive environments.

- Policy Change
- Community Awareness
- Education
- Structural Changes
- Advocacy Campaigns

# What is advocacy?

## Macro-Level

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# Why do we need to advocate for change?

## 25%

The U.S. has 5% of the world's population but nearly 25% of its incarcerated population. <sup>1</sup>

## \$87B

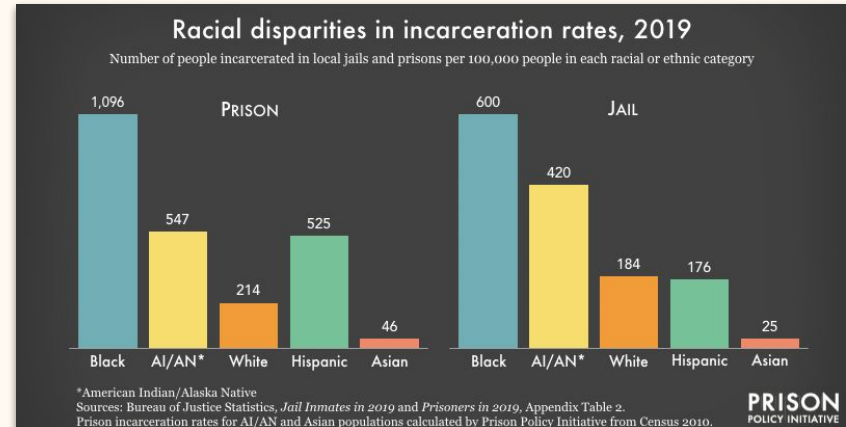
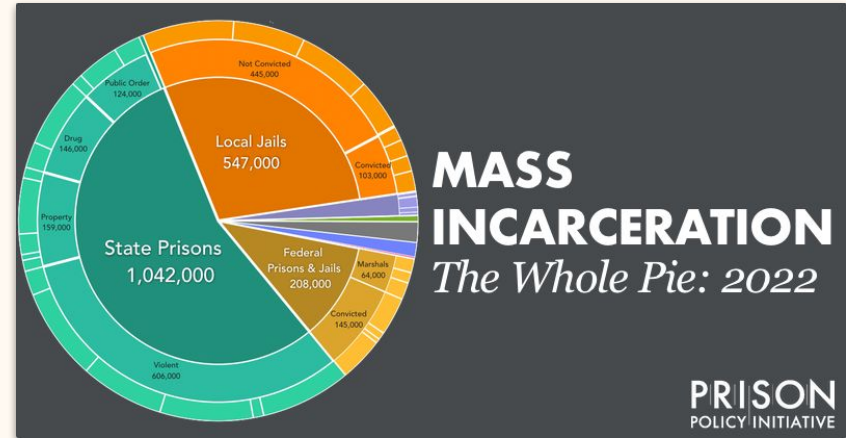
Our spending on jails and prisons reached \$87 billion in 2015, an increase of 1000% from the \$7.4 billion spent in 1975. <sup>2</sup>

## 2.2M

In 1972, there were only 200,000 people incarcerated in the United States. Today that number has grown to 2.2 million. <sup>3</sup>

## 750%

From 1980 to 2017, the number of women in jails and prisons in the U.S. grew 750%. Over 225,000 women are incarcerated today. <sup>4</sup>



# Relevance in peer support

**Lived Experience:** Peer support workers possess first-hand experience that can inform policy discussions with a powerful and authentic voice.

**Systemic Impact:** Involvement in advocacy can lead to policy reforms that impact many individuals.

**Influencing Cultural Shifts:** Efforts can contribute to changing public perceptions about reentry and reducing stigma.

**Resource Allocation:** Advocating at a macro level can allow for increased funding and resources for reentry programs, education, mental health services, and addiction treatment.

**Alternatives and Reform:** Peer support workers can advocate for the expansion of diversion programs, mental health courts, and restorative justice initiatives, reducing reliance on incarceration.



# Getting involved



**01**

**Educate yourself  
on issues and laws**

**02**

**Find areas you're  
passionate about**

**03**

**Connect with  
organizations**

**04**

**Stay updated  
on legislation**

**05**

**Contact elected  
officials and vote**

**06**

**Participate in  
advocacy campaigns**



# Major areas of criminal justice reform

<b><u>Juvenile Systems</u></b>	Developing alternatives to incarceration for juveniles, emphasizing rehabilitation, education, and restorative justice practices over punitive measures.
<b><u>Mental Health &amp; Diversion</u></b>	Expanding mental health and crisis intervention services, diverting individuals with mental health issues away from the criminal justice system, and providing appropriate treatment and support.
<b><u>Drug Policy Reform</u></b>	Shifting from punitive approaches to drug offenses to treatment and harm reduction strategies, including decriminalization or legalization of certain substances and expanding access to rehabilitation services.
<b><u>Racial and Ethnic Disparities</u></b>	Addressing systemic racial and ethnic disparities within the criminal justice system, including profiling, sentencing, and disproportionate representation of minorities in prisons.

# Major areas of criminal justice reform

<b><u>Sentencing Reform</u></b>	Addressing disparities in sentencing by revising mandatory minimum sentences, three-strikes laws, and other policies that have led to excessively long prison terms.
<b><u>Bail and Pretrial</u></b>	Reforming the bail system to reduce the reliance on cash bail, which can disproportionately impact low-incomes.
<b><u>Prison Conditions</u></b>	Improving conditions within correctional facilities, focusing on rehabilitation programs to reduce recidivism, and providing education, job training, and health services.
<b><u>Policing Practices</u></b>	Implementing policies to address excessive use of force, racial profiling, and biased policing. Encouraging community policing, de-escalation training, and increased accountability for law enforcement officers.
<b><u>Collateral Consequences</u></b>	Revisiting policies that impose long-term consequences on individuals with criminal records, such as restrictions on employment, housing, and voting rights.

# 03 Connect with organizations



[ACLU Criminal Law Reform Project](#)



[Vera Institute of Justice](#)



[Reform Alliance](#)



[The Sentencing Project](#)



[FAMM](#)



[Drug Policy Alliance](#)

\*Please note these are example advocacy organizations and not official partners or recommendations of the Hinda Institute

# 04 Follow relevant legislation



GovTrack



LegiScan

## Take Action

Changing laws and policies to end mass incarceration require a mass movement. Here are ways you can engage at the federal, state, and local levels.

WASHINGTON, DC

### Save Second Chances in DC

The Washington, DC Council is reversing course and considering expanding mandatory minimums, weakening the District's second chance law, and expanding youth detention, among other concerning provisions. Urge the DC Council to protect second chances and oppose regressive legislation!

PROTECT SECOND CHANCES IN DC



FEDERAL

### Guarantee the Right to Vote in America

Urge legislators to protect voting rights for all! The Democracy Restoration Act would expand voting rights to persons after incarceration including individuals completing their sentence in the community.

URGE LAWMAKERS TO PASS THE  
DEMOCRACY RESTORATION ACT!



[Specialized Organizations \(e.g. Sentencing Project\)](#)

# 05 Contacting elected officials



**THE SENTENCING PROJECT**  
RESEARCH AND ADVOCACY FOR REFORM

## Repeal the Ban on Food Stamps for People with Drug Convictions

Urge Congress to end the ban on food stamps for people with drug convictions and pass the RESTORE Act

Take future action with a single click.  
Log in or Sign up for [FastAction](#)

[fastaction](#) ?

1 Details    2 Messages    3 Confirmation

Prefix (Optional)

First Name

Middle Name (Optional)

Last Name

Suffix (Optional)

Advocacy organizations often provide an easy-to-fill form that collects your information and stance and sends it directly to your representative.

# 05 Contacting elected officials



## Find your representative

Chicago representatives  
Raja Krishnamoorthi - [Contact](#)  
Delia C. Ramirez - [Contact](#)

## Find your senator

Chicago senators:  
Tammy Duckworth - [Contact](#)  
Richard J. Durbin - [Contact](#)



## Include:

1. Your name
2. Your contact information
3. Date, Greeting, and Introduction
4. Bill Information and Facts
5. Reasons for Support or Opposition
6. Connection to Constituents
7. Call to Action
8. Closing and Signature
9. Optional Attachments

# 05 Example Letter of Support



Subject: Support for H.R.176 - Restricting the Use of Solitary Confinement Act

Dear [Representative's Name],

I am writing to express my strong support for H.R.176, also known as the Restricting the Use of Solitary Confinement Act or the End Solitary Confinement Act. As a concerned constituent and advocate for human rights, I believe that this bill is of utmost importance in ensuring a just and humane criminal justice system in our country. **[Introduce yourself and your connection to the issue].**

Solitary confinement is a practice that raises serious ethical and constitutional concerns. It involves confining an inmate to a small, often windowless cell for up to 23 hours a day with little to no human interaction. This isolation can last for weeks, months, or even years, causing severe mental and emotional distress. While it was initially intended as a measure to ensure prison safety, research has shown that prolonged solitary confinement can lead to a range of harmful effects, including anxiety, depression, hallucinations, and an increased risk of suicide. Studies have shown that inmates subjected to solitary confinement are more likely to develop mental health issues than those in the general prison population. The United Nations has recognized that solitary confinement for extended periods can amount to torture or cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment, especially when used on vulnerable populations such as juveniles and individuals with mental health conditions.

\*Please note this is an example for learning purposes and does not represent a political stance or position of the Hinda Institute on this bill.



# 05 Example Letter of Support



H.R.176 proposes necessary reforms to limit the use of solitary confinement, ensuring it is only used as a last resort and for the shortest time possible.

By supporting H.R.176, you have the opportunity to take a significant step toward reforming our criminal justice system and protecting the fundamental rights of all individuals, including those incarcerated. This legislation not only acknowledges the need to safeguard public safety but also recognizes the importance of treating inmates with dignity and respect, fostering rehabilitation rather than exacerbating trauma.

I urge you to stand on the right side of history and support H.R.176 - Restricting the Use of Solitary Confinement Act. By doing so, you will play a crucial role in promoting a more compassionate and effective criminal justice system in our country. Thank you for your attention to this critical matter.

Sincerely,

[Your Name]

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# 05 Testifying about a bill



1. Follow legislation and identify a bill of interest
2. Check the legislative website to see when it is open for comment
3. Prepare your testimony in line with best practices
4. In-person or live virtual testimony:
  - a. Arrive at the scheduled time
  - b. Keep it targeted and brief and follow the time limit
  - c. Share personal experiences and call to action
5. Written testimony
  - a. Check the legislative website for instructions
  - b. Provide a clear, well-formatted argument
6. Proofread, practice, and follow guidelines
7. Submit early
8. Be prepared for questions and for follow-up



# Guide to Providing Testimony in Committee

[Sample Resource](#)

# 06 Advocacy Campaigns

**Letters to the Editor**

**Social Media**

**Protests & Demonstrations**

**Phone Banking**

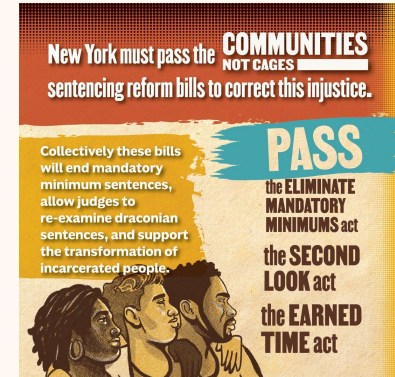
**Individual Interactions**

**Educational Events**

**Creative Expression**



# Highlighted legislation



\*Please note these are examples for learning purposes and does not represent a political stance or position of the Hinda Institute on these bills..

# Special Guest Speaker: Debi from FAMM

# FAMM

FAMILIES AGAINST MANDATORY MINIMUMS  
Sentences that fit. Justice that works.

FAMM is mobilizing families across the country to ensure that our criminal justice system is both fair and effective. For far too long, people who have made mistakes and broken the law have been subject to harsh, one-size-fits-all sentencing and prison policies that ignore the unique facts and circumstances of the crime and the individual. This approach is not only un-American, it wastes taxpayer dollars with sentences that are too long, too heavy-handed, and too focused on punishment instead of rehabilitation for the 94% of all prisoners who will return to our neighborhoods one day. FAMM is changing all this by supporting reforms at the federal and state level, including:

- **Sentencing reform**
- **Prison reform**
- Increased use of **compassionate release**
- Increased use of **executive clemency**.

## The Power of Your Advocacy



FAMM Foundation · Follow

Published in FAMM · 3 min read · 2 days ago



By Daniel Landsman

[Power of Your Advocacy](#)