



# PRISON TRANSPARENCY PROJECT REPORT:

*Rethinking Crime Prevention:  
Addressing Root Causes and  
Systematic Failures*

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# RETHINKING CRIME PREVENTION: ADDRESSING ROOT CAUSES AND SYSTEMIC FAILURES

## Understanding the Root Causes of Crime

- **The Role of Trauma:** Most crimes are committed by individuals who are in trauma. The adage "hurt people hurt people" is often true—those who have been traumatized are more likely to engage in harmful behaviors. Understanding this is key to preventing crime. Individuals in survival mode will do whatever it takes to survive, whether that means taking drugs to cope, stealing to avoid starvation, or even committing violence out of desperation.

- **Basic Needs and Crime Prevention:** If society wants to prevent crime, it must ensure that all citizens have their basic needs met—housing, food, safety, education, and healthcare. When people are secure in their basic needs, they are less likely to resort to criminal activities. Instead, they can focus on reaching their full potential.

## The Flawed Approach to Crime Prevention

- **Misguided Focus on Policing:** When municipalities or government representatives talk about crime prevention, they often mean hiring more police officers, expanding policing, and investing into weapons. Some police forces even have tanks, as if they're preparing for war. However, this approach frequently makes crime worse. When law enforcement is focused on finding flaws among human beings, they inevitably find them—because all of us have, at some point, broken a law or rule. This leads to over-policing and the criminalization of minor infractions, contributing to mass incarceration.

- **Criminality as a Spectrum:** All human beings make mistakes. The notion that minor infractions make someone a "criminal" is flawed, as criminality exists on a spectrum. The human condition is inherently imperfect, and society must decide how to address this imperfection in a way that is just and compassionate.

## The Failure of Punishment as a Solution

- **Punishment Does Not Work:** Data shows that punishment-focused approaches to crime do not work. They keep recidivism rates high and require significant resources for security and staffing, as they fail to address the underlying causes of criminal behavior. Instead of rehabilitating individuals, prisons often exacerbate the problems they are meant to solve.

- **Misplaced Priorities:** In the United States, more money is spent on prisons than on schools in all 50 states. There are more prisons than colleges in the country, a clear indication that societal priorities have gone astray. The result is nearly 2 million Americans—almost 1% of the population—incarcerated, more than in any other country in the world. This is an international embarrassment and a gross misallocation of resources.

## The Need for a New Approach

- **Smart Prisons and Diversion Programs:** The criminal justice system must be redesigned to focus on smart alternatives to incarceration, such as diversion programs, which are cheaper and more effective. These should be the default approach, not mass incarceration with excessive sentencing. The data is clear: alternatives to incarceration lead to better outcomes, both for individuals and society as a whole.

- **Ending the Humanitarian Crisis:** The mass incarceration crisis in the United States is a humanitarian disaster. The 13th Amendment, which allows for the enslavement of prisoners, has been exploited to create a profit center through the incarceration of citizens who do not deserve to be imprisoned. This system has victimized millions of Americans and must be dismantled.

## A Call for Change

- **The Role of Government:** The government's role is to serve and protect its citizens, in exchange for the tax money citizens pay them; their job is not to exploit citizens for profit, or to dehumanize or abuse them. The current state of mass incarceration, driven by economic incentives and systemic failures, is unacceptable. The status quo is also racist and classist. It is time for the government to take responsibility for the harm it has caused and to implement reforms that prioritize the well-being of all citizens.

- **Roadmap to a Better Way:** This report has outlined a data-driven strategic plan to help reform America's law enforcement system and envisions a new approach which is more humane, efficient, and effective. **Rather than just remaining text on a page or screen, please use this information to guide your work so that together, we**

can make a difference for good, and end the humanitarian crisis that America's criminal justice system has sadly become.

This report is part of a series produced by the Prison Transparency Project, aimed at uncovering and addressing issues within the prison system. For additional reports and recommendations, please visit our website at <https://prisontransparency.com>.