

Resolution on “Tough-on-Crime” Policies

An official statement from the Global Alliance on Behavioral Health and Social Justice, developed by the Mass Incarceration Task Force

The Global Alliance, an organization committed to the behavioral health and wellbeing of populations that are vulnerable or marginalized, is alarmed by a recent order from Attorney General Jeff Sessions urging prosecutors to file the most serious criminal charges possible, carrying the largest punishments and longest minimum sentences. This approach differs drastically from that of former Attorney General Eric Holder, who supported lesser charges for low-level drug crimes, and that of many states which have begun focusing on rehabilitation and treatment.



The statistics show the failing of the *tough-on-crime* policies launched in the 1980s and 1990s.

- The recidivism rate of inmates released from prison is over 65%.
- Over 2.2 million Americans are incarcerated, which costs approximately \$74 billion per year.
- The growth results from expanded drug law enforcement which made it more likely for an individual to be sentenced to prison and remain there significantly longer than in the past.
- Although incarceration rates have increased considerably over the last 40 years, *crime rates have not proportionately dropped.*

Punishment can, however, aggravate many of the conditions, disorders, and problems that criminal offenders face.

- About 15% of men and 1/3 of women in jail settings have a serious mental illness.
- Rates of serious mental illness in state prison populations are at least 2 to 4 times higher than community populations.
- 1 in 5 incarcerated individuals is locked up for a drug offense.

The Global Alliance promotes a focus on crime prevention and on treatment, diversion, and rehabilitation. Resources should be allocated to prevent criminal behavior early in the lifecourse. Further, offenders must also be given opportunities for treatment, diversion, and rehabilitation to be productive, healthy citizens. The entire society benefits from a holistic approach to crime prevention.

Additional Resources

Global Alliance for Behavioral Health and Social Justice. www.bhjustice.org/mass-incarceration

Vera Institute of Justice. www.vera.org

Sentencing Project. www.sentencingproject.org

Prison Policy Initiative. www.prisonpolicy.org

Justice Policy Institute. www.justicepolicy.org

Justice Strategies. www.justicestrategies.org

Brennan Center for Justice.
www.brennancenter.org/issues/ending-mass-incarceration

Treatment Advocacy Center.
www.treatmentadvocacycenter.org

How You Can Help

- Learn more about your states' policies related to drug-related offenses and sentencing.
- Educate friends, family, and co-workers on the facts about mass incarceration and the cost-saving potential of smart-on-crime policies.
- Advocate at the state and federal levels for policies that promote prevention, diversion, and treatment.
- Donate to or volunteer for an organization that provides resources to individuals diverted from the criminal justice system or re-entering the community.
- Promote behavioral health services in your community as a strategy for preventing the incarceration of individuals with behavioral health concerns.