



The Challenge

Our nation's criminal justice system is not producing enough safety or justice. Although crime and incarceration rates have receded from historic highs, racial and economic disparities persist, too many communities struggle with violence and substance abuse, and new technologies are increasing our vulnerability to cybercrime and other security threats. Taxpayers now spend a quarter trillion dollars per year to arrest, try, sentence, and supervise the seven million American adults behind bars or on probation and parole, yet return-to-prison rates remain high.

The Opportunity

Over the past decade, however, compelling improvements have been adopted by Congress and state and local governments across the country, borne of strong backing across the ideological spectrum. Growing awareness of strategies that work better and cost less has made many policymakers thirsty for sound data and research from trustworthy sources. And, in an age of polarized politics, our nation needs solidly nonpartisan institutions that encourage people to focus on facts and come to agreement on central issues of the day. The Council on Criminal Justice is designed to be such a resource.

Our Mission

The Council on Criminal Justice advances understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all. We believe a fair and effective criminal justice system is essential to democracy and a core measure of our nation's well-being.

What We Do

Independent and nonpartisan, the Council serves as a center of gravity and incubator of policy and leadership for the criminal justice field. The Council has two main components:

- First, it is a national invitational membership organization that elevates the field and creates a community of the most influential and innovative leaders in criminal justice and public policy. Members include federal, state, and local policymakers; professionals in law enforcement, courts, and corrections; program providers and advocates; directly impacted people and victims of crime; and others in media, faith, and business.
- Second, the Council is a criminal justice think tank that conducts groundbreaking research and harnesses the credibility of its leaders and members to generate bold policy roadmaps. A key Council activity is convening member task forces that produce policy recommendations capable of garnering political support and driving change.

By combining these two elements, the Council has the intellectual horsepower and diverse expertise needed to translate research and data into policy grounded in facts, evidence, and fundamental principles of justice – and the clout to turn policy proposals into action. (The Council itself does not take policy positions, lobby, provide technical assistance, or apply for government contracts or grants.)

Leadership

The Council is guided by a 16-member governing Board of Directors led by Laurie Robinson, who twice served as Assistant Attorney General in charge of the U.S. Department of Justice Office of Justice Programs. The Council's advisory Board of Trustees is co-chaired by former U.S. Deputy Attorney General Sally Yates and Koch Industries Senior Vice President Mark Holden. It also includes U.S. Sen. Mike Lee of Utah and former California Gov. Jerry Brown. The Council was founded by its president and chief executive officer, Adam Gelb, who, over a 30-year career in criminal justice, has influenced policy and practice as an award-winning journalist, senior state government official, U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee staffer, local program provider, and director of public safety initiatives at The Pew Charitable Trusts.

Membership

Council membership rewards the accomplishments of established leaders and serves to develop a strong, diverse cohort of emerging leaders who will steer the field through future challenges. It also supports a field that is more inclusive of those whose perspectives often are overlooked, such as formerly incarcerated people.

Lifetime members of the Council are selected based on multiple criteria, including intellectual achievement, practical impact, dedication to research-informed policymaking, standing among peers, promise of future service to the field, and potential for contributing to the Council's work. Once an initial class of founding members has been chosen, subsequent members must be nominated by a current Council member, seconded by at least two other members, and elected by a vote of the Board of Directors.

Funding

To fulfill its mission, the Council is seeking to raise \$22 million over five years. Startup funding has been provided by institutional and individual donors sharing a commitment to using data and evidence to inform policy. They include Arnold Ventures, the Ford, H.F. Guggenheim, Joyce, Loeb, and MacArthur foundations, and the David Rockefeller Fund.

Metrics of Success

- Influence on policy change (extent to which task force/other policy proposals are adopted)
- Influence on overall national dialog (as measured by requests for testimony or briefings and extent to which Council data and analyses are cited in reports and media)
- Demand for Council engagement (requests for the Council to establish task forces and study groups, perform research and conduct other activities)
- Demand for Council membership (membership nominations filed)
- Satisfaction of members that the Council adds value to their efforts (measured by surveys)

*For more information
please visit our website at counciloncj.org.*

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- Colette Peters—Director, Oregon Department of Corrections
- Charles Ramsey—fmr Police Chief, Washington and Philadelphia
- Louis Reed—National Organizer, #cut50; fmr director, Mayor's Office for Reentry Affairs, Bridgeport, CT
- Virginia Sloan—fmr President, The Constitution Project; fmr Counsel, U.S. House Judiciary Committee
- Diane Williams—President Emeritus, The Safer Foundation
- Paula Wolff—Director, Illinois Justice Project; fmr policy director for Illinois Governor Jim Thompson (R)
- Sally Yates (Co-Chair)—fmr U.S. Deputy Attorney General; partner, King & Spalding

In the News

Panel of national leaders aims for bipartisan justice reform

"Criminal justice is one of the few issues in which you do find some bipartisan consensus these days," [CCJ Trustee Sally] Yates said of criminal justice reform. "We need to latch on to that and to latch on to this moment in time to be able to drive that forward."

[*Associated Press, July 2019*](#)

The US has barely scratched the surface on criminal justice reform

"The Council captures the energy and brainpower of some of the most respected criminal justice experts and innovators in the country. By serving as an incubator for policy in the field, the Council will build on our historic opportunity by generating authoritative guidance on what actions, now and in the future, will bring Americans safety and justice."

[*The Hill, Op-Ed by CCJ Trustees Gov. Jerry Brown and Gov. Matt Bevin, August 2019*](#)

The Criminal Justice Debate Has Changed Drastically. Here's Why.

"This is a conversation that is unrecognizable from 10 years ago — even five years ago — when these kinds of proposals wouldn't have been floated in back rooms, let alone in public," said Adam Gelb, president of the Council on Criminal Justice, a nonpartisan research organization.

[*The New York Times, August 2019*](#)

1994 Crime Bill's Effect on Mass Incarceration Was Limited: Study

"Critics of the nation's more than two million people in prisons and jails frequently blame a law passed by Congress in 1994 for the mass incarceration that persists well into the 21st century. [A new analysis](#) concludes that the statute actually had only a modest impact. "Many states already had enhanced sentences for people convicted of violent offenses by the time the 1994 Crime Bill was enacted," write criminologists William J. Sabol and Thaddeus L. Johnson of Georgia State University. Sabol and Johnson wrote their analysis for the [Council on Criminal Justice](#), a new nonpartisan think tank studying criminal justice issues."

[*The Crime Report, September 2019*](#)

Racial gap in U.S. criminal justice system shrinks, but blacks still 5 times more likely to be imprisoned than whites: study

"The long-standing racial disparity in rates of incarceration has begun to narrow in the early part of the 21st century, but a wide-ranging new study shows a stubbornly persistent inequality in the racial composition of the nation's state prison systems. The numbers, released Tuesday by the Council on Criminal Justice, show that skin color still plays a major role in determining who goes to prison, and how long they stay there."

[*The New York Daily News, December 2019*](#)