May 7, 2025

Groups Support to Civic Engagement for Legal System Impacted Nevadans

Steve Yeager
Speaker
Nevada General Assembly
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, NV
Steve.Yeager@asm.state.nv.us

M. Dondero Loop
President Pro Tempore
Nevada State Senate
401 South Carson Street
Carson City, NV
Marilyn.DonderoLoop@sen.state.nv.us

Dear Speaker Yeager and Senate President Pro Tempore Loop:

We, the undersigned civil rights, faith, and advocacy organizations, write to demonstrate our civic duty to advance more fairness in Nevada's legal system. Nevadans directly impacted by the criminal legal system must have a voice in policymaking as part of the moral arc towards justice. We urge robust reform of Nevada's sentencing laws to promote fairness, reduce recidivism, and strengthen communities.

Nevada is home to thousands of individuals impacted by the criminal legal system who are striving to rebuild their lives, contribute to their communities, and participate fully in democracy. Yet systemic barriers—including disenfranchisement, overly harsh sentencing laws, collateral consequences in housing and employment among other supports to reintegration —continue to marginalize many Nevadans.

Nevadans deserve better than the policies that have grown the state's criminal legal system.The state's prison population grew by over 460% since 1980, although it peaked in 2017 and there has been a decline by more than 25% in recent years.[1] Yet, the incarceration growth between 1980 and 2017 demands more to be done to address the policies and practices that contributed to Nevada's incarceration growth.

Civic Engagement Helps Achieve Community Safety
Civic engagement is a strategy that supports safer communities. When people are empowered to vote, participate in community leadership, and engage in public discourse, community inclusion fosters a sense of belonging and accountability. It also is related to reductions in recidivism.[2] Evidence suggests that participation in civic life – like participation in work and

[1] Nevada's prison population was 1,839 in 1980 (Source: Staff.(1981) *Prisoners in 1980*, Bureau of Justice Statistics). Nevada's prison population was 10,304 in 2022 (Source: Carson, E. A. (2023). *Prisoners in 2022 - Statistical Tables*, Bureau of Justice Statistics). At its peak in 2017, Nevada's prison population was 13,671 (Source: Bronson, J. and Carson, E.A. (2019). *Prisoners in 2017*. The Bureau of Justice Statistics).
[2] Budd, K. M., & Monazzam, N. (2023). *Increasing public safety by restoring voting rights.* The Sentencing Project.

family life – is part of a broader "package of prosocial behaviors" that serves society well.[3] Nevada has taken important steps toward expanding voting rights, but more work remains to ensure that all Nevadans regardless of their conviction status are fully included in our democracy.

Steps towards moving the needle have materialized with the passing of AB 431 (2019) restoring the right to vote to every formerly incarcerated Nevadan. Decriminalizing traffic tickets, making the infractions civil matters with AB 116 (2021), keeping youth out of the adult court system with AB 230 (2021) and current efforts to garner a second-look for currently incarcerated Nevadans with AB 91 (2025) are all efforts to eliminate growth in our state's jail and prison population.

We recognize those closest to the problem should inform the changes Nevada needs. Nevada's current sentencing structure, including mandatory minimums and excessive prison terms, often fails to serve justice or enhance community safety. Instead, it contributes to high levels of incarceration, racial disparities, and undermines community cohesion. We urge Nevada's lawmakers to consider comprehensive sentencing reforms that prioritize rehabilitation, restorative justice, and fairness in sentencing.

- AB 91 - This Legislation will open a pathway for certain individuals to garner a second-look on their criminal convictions;
- AB 321 - This Legislation would force the Forester Firewarden to create a hiring program for individuals who hold firefighter positions during incarceration; and
- AB 291 - This Legislation would seal criminal history records when charges are dropped, or an individual is ultimately found innocent.

A Call to Action
As organizations committed to equity, community safety, and the dignity of all Nevadans, we call on you to champion policies that restore hope and opportunity for residents directly impacted by the criminal legal system. This includes removing barriers to civic engagement and enacting bold justice reforms that reflect shared values of fairness and second chances for all.

Thank you for your leadership and for standing with us in the effort to make Nevada safer and more just.

Sincerely,

A.C.L.U. Nevada
The Change Up-Midnight Coalition
Colorado Criminal Justice Reform Coalition
EX-incarcerated People Organizing (EXPO)
Full Citizens Coalition
Illinois Alliance For Reentry And Justice

[3] Uggen, C. and Lookner E. (2025) *Chapter 11: Disenfranchisement, Reenfranchisement, and Crime*. Democracy, Governance, and Law Sociology of Crime, Law and Deviance, Volume 29.

Initiate Justice Action
Just Future Project
Las Vegas Clark County Urban League
League of Women Voters of Kentucky
Life Coach Each One Teach One Re Entry Fellowship
Make The Road Nevada
Mass Liberation Project NV
Millions for Prisoners NM
National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers
National Urban League
Nevada Coalition Against the Death Penalty
Out for Justice, Inc.
Prisoners Legal Advocacy Network
The Sentencing Project

CC:
Members of the Nevada Assembly
Members of the Nevada Senate