



Conversation About Crime Survivors and Justice Reforms *July 21, 2021*

Summary of the Conversation's Points of Consensus

Introduction

The Sentencing Project works to promote effective and humane responses to crime that minimize imprisonment and criminalization by promoting racial/ethnic, economic and gender justice. Increasingly, crime survivors and those who assist them are critical partners in efforts to promote meaningful justice reforms, equitable access to services for survivors, crime prevention strategies including access to mental health care and community-based violence interruption initiatives, and restorative justice.

The Sentencing Project and national victim/survivor advocate Anne Seymour, with support from Open Philanthropy, sponsored a virtual conversation to address these and other critical issues. The goal of the conversation was to identify strategies that can more wholly identify and address the needs of survivors, those who harm them, and the communities in which they reside.

Participants were provided with an agenda in advance of the conversation, which is included in *Appendix A*. Seventeen participants – including survivors and advocates at the local, state and national levels – joined the conversation. A roster of participants is included in *Appendix B*.

Conversation participants agreed to join in future conversations to expand upon and fine-tune the points of consensus developed at this inaugural meeting, with a focus on their potential impact on policy, protocols and service provision.

Points of Consensus

1. Representation and Relationships

- Elevate the voices of victims / survivors themselves, particularly people of color (especially Black men) and including LGBTQ+ people, youth, those with

disabilities, and incarcerated people. Note that many of these individuals do not trust the criminal justice system and may not have reported their crime.

Compensate these victims and survivors for their time, and bring them on staff and/or train and mentor them for leadership roles.

- Build relationships between justice reform and victim/survivor advocacy groups; invite those with opposing views to internally discuss commonalities and perceived differences; and provide opportunities to find “common ground.”

2. Services and Policies

- Ensure that victim assistance organizations and funding accept and effectively serve people with a criminal record / substance use disorder problem, not just “innocent victims.”
- Offer services to crime survivors who did not report their crime and/or seek criminal prosecution (today, this constitutes the majority of people harmed by crime).
- Expand choices for people who were harmed by increasing access to non-punitive responses such as by expanding restorative justice. In particular, work with prosecutors and police to better serve victims outside of the punitive framework, and to proactively involve crime survivors and those who serve them in violence interruption initiatives.
- Work to transform the context in which harm occurs: the socio-historical conditions and institutions. Expand the social safety net — including mental and behavioral health services, housing, and income economic security.

3. Advocacy and Public Education

- Help survivors who support justice reform be heard to ensure that the public and policymakers do not get a false impression that victims are a monolith who only want the person who caused them harm to be imprisoned for as long as possible.
- Challenge the “false dichotomy” of victims/survivors and those who harm them by increasing recognition that many incarcerated people have significant histories and lived experiences of victimization and trauma, and are likely to be further harmed by incarceration.

- Connect decision makers with survivors of color and those from marginalized communities with. Do not rely only on quantitative data.
- Make a better case for how restorative justice programs, although not inexpensive, bring eventual cost savings, versus the high cost of traditional justice processes.
- Elevate the voices of police and prosecutors who champion non-punitive approaches.
- Demonstrate support from trusted local leaders, not just national figures. Similarly, when using quantitative data, present local / state data when possible.
- Develop and demonstrate cohesion among reform advocates.
- Educate victims, survivors and the public about the reality of how the criminal justice system works, with respect to sentencing, recidivism, and costs.

4. Funding

- Break down silos in government funding streams for reentry and victim service providers, working creatively with private philanthropy, and increasing funding for restorative justice programs without taking funding away from other non-punitive programs.
- Fund projects that provide both victim and offender services in the community — both ongoing and new.

Appendix A

The Sentencing Project Virtual Conversation About Crime Survivors and Justice Reform Issues July 21, 2021 3:00 p.m. to 5:00 p.m.

A G E N D A

Overview of The Sentencing Project Amy Fetting, Executive Director

Icebreaker All Participants

“What is *your personal goal* for today’s conversation?”

Conversation Questions All Participants

1. Who needs to be proactively engaged in further conversations and activities related to crime survivors’ issues and concerns, and justice reforms?
2. What strategies can you recommend to address the “false dichotomy” of victims/survivors and those who harm them, that can help recognize the *whole individual* across justice and social response systems?
3. What effective strategies can improve outreach to victims and survivors of color and access to victim services in communities that are often marginalized? (please offer any specific examples)
4. What would it look like if crime survivors, victim advocates and justice reform professionals work together for meaningful justice reforms, and to address current crises (i.e., the VOCA Fix in Congress; rising homicide rates)?
5. What are concrete ways that advocates and researchers can support crime survivors, crime prevention initiatives, and efforts to reduce unnecessary incarceration?

Closing and Next Steps Anne Seymour, National Victim/Survivor Advocate
Amy Fetting, Executive Director

Appendix B
The Sentencing Project

Conversation Participants

Alexandra Bailey, End Life Imprisonment Strategist
The Sentencing Project
Washington, DC

Aurelia Sands Belle, Research Instructor
National Crime Victims Research and Treatment Center
Medical University of South Carolina
Charleston, SC

Jennifer Brinkman, Director
Tennessee Department of Finance and Administration
Office of Criminal Justice Programs
Nashville, TN

Kristin Eliason, Director of Legal & Strategic Advocacy
Network of Victim Recovery of DC
Washington, DC

Michelle Garcia, Director
Office of Victim Services and Justice Grants
Executive Office of the Mayor
Washington, DC

Nazgol Ghandnoosh, Senior Research Analyst
The Sentencing Project
Washington, DC

Jim Jones, Executive Director
Community Justice Center
Lincoln, NE

Nancy Lewis, Executive Director
Colorado Organization for Victim Assistance
Denver, CO

Kimiko Lighty, Coordinator

Restorative Arlington
Arlington, VA

Marcy Mistrett, Senior Fellow
The Sentencing Project
Washington, DC

Katie Monroe, Executive Director
Healing Justice
Washington, DC

Joel Junior Morales, Director of Operations
LGBT+ Center Orlando
Orlando, FL

Andrew Page, Vice-President
Council on Criminal Justice
Washington, DC

Nicole Porter, Director of Advocacy
The Sentencing Project
Washington, DC

Sarah Taylor, RISE Project & Advocacy Coordinator
Network of Victim Recovery of DC
Washington, DC

Amy Fettig, Executive Director
The Sentencing Project
Washington, DC

Anne Seymour
National Crime Victim/Survivor Advocate
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