

Background information

You may be aware, there is great concern among Massachusetts residents about the need to make changes in the justice and corrections systems. Far too many people are incarcerated in the state. If the Commonwealth was an independent country, it would have the 11th largest prison population on the planet. The racial disparities in the system are egregious. Those with low income, mental illness, substance abuse disorders and dark skin are victimized by the system. There are insufficient rehabilitation services for people incarcerated in state prisons and county jails. Incarcerated people receive inhumane treatment. The recidivism rate is more than 50 percent – a sign of a failing system. People who leave prison receive little support to re-enter the community. **These are reasons why reforms are so necessary.**

In 2015, Gov. Baker, House Speaker DeLeo, Senate President Rosenberg, and Chief Justice Gantz agreed to invite the Council on State Government (CSG) to study the state's justice and corrections systems. The study revealed many flaws, yet the four leaders could only agree to propose legislation to reduce recidivism, which is about 15 percent of the problem.

For the past decade, activist groups like EMIT [End Mass Incarceration Together/UU Mass Action Network, the United Church of Christ Witness and Justice Task Force, EPOCA, Jobs not Jails, and GBIO [Greater Boston Interfaith Organization] have advocated for comprehensive reforms. We have held informative meetings and rallies, shown films, hosted speakers, testified at Statehouse hearings, and met with legislators

Activists have partnered with dozens of legislators who are members of the Harm Reduction and Drug Reform Caucus at the Statehouse to discuss needed legislative changes. The groundwork laid by committed activists and legislators is finally paying off after much hard work.

We anticipate that state Senate will vote before Thanksgiving on an Omnibus Bill, a comprehensive package of reforms to reduce how many people are sent to jail; to insure humane treatment and programs to prepare for re-entry while incarcerated; and to provide a smoother return to the community. Propelled by the voice of the people, we hope state representatives will express support for the Omnibus Bill, now being formulated.

What is needed NOW is for constituents to inform state representatives that you want them to support an ambitious and comprehensive legislative package equal to the Senate's proposal.

As members of our network of people of conscience, it is VITAL for you to contact your state representative and implore him/her to unequivocally pass on the message to their leader, Rep. Cronin, that your representative will vote for a bold and comprehensive package. **Please call TODAY.**

*The Rev. Bill Gardiner, Susan Tordella and Laura Wagner from EMIT/UU Mass Action Network
The Revs. Jon Tetherly and George Oliver, and Kathryn Byers of the UCC Witness and Justice Task Force*

For information, visit these resources

<https://massinc.org/our-work/policy-center/criminal-justice-reform/>

<https://endmassincarcerationtogether.wordpress.com/>

<http://www.macucc.org/justicewitnessministries>