

Too often in our society, one's race, gender, religion and socio-economic background determine the trajectory of their adolescent and adult life, and some of the greatest imbalances and inequities in our society persist within our current criminal justice system.

In this year's State of the State, Governor Cuomo laid out a bold and comprehensive criminal justice reform agenda to eliminate many outdated policies that have enabled these injustices to persist.

In New York City jails, 75 percent of incarcerated individuals have not been convicted of a crime and are awaiting trial. Throughout the rest of the state, 60 percent of incarcerated individuals have yet to stand trial. The reason a vast majority of these individuals are detained pretrial is simple—they can't afford to pay bail.

Within his agenda, Governor Cuomo has vowed to eliminate cash bail for anyone facing misdemeanor or nonviolent felony charges, effectively reducing pretrial detainment statewide.

Historically, our criminal justice system has disproportionately preyed on low-income young men and women of color, unjustly locking them up because they or their families are too poor to bail them out. Countless lives have been unfairly squandered as these individuals await trial for indefinite periods of time. These indefinite periods of incarceration can significantly alter an individual's future, posing potential negative impacts on their mental health, educational advancement, and professional development. In some cases, incarcerated individuals may even be encouraged to accept premature plea deals in a desperate attempt to be released from jail, regardless of their innocence.

This version of the criminal justice system ignores and attacks some of our nation's most vulnerable populations--going against its very purpose and creating an unequal and unbalanced system. Governor Cuomo's reform package returns dignity to the criminal justice system.

This progressive and comprehensive criminal justice reform package also includes discovery reform, which will provide attorneys the tools to properly represent their clients, as well as change in court procedures and scheduling to reduce backlog and case delays. This builds on Governor Cuomo's improvements to New York's re-entry process, removing statutory bans on occupational licensing for professions outside of law enforcement. For many incarcerated individuals, re-entering their community is an incredibly hard transition. Governor Cuomo's proposed reforms allow for a more stable, smooth and fair transition back into society.

Incremental change is not enough. While these reforms show progress and are truly a step in the right direction, we must continue to fight to ensure an equal justice system for all New Yorkers. We unequivocally endorse Governor Cuomo's bold, progressive, and necessary criminal justice reform package, and urge its swift passage.

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