

Add racial impact statements on criminal justice legislation to reduce disparities in the justice system

BACKGROUND

Communities of color are disproportionately affected by incarceration in Oklahoma. One in every 15 adult Black men in Oklahoma is in prison, giving us the highest rate of Black incarceration in the country. Native Americans make up about 9 percent of Oklahoma's population, but Native American women make up about 12 percent of the incarcerated women in the state. Hispanics are also overrepresented in Oklahoma prisons, making up 9 percent of the state population and 15 percent of its prisoners.



Communities of color are also the most burdened by the fines and fees that pay for Oklahoma's court system. When low-income defendants can't keep up with court debt, a warrant may be issued for their arrest, leading to a cycle of incarceration that makes the climb out of poverty nearly impossible. Disparities of incarceration and court debt feeds into a multi-generational cycle of trauma and economic inequality.

THE SOLUTION

To better understand the racial impact of policy decisions, lawmakers should require an analysis of potential racial disparities resulting from any proposed criminal justice legislation. These racial impact statements would allow Oklahoma to track best practices and highlight disparities which lead to overly incarcerated communities of color. Both Iowa and Arkansas have seen positive results from racial impact analyses in recent years, and this data could be a critical resource in Oklahoma as well.

Requiring racial impact statements on criminal justice legislation will allow lawmakers to make better-informed decisions and avoid deepening racial and ethnic disparities. Reducing disparities in the justice system is critical to ensuring that all Oklahomans - especially those from historically disadvantaged groups - have a chance to prosper.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Contact your state Representative and Senator and urge them to add racial impact statements to criminal justice legislation. Ask them to help end racial disparities in justice outcomes by evidence-based analysis and a reliance on data to create a system which treats all Oklahomans fairly under the law.

To join the coalition of Oklahomans working to ensure that our criminal justice system is smarter, makes our communities safer, and gives us the return on our taxpayer dollars that we deserve, visit www.okjusticereform.org. To receive SMS advocacy alerts on important budget issues, text OKJUSTICE to 51555.

You can look up your Senator and Representative on our website under the “Advocacy” tab on our main menu. You can also call the House switchboard at 405-521-2711, and the Senate switchboard at 405-524-0126.



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