

August 12, 2021

The Honorable David Trone
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Kelly Armstrong
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Congressmen Trone and Armstrong:

The undersigned groups are writing to express our support for the Community First Pretrial Reform and Jail Decarceration Act and thank you for your leadership on these critical issues. This legislation represents a critical step toward redirecting scarce public resources, reducing the overuse of jails in rural areas and small cities, and lessening the heavy burden of mass incarceration on communities.

Jail incarceration rates in rural counties and small and midsized cities are vastly higher than those in urban centers and the suburbs. At present, more than half of the people in jail in our nation are in facilities in these less-populated areas. Minor offenses—often the result of poverty, mental illness, substance use, and lack of access to diversionary and treatment programs in these regions—drive the overuse of jails. Approximately two-thirds of the 633,000 individuals in American jails are presumed innocent and being held as they await trial. Unfortunately, disinvestment over recent decades by both the public and private sectors has left far too many of these smaller communities ill-equipped to fund agencies and programs that would better serve their needs.

The Community First Pretrial Reform and Jail Decarceration Act would help recreate public safety, reduce jail populations in smaller communities, and give community members, leaders, and organizations greater leadership in decisions about these issues. By providing resources to rural counties and smaller cities for reforms like ending cash bail, growing pretrial services and diversion programs, and assuring timely access to counsel, local governments and community organizations can address the uneven access to justice that fuels severe racial disparities and a continued growth in pretrial detention.

This reform package makes clear your priorities for investments in public safety. We greatly appreciate your leadership on behalf of those affected by high incarceration rates in rural areas and smaller cities and thank you for introducing this critical legislation. Federal efforts to disinvest from jails and invest in true public safety and health are critically needed to support individuals, families, and communities affected by mass incarceration.

Sincerely,

Vera Institute of Justice
Tzedek Association
National Crittenton
National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA (NCC)
National Association of Social Workers
From Prison Cells to PhD
Reproductive Justice Inside
Interfaith Action for Human Rights

Forward Justice Maryland
CURE (Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants)
Law Enforcement Action Partnership
Church of Scientology National Affairs Office
Equal Justice Under Law
Justice For Families
College & Community Fellowship
Center for Court Innovation
EmancipateNC
Deep center
Healing Communities USA
Arkansas Justice Reform Coalition
Kentucky Center for Economic Policy
Race against injustice now (R.A.I.N.)
Texas Jail Project
The Bail Project
Dignity LeadHERship Alliance
No Exceptions Prison Collective