

Westport Monthly Meeting Minute on Criminal Justice Reform
Approved May 17, 2020

We, as members of the Religious Society of Friends, are called to seek that of God in every person. It is our challenge to live our faith in our personal lives but also through the community we create that is humane, inclusive, and caring. Our resolve is to seek a society and institutions that promote peace, justice, and equality.

The criminal justice system in Massachusetts and the United States is one such institution that is in need of reform. Policies and practices at the state and federal level place greater value on punishment and degrading the human spirit. The criminal justice system has also been a tool for reinforcing deep seeded racism in our culture through mass incarceration of persons of color and the poor. We recognize that American Friends have a long history of prison reform dating back to the eighteenth century. And we acknowledge that some reforms introduced by Friends with good intention nevertheless became oppressive measures of punishment rather than rehabilitation.

Westport Friends Meeting recognizes that there are many opportunities to engage in criminal justice reform and that individual Friends and the Westport Peace and Social Justice Committee must discern leadings and gifts in choosing how to turn faith into action. In this pursuit, we endorse action to recreate and reform the criminal justice system to hold up the dignity and worth of each person by valuing rehabilitation over punishment; human rights and humane treatment over oppressive and degrading practices; and justice and equity over racism and inequality. We seek a more effective and humane system of justice through promising approaches, such as restorative justice and alternatives to incarceration that reduce the criminalization of poverty and race.

As a community of faith, we are called to support the work of individual Friends and our Peace and Social Justice Committee in those endeavors that seek criminal justice reform.