



CONTACT:

Emma Sandler
Director of Communications
617-566-3960
esandler@t israel.org

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Fifty Jewish Leaders Join Push for Criminal Justice Reform

Reform clergy the latest religious group to urge support for broad changes to Criminal Justice System

Boston, MA: Fifty Reform Jewish rabbis and cantors from synagogues and institutions across Massachusetts have joined together to urge political leaders to strengthen pending criminal justice legislation, just as the most important days of the Jewish calendar arrive. [Read the letter here.](#)

In a letter hand-delivered to the offices of **Governor Charlie Baker, Lieutenant Governor Karyn Polito, Senate President Stanley Rosenberg, House Speaker Robert DeLeo, and Supreme Judicial Court Chief Justice Ralph Gants**, the rabbis wrote, “Animated by our Reform Jewish values and an investment in the safety and justice of our community, we join with others who advocate for criminal justice reform to repair systemic racial and economic bias.”

This statement comes as advocates around the Commonwealth are raising concern about the scope of criminal justice legislation being considered in the State House. While legislative leaders have declared achieving some level of criminal justice reform a priority for the session, the letter sides with those calling for broad changes.

On one particularly contentious issue, that of [mandatory minimum sentencing](#), the rabbis were clear in calling for a repeal of mandatory minimum sentencing for non-violent drug offenses. They write, “Our current system swells the prison and jail population, particularly affecting young men of color, and increases costs while not affecting public safety.”

Drafted by Rabbi Elaine Zecher of Temple Israel of Boston and Rabbi Neil Hirsch of Hevreh of the Southern Berkshire, the letter came in conjunction with the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization, (GBIO), a broad-based organization of 42 institutions representing more than 45,000 individuals that works for the public good by organizing people across religious, racial, ethnic, class, and neighborhood lines. It follows [similar calls from the Roman Catholic Bishops and Archbishops](#), and leaders from the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Rabbi Zecher connected the need for this letter to the coming holidays of Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, “Our holiest days of the year remind us of the value of repair, implanted in humanity. We commend our state leaders for efforts to create a criminal justice system more attuned and compassionate to the sacred human act of repair and restoration.”

About Temple Israel of Boston: Temple Israel is a diverse, urban, Reform Jewish congregation where all are welcome to live Judaism together through discovery, dynamic spirituality, and righteous impact. We welcome the opportunity to comment further on this story. Learn more at www.tisrael.org.

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