

September 1, 2017

The Honorable Charles D. Baker, Jr.
Governor
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Karyn Polito
Lieutenant Governor
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 360
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Stanley C. Rosenberg
Senate President
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 332
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Robert A. DeLeo
Speaker of the House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Massachusetts
State House, Room 357
Boston, MA 02133

The Honorable Chief Justice Ralph D. Gants
Supreme Judicial Court
John Adams Courthouse
One Pemberton Square, Suite 2500
Boston, MA 02108

Re: Criminal Justice Reform

Dear Governor Baker, Lieutenant Governor Polito, Senate President Rosenberg, Speaker DeLeo, and Chief Justice Gants:

We are Reform Jewish clergy, leaders in the largest denomination in American Jewish life, who call for a criminal justice system that reflects the dignity of every human being. We serve as leaders of Reform synagogues and institutions from across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. We write to you 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. GBIO is partnering with congregations across the Commonwealth to organize for meaningful criminal justice reform.

Our call to justice comes from our shared sacred text. In the Book of Leviticus, we are instructed, “You shall not render an unfair decision: do not favor the poor or show deference to the rich; judge your kinsman fairly... You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against your countrymen. Love your fellow as yourself: I am the Eternal God.”

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. We commend you for your efforts on criminal justice reform embodied in the omnibus legislation in formation and to urge you now to strengthen its provisions in ways essential for equal justice and humane treatment for all.

Toward this end, we are committed to and ask you to support bringing these reforms to a vote on Beacon Hill:

- **Repeal mandatory minimum sentencing for non-violent drug offenses and restore the discretion of judges in handing down sentences that reflect the particular circumstances of each case.** Our current system swells the prison and jail population, particularly affecting young men of color, and increases costs while not affecting public safety. We support the reform legislation proposed by Senator Creem and Representative Carvalho (**S.819, H.741**).
- **Reform the pretrial bail system so that it incarcerates people on the basis of flight risk, not on their ability to raise the required funds.** Our system now disproportionately affects people of color, results in rising rates of pre-trial detention, and disrupts the livelihood, family and community lives of those who may be judged innocent. We support the reform legislation proposed by the late Senator Donnelly and Representative Dave Rogers (**S834, H 3120**).
- **Reduce or eliminate excessive fees and fines that contribute to high rates of recidivism.** For too many poor people released from prison, criminal justice debt incurred due to fees imposed for counsel fees, probation fees, and other assessments significantly interferes with efforts to live a law-abiding life and often leads to re-incarceration for non-payment. We support the reform legislation proposed by Senator Barrett and Representative Keefe (**S755, H3077**) as well as elements of the Omnibus bill sponsored by Senator Brownsberger and Representative Tyler (**S777; H2359**).
- **Eliminate excessive and lengthy solitary confinement practices, which are inhumane, traumatizing, and ineffective in reducing violence.** Massachusetts is one of only three states that allows up to ten years of solitary confinement, a tactic judged by the United Nations international standard to constitute torture when imposed for more than 15 days. We support the reform legislation proposed by Sen. Creem and Rep. Balser (**S1296, H2248**), Sen. Chang-Diaz and Rep. Markey (**Data Collection S1286, H3092**).

The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. once said, “We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce *urgency of now*. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there ‘is’ such a thing as being too late. This is a time for vigorous and positive action.” Our movement is committed to *tikkun olam*, the Jewish value of bettering our society and repairing our broken world. Today, the need for meaningful criminal justice reform is urgent.

In keeping with our faith and communal commitments, we will continue to raise these particular issues of justice within our congregations. We hope that with you we can assure that our beloved Commonwealth upholds the justice that we all deserve.

We urge you to advocate for and vote in favor of these critical reforms, that we might improve the lives of many in our Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

Rabbi Elaine Zecher, Temple Israel, Boston

Rabbi Neil Hirsch, Hevreh of the Southern Berkshire, Great Barrington

Rabbi Jay Perlman, Temple Beth Shalom, Needham
Rabbi Elias Lieberman, Falmouth Jewish Congregation, East Falmouth
Rabbi Howard Berman, Central Reform Temple, Boston
Cantor Steven Weiss, Congregation Sha'aray Shalom, Hingham
Rabbi Keith Stern, Temple Beth Avodah, Newton Centre
Cantor Lisa Doob, Temple Isaiah, Lexington
Rabbi Thomas Alpert, Temple Etz Chaim, Franklin
Rabbi Susan Abramson, Temple Shalom Emeth, Burlington
Rabbi Jodie Gordon, Hevreh of Southern Berkshire, Great Barrington
Rabbi Rachel Saphire, Temple Beth Elohim, Wellesley
Rabbi Caryn Broitman, Martha's Vineyard Hebrew Center, Vineyard Haven
Rabbi Suzie Jacobson, Temple Israel, Boston
Rabbi Howard Jaffe, Temple Isaiah, Lexington
Cantor Shanna Zell, Temple Beth Elohim, Wellesley
Rabbi Matthew Soffer, Temple Israel, Boston
Rabbi Mark Shapiro, Sinai Temple, Springfield
Rabbi Jennifer Gubitz, Temple Israel Boston
Rabbi Shoshana Meira Friedman, Temple Sinai, Brookline
Rabbi Kenneth Carr, Temple Chayai Shalom, Easton
Rabbi David Freelund, Cape Cod Synagogue, Hyannis
Rabbi Henry Zoob, Temple Beth David, Westwood
Rabbi Philip Sherman, Temple Beth Elohim, Wellesley
Rabbi Ronne Friedman, Temple Israel, Boston
Rabbi Liz P.G. Hirsch, Great Barrington
Rabbi Jill Perlman, Temple Isaiah, Lexington
Rabbi Jordana Battis, Temple Beth Shalom, Needham
Cantor Peter Halpern, Temple Shalom, Newton
Rabbi Bernard Mehlman, Temple Israel, Boston
Rabbi Valerie Cohen, Temple Emanuel Sinai, Worcester
Rabbi Robin Sparr, Temple Emanuel, Lowell
Rabbi Serena Fujita, Temple Israel, Boston
Rabbi Stephen Arnold, Hingham
Rabbi Eric Gurvis, Newton
Cantor Roy Einhorn, Temple Israel, Boston
Rabbi Rita Sherwin, South Dennis
Rabbi David Thomas, Sudbury
Rabbi Ira Korinow, Newton Highlands
Rabbi Robert Miller, Temple Beth Avodah, Newton
Rabbi Amy Goodman, Hebrew SeniorLife Hospice Care, Dedham
Rabbi Rachel Gurevitz, Congregation B'nai Shalom, Westborough
Rabbi Michele Lenke, Needham
Cantor Vera Broekhuysen, Tempel Emanu-El, Haverhill
Rabbi Joseph Meszler, Temple Sinai, Sharon
Rabbi Cari Bricklin-Small, Temple Shir Tikvah, Winchester
Rabbi Shoshana Perry, Congregation Shalom, Chelmsford
Rabbi Jonathan Kraus, Beth El Temple Center, Belmont

* Congregations listed for identification purposes only.