

# ACLU of Mississippi Releases Blueprint with Roadmap for Cutting Incarceration by 50 Percent

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**Jackson, MS** — The ACLU of Mississippi today released a report with recommendations that could lead to a 50 percent reduction in Mississippi’s prison population.

The report is a part of the ACLU’s Smart Justice 50-State Blueprints project, a comprehensive, state-by-state analysis of factors that contribute to mass incarceration and includes reforms that if implemented would end our overreliance on incarceration.

The Blueprint includes an overview of Mississippi’ incarcerated populations, including analysis on who is being sent to jail and prison and the racial disparities that are present, what drives people into the system, how long people spend behind bars, and why people are imprisoned for so long.

Some of the key findings include:

- Mississippi’s prison population has grown nearly fivefold since 1980.
- While Black men make up 34% of the male population in Mississippi, they make up 65% of the prison population, which translates to one in 30 Black men in prison.
- Drug offenses are the leading driver of this incarceration epidemic. For example, selling just 2 grams of most drugs carries up to 20 years in prison.
- The majority of people in county jails – about 56 percent – have not yet been convicted of a crime and are awaiting trial.

“While recent reforms over the last few years has reduced Mississippi’s prison population, the state ranks third in the country for the number of people we lock up every day,” said Jennifer Riley Collins, ACLU of Mississippi Executive Director. “This addiction to prison is ruining families and communities and costing taxpayers about \$330 million in corrections costs. To get to better outcomes for the criminal justice system in Mississippi, we must take a different approach and divert resources toward education, infrastructure, and economic stimulation.”

Some of the key reforms include:

- Urgent efforts should focus on bail reform, an evaluation of prosecutorial practices, sentencing reform for burglary offenses, and increasing access to alternatives for incarceration for drug-related offenses.
- Policymakers should take state prison time off the table for low-level drug and property offenses and reduce them to misdemeanors.
- The Legislature should also take a comprehensive approach to reform the state’s extreme minimum and maximum sentencing laws as well as sentence enhancements for people with prior convictions.

