

**Governor Chris Christie and Members of the New Jersey Legislature**

June 20, 2016

**RE: State and National Groups Support S. 677 and A. 3677**

Dear Legislators:

We, the undersigned forty-one faith, advocacy, civil rights, criminal justice reform, and human rights organizations and legal service and reentry service providers strongly support efforts to challenge racial disparity in New Jersey's criminal justice system. New Jersey's authorization of racial and ethnic impact statements will promote a fair criminal justice system that acknowledges how sentencing policy can contribute to unjust racial disparities.

We applaud the introduction of S.677/A.3677 and believe its enactment will be a critical turning point in New Jersey's effort to recognize the impact of criminal justice policies on communities of color. The legislation will authorize racial and ethnic impact statements, a tool for lawmakers to evaluate potential disparities of proposed legislation prior to adoption and implementation. Similar to fiscal or environmental impact statements, racial and ethnic impact statements provide legislators with a statistical analysis of the projected impact of policy changes prior to legislative deliberation.

Practically speaking, it is important to address a policy's unwarranted effects before it is adopted, as it is more difficult to reverse sentencing policies once they have been implemented. S.677/A.3677 is a crucial first step to addressing racial disparity in the state's criminal justice system.

New Jersey's prison population has more than doubled in recent decades, growing from 6,087 in 1980 to 21,590 in 2014.<sup>1</sup> This growth has been accompanied by an increasingly disproportionate racial disparity, with significantly high rates of incarceration for African Americans, who now constitute over 60% of committed New Jersey inmates, compared to the African American proportion of 12.9% in the general population of New Jersey.<sup>2</sup>

To break from the system's unfair past, the bill's provisions govern a process for the development racial and ethnic impact statements. Several states – Iowa, Connecticut, Oregon and Minnesota – provide racial and ethnic impact statements to lawmakers. Other states currently considering this policy include Maryland, Washington, and Wisconsin.

New Jersey's adoption of racial and ethnic impact statements will help to build national momentum in ensuring a fair review of proposed sentencing laws. The families and communities that we serve have borne devastating costs from mass incarceration.

We support challenging racial and ethnic disparity in the state's criminal justice system and passage of S.677/A.3677. If you have any questions or wish to discuss this issue further, please contact Rev. Charles Boyer at [revboyer@ameministerscoalition.org](mailto:revboyer@ameministerscoalition.org).

Sincerely,

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<sup>1</sup> E. Ann Carson. Prisoners in 2013. U.S. Dept. of Justice. Web. 17 Dec 2014

<sup>2</sup> Ashley Nellis. 2016. *The Color of Justice: Racial and Ethnic Disparity in State Prisons*. Washington, DC: The Sentencing Project.

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AME ministers coalition  
American Friends Service Committee Immigrant Rights Program  
American Friends Service Committee Prison Watch Program  
Anti-Poverty Network of NJ  
Bethel AME Church  
Bethel AME Lakewood Church  
Black Methodists for Church Renewal of the Greater New Jersey Conference of the United Methodist Church  
Communications Workers of America (CWA) District 1  
Decarcerate the Garden State  
Drug Policy Alliance  
Eternal Life Christian Center  
Faith in New Jersey  
Food Justice at Trinity  
GGI LLC  
Grant AME Church  
Green Party of Mercer County  
Lebanon Baptist Church  
Lutheran Episcopal Advocacy Ministry New Jersey  
MC-NAACP  
NAACP Morris County Branch  
NAACP NJ STATE CONFERENCE  
National Council of Jewish Women, Essex County Section  
National Organization for Women of NJ  
NeighborCorps Re-entry Services  
New Jersey Parents Caucus  
New Jersey Tenants Organization  
NJ Annual Conference of the AME Church  
NJ Coalition 4 Redemption & Justice  
NJ Conference AME Church Women's Missionary Society  
NJ Working Families Alliance  
Northern NJ Chapter, National Organization for Women  
Not In Out Town (NIOT) Princeton  
Omega Psi Phi, Delta Upsilon Social Action Committee  
Princeton Students for Prison Education and Reform (SPEAR)  
Racial Justice Project  
The Evangelical Pastors Association of Hudson County  
The Sentencing Project  
UIH Family Partners  
Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of NJ  
Wind of the Spirit, Immigrant Resource Center  
Women Who Never Give Up

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