

Resolution on Criminal Justice Reform

WHEREAS, the United States has the highest incarceration rate in the world, holding approximately 2.3 million people in prisons and jails on any given day; and

WHEREAS, the number of people incarcerated has increased almost eight times since 1980, largely as a result of the “War on Drugs” and “tough on crime” policies created in the 1970s, 1980s, and 1990s; and

WHEREAS, even after release from prison, collateral consequences make it extremely difficult for people to reenter society successfully; and

WHEREAS, African Americans and Latinos make up approximately 30 percent of the nation’s population but almost sixty percent of prisoners; and

WHEREAS, unless current trends change, one in three African American male babies born today will become incarcerated at some point in his life; and

WHEREAS, approximately 5.85 million people, including one in thirteen African Americans in the United States, cannot vote as a result of laws that disenfranchise people with felony convictions; and

WHEREAS, laws, policies, and practices throughout the criminal justice system, including racial profiling and disproportionate application of mandatory minimums, have resulted in African Americans and Latinos being much more likely to be stopped, arrested, and charged with crimes, as well as more likely to serve longer prison sentences for the same crimes as whites; and

WHEREAS, recent police-involved fatalities of unarmed African American men and boys have brought issues of police reform into the national spotlight; and

WHEREAS, the men and women who go into law enforcement perform very significant responsibilities, under difficult and often dangerous circumstances, including enforcing our nation’s laws, preserving the peace, and preventing and responding to crime and terrorism, while adhering to the Constitution; and

WHEREAS, police are able to do their jobs most effectively when there is trust between them and the communities they serve and protect; and

WHEREAS, studies show that diverse police departments have an easier time building bridges with communities; and

WHEREAS, as a leader in promoting civil rights and equality, and as the largest non-governmental trainer of law enforcement on issues of hate crimes, extremism, domestic and

international terrorism, and ethics and core values, ADL is uniquely positioned to assist in addressing issues affecting the relationship and trust between law enforcement and the people and communities they serve; and

WHEREAS, ADL has been working to dismantle the school-to-prison pipeline, a phenomenon in which harsh school discipline policies that include suspensions and expulsions often lead students to drop out of school and ultimately become entangled in the criminal justice system, increasing the education gap in the United States because students of color are much more likely to be suspended or expelled than their peers; and

WHEREAS, there are multiple proposals at the federal and state levels to reform criminal justice and police policies, including reforming pretrial detention; adopting alternatives to arrest and incarceration for minor, non-violent offenses; appointing special prosecutors in cases of police involvement in fatalities of unarmed civilians and allegations of serious police misconduct; requiring law enforcement officers to wear body cameras; expanding FBI and Justice Department data collection on police use of lethal force; providing treatment, rather than incarceration, for substance abuse and mental health; limiting mandatory minimum sentences to the most serious offenses; ensuring fairness in the selection of jurors and grand jurors; focusing prisons on rehabilitation efforts; and promoting best practices to ease reentry and reduce recidivism;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Anti-Defamation League supports efforts such as those mentioned in the preceding paragraphs that prove to be effective to reduce mass incarceration, oppose racism, reform practices that disproportionately impact communities of color, create safe environments for all communities, and build trust between law enforcement and the communities they serve and protect; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED that the Anti-Defamation League work with the Department of Justice, national and local law enforcement organizations, civil rights groups, and communities to develop and promote community policing best practices—including expanded training and outreach programs to promote an inclusive, diverse and effective police force that better reflects the racial, ethnic, and religious communities it serves and protects.