



NEW ADVOCACY GUIDE HELPS MULTNOMAH COUNTY RESIDENTS ZERO IN ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

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PORTLAND, Oregon – The problem of mass incarceration – the term used to describe the substantial increase of recent decades in the number of people locked up in prison or jail in the US – has been drawing growing public attention in the last few years. Everything from polished TV documentaries such as “Making a Murderer” and “13th” to harrowing cellphone videos of police shootings has fed increasing interest in what’s going on with the criminal justice system and law enforcement. But while awareness and concern may have mushroomed, clear guidance on how individuals can be part of addressing this issue has often been hard to find.

Now, however, residents of Multnomah County and the City of Portland can take action with the help of a new advocacy guide. “Disrupting Mass Incarceration at the Local Level: A Guide to Mapping Reform” is published by the Oregon Justice Resource Center. Its premise is that too much attention has been focused on what is happening at the federal level and not enough on the huge potential for change at the local level. The guide advocates for engagement with nine key stakeholders in Multnomah County and the City of Portland who all have sizable influence over the criminal justice system and thus the problems associated with mass incarceration.

“In recent years, many Oregonians and many Americans have become more aware of the problems in our justice system,” said Kate Gonsalves, Political Director for the Oregon Justice Resource Center and author of the guide. “Terms such as ‘mass incarceration’ have become familiar to many of us. When people understand that they are living in the most carceral nation on the planet and what damage that is doing to our families and our communities, they often feel motivated to act. This guide gives them the tools to do so.”

The Oregon Justice Resource Center has used Multnomah County and the City of Portland as a case study for the report, although the lessons it contains could be extended to any county in

Oregon. Official figures show that nearly one in five people who went to prison last year in Oregon was sent there from Multnomah County. This shows the impact that local level action in the county could have on the financial and human costs of the justice system and how our society responds to crime, benefiting the entire state.

“Portland and Multnomah County enjoy a reputation as a stronghold of progressive values and local voters tend to look to their representatives to reflect those views in the decisions they make while in office,” said Gonsalves. “But we haven’t seen that same scrutiny given to some of the down-ballot elected officials, such as district attorneys, who hold tremendous power over criminal justice and yet often run unopposed and with few voters participating in their election. It’s time for voters to pay more attention to what city and county leaders are doing on this issue.”

The Oregon Justice Resource Center will soon be releasing a campaign plan for 2017, complementing the main guide, and providing those who want to combat mass incarceration with specific activities for this year.

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For more information or interviews, please contact Kate Gonsalves, Political Director, Oregon Justice Resource Center.

Visit the dedicated webpage for the report at www.ojrc.org/disrupting-mass-incarceration-at-the-local-level. PDF copies are available to download for free there.