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**NEW REPORT: U.S. WASTED \$3.4 TRILLION ON
MASS INCARCERATION AND CRIMINALIZATION**

*'The \$3.4 Trillion Mistake' Breaks Down Flawed U.S. Spending on Criminal and
Juvenile Justice, Highlights Opportunities for Justice Reinvestment*

Over the last three decades, the U.S.'s emphasis on mass incarceration and criminalization policies wasted \$3.4 trillion that could have instead been used to create living-wage jobs, improve educational opportunities for youth, and hire mental health and drug treatment counselors, according to a new report released today by three advocacy organizations. The report, "The \$3.4 Trillion Mistake: The Cost of Mass Incarceration and Criminalization, and How Justice Reinvestment Can Build a Better Future for All," provides an analysis of the country's investments in the justice system and their impact on federal, state, and local budgets, and on individual taxpayers. Authored by Communities United, Make the Road New York, and Padres & Jóvenes Unidos, the report includes state-by-state data and details on alternative investments that would more effectively address the roots causes of crime.

Key report findings show that, from 1982 to 2012, the U.S. increased its spending on the justice system from \$90 billion annually to nearly \$297 billion, a 229 percent increase. Cumulatively, over that 30-year period, the U.S. spent \$3.4 trillion more on the justice system than it would have if spending had remained steady since 1982.

"The 'tough-on-crime' approach and the 'War on Drugs' have not substantially improved public safety, but they have resulted in nearly eight million U.S. residents that are either in prison, in jail, on probation or parole, or otherwise under control of the justice system," said Ricardo Martinez, Co-Director of Padres & Jóvenes Unidos. "That amounts to one out of every 40 people, which is a clear indication that our justice system is vastly oversized."

Report authors found that the flawed spending impacted the country in the following ways:

- All 50 U.S. states accumulated billions of dollars in surplus justice spending over that time, ranging from \$2.2 billion for North Dakota to \$505 billion for California.
- In 1982, each household in the U.S. paid an average of \$1,076 for our justice system. By 2012, each household was paying an average of \$2,557, almost \$1,500 more.
- Between 1983 and 2012, the justice system added an additional 1.2 million police officers, corrections employees, prosecutors, and other employees to our publicly funded workforce, nearly doubling its number of personnel.
- By far the largest category of justice spending – at 45 percent of the total – is police spending. It has also increased over time more than the other categories. For example, in 2012, the U.S. spent \$85 billion more on police than it did in 1982.
- The impact of over-investment in the justice system has been particularly severe in communities of color. For example, approximately 1 in 18 Black residents, and 1 in 34 Latino residents, were under the control of the justice system in 2013 (compared to 1 in 55 White residents).

"To build safe and healthy communities, we need living-wage jobs, affordable housing, and access to quality education," said Zion Harley, youth leader at Make the Road New York. "It is time for us prioritize these types of community investments and stop the massive over-spending on the criminalization and incarceration of people of color and immigrants."

The report suggests that, instead of spending an extra \$206 billion per year on the justice system, the U.S. could have created healthier and safer communities through other investments, such as:

- Creating over one million new living-wage jobs: \$114B
- Increasing spending by 25 percent at every K-12 public school in the country: \$159B
- Providing every household living in poverty with an additional \$10,000 per year in income or tax credits: \$87B
- Funding one million new social workers, psychologists, conflict mediators, mental health counselors, and drug treatment counselors to address public health/safety issues: \$67B
- Creating a universal pre-K system for all 3- and 4-year-olds that would be free for low-income families and affordable for middle-class families: \$20B

"With \$3.4 trillion, we could have ended inter-generational poverty in this country and created a much brighter past, present, and future for every U.S. resident," said Pastor Ron Taylor, a faith and community leader in Chicago and member of the Right on Justice Alliance, co-convened by Communities United. "We cannot afford to make the same mistakes over the next 30 years, when the consequences of our misplaced priorities will only worsen."

Key recommendations in the report suggest the following:

- Inclusive efforts at the federal, state, and local levels to reduce all four areas of surplus justice spending (police, corrections, judicial/legal, and immigration enforcement) and reinvest those funds in meeting critical community needs;
- The creation of a new, federal *Justice Reinvestment Fund* to dramatically expand the support and incentives for states and localities to engage in comprehensive justice reinvestment efforts; and
- State-level support and incentives for localities governments to engage in comprehensive justice reinvestment efforts.

Download "The \$3.4 Trillion Mistake" at www.reinvest4justice.org/report. For additional media inquiries, contact Zerline Hughes at 617.596.6958 or media@communitiesunited.org.

[Communities United](#) is a Chicago-based organization – and convener of the Right on Justice Alliance – that develops leadership at the grassroots, city, and statewide levels to address the root causes of social, racial, and economic injustice.

[Make the Road New York \(MRNY\)](#) builds the power of Latino and working class communities to achieve dignity and justice through organizing, policy innovation, transformative education, and survival services.

[Padres & Jóvenes Unidos](#) is a Denver-based, multi-issue organization led by people of color who work for educational equity, racial justice, immigrant rights and quality healthcare for all.