We spend $80 billion annually to incarcerate 2.2 million people in facilities with subpar treatment services, ineffective programs, and deplorable conditions. Loved ones spend another $3 billion to support them. But the social costs of our failing criminal legal system, such as the harm done to families and communities, are far higher. And these costs are not distributed evenly—their burden is carried largely by those we already marginalize: low-income and minority communities.

However, this injustice has produced windfalls for some. Private and public actors have commercialized each segment of our punishment continuum to financially exploit our criminal legal system and those it touches. Motivated to help expand its reach, these actors wield their economic and political power to protect the legal structures that support their growth.

These structures have become an invisible, but fortified barrier to building a criminal legal system rooted in justice. Thus, while advocates fight for legislative, legal, and organizing wins, their efforts are thwarted by the oft-ignored imbalance of economic and political power between affected communities and those who capitalize on their victimization, criminalization, and incarceration.

Worth Rises is a non-profit organization dedicated to elevating people over profits.