



5 Years of SMART JUSTICE

Smart Justice Vermont was launched in January 2018, with joint goals of reducing the number of incarcerated Vermonters by 50% and combating racial disparities in our criminal legal system that are among the worst in the country.



In five years, our Smart Justice campaign has contributed to a 40% reduction in Vermont's prison population and helped win groundbreaking victories for racial justice, decarceration, and police accountability.

And we're just getting started.



**PEOPLE.
NOT
PRISONS.**



OUR IMPACT

Smart Justice Vermont was launched as part of a nationwide movement to reform a criminal legal system that has been defined by mass incarceration and systemic racism.

Ahead of the 2018 midterm elections, we highlighted the outsized power and influence of Vermont's elected prosecutors. Known as state's attorneys, these elected officials make daily, life-altering decisions that have profound impacts in our communities, and they are ultimately accountable to you, the voters.

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We published the "Blueprint for Smart Justice" in 2019 with detailed analysis of Vermont's criminal legal system and a comprehensive list of policy recommendations including critical reforms to our bail system, sentencing laws, and probation and parole policies. Several of these have since been signed into law.



Spotlight on Justice Reinvestment

In 2019, the state legislature committed to building a “smarter criminal justice system” through Justice Reinvestment (JRI), a collaborative reform process in which the ACLU of Vermont and our partners were closely involved.

That process revealed that Vermont had the most punitive community supervision system in the country. The resulting policy reforms have led to hundreds fewer people being sent back to prison for technical violations like missing curfew or not having “adequate housing.”

JRI data also confirmed that Black people in Vermont are far more likely to be arrested, prosecuted, and incarcerated for drug offenses, despite having similar rates of drug use and sales as their non-Black counterparts.

In 2022, after four years of relentless advocacy, we helped to pass legislation establishing Vermont’s first-ever Bureau of Racial Justice Statistics, to identify and address these persistent injustices.

We won a unanimous Vermont Supreme Court ruling in *Zullo v. State*, a case arising from a racially motivated traffic stop by Vermont State Police. This case established the right to sue the State for constitutional rights violations, a landmark victory for racial justice and police accountability.

After Smart Justice reforms,

80%

fewer people were returned to prison from community supervision in 2021 than in previous years



After the 2020 police murder of George Floyd sparked nationwide protests, we helped pass some of the strongest police reforms in the country, including limits on police use of force and a ban of discriminatory face recognition technology.

In 2021, the Vermont Supreme Court again sided with the ACLU and our efforts to hold police and prosecutors accountable, ensuring that Vermont state’s attorneys cannot use the U.S. Border Patrol to sidestep the constitution.

With defenders of the status quo mobilizing to undermine criminal justice reform, we recentered the debate in 2022 with our voter education initiative, “Your Vote, Your Prosecutor” and created the state’s only database for tracking problem officers to improve police oversight.



RELENTLESS ADVOCATES FOR CHANGE

The people of Vermont want smarter justice policies, as they have made clear through extensive polling and thousands of letters, emails, and phone calls to state lawmakers.



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www.acluvt.org

Five years after the launch of Smart Justice Vermont, we continue to advocate for a smarter, fairer justice system.

- Opposing the use of private, out-of-state prisons—and plans to expand our prison system in Vermont.
- Lobbying for people incarcerated by the state of Vermont to be referred to effective, community-based programs whenever possible.
- Ensuring compliance with our class action settlement on behalf of hundreds of incarcerated Vermonters denied lifesaving medical care.
- Advocating for Vermont to reimagine policing by reducing the footprint of law enforcement and hold police accountable.

Together, we've won transformative changes in the lives of real people, families, and communities.

Thank you for helping to make these reforms a reality!