

PEOPLE
IN PRISONS

OUR
ELDERS

DETAINED
IMMIGRANTS

CHILDREN

PEOPLE
IN JAIL

COMMUNITIES

#FREE THEM ALL



American Friends
Service Committee

YOUTH

FAMILIES



STUDENTS

LOVED
ONES



AFSC—along with Assata's Daughters, Liberation Library, and For the People Artists Collective—organized a #FreeThemAll block party in front of the Juvenile Temporary Detention Center to protest the judge's actions, show love and support to the young people in detention, and boost the call to #FreeOurYouth.

Photo: Sarah-Ji @loveandstrugglephotos

WHY #FREE THEM ALL

Everyone deserves dignity and justice. But in the United States, 2.3 million people are locked away in prisons, jails, and detention centers because of racist law enforcement, and a legal system whose only solution is violence and confinement. At the same time, we don't have the resources for health care, housing, education, and all the structures our communities need to thrive.

During a pandemic, the dangers of incarceration multiply exponentially. COVID-19 makes every cell and cage a potential death chamber.

People across the country are organizing under the call to **#FreeThemAll**. We are working to get as many people out of prisons, jails, and immigration and juvenile detention centers as possible—and abolish these carceral facilities once and for all.

The idea of abolishing prisons can seem scary—we live in a society where we are repeatedly being told that incarceration and law enforcement protect us. But if incarceration stopped violence, the U.S. would be the most peaceful country in the world. Instead of trying to “fix” the systems of incarceration we have, it is time for us to build something new.

WHY IS INCARCERATION BAD?

Incarceration doesn't keep us safe.

The U.S. has the highest incarceration rate in the world but has incredibly high rates of gun violence and sexual assault. This country warehouses 2.3 million people—disproportionately people of color and poor people—while doing little to stop harm or help survivors of violence and communities heal.

Incarceration perpetuates cycles of trauma.

If the factors that lead to incarceration are poverty, racism, trauma, and lack of access to essential services, locking someone up in a cage where they will be further traumatized and impoverished simply perpetuates the cycle.

Prisons, jails, and immigration detention centers are extremely expensive.

Taxpayers in the U.S. spend around \$80 billion annually on keeping people in cages. This diverts funds from essential services and community-led programs that address the root causes of violence.

People are jailed for coming to the United States, and people who have lived here for years are jailed simply because of their immigration status.

People in the U.S. or at the border seeking to adjust their immigration status need access to services and community-based case management—not incarceration in deadly detention centers.



Rally to shut down Otay Mesa Detention Center in San Diego.
Photo: San Diego/AFSC

Even children are jailed and detained.

Around 52,000 youth are jailed in the immigration and criminal legal systems in the U.S. This puts them at risk of exploitation, abuse, and death and causes long-lasting physical and psychological harm. Migrant children are detained for long periods of time or separated from their families, sometimes permanently.

Incarceration, immigration policies, and law enforcement are racist.

U.S. policing has its roots in slave patrols. The first immigration policies were created specifically to exclude Chinese immigrants. The expansion of racially targeted policies such as stop-and-frisk and the “war on drugs” have fueled mass incarceration in the U.S., with Black people incarcerated at more than five times the rate of white people. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement (ICE) and Customs and Border Protection (CBP) agents routinely target people of color for detention and deportation.

WHAT WILL WE DO INSTEAD?

There are many ways to help create healthy, thriving communities. Here are just a few ideas that people are already working to make a reality



AFSC New Mexico launched our Farm to Food Bank program in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. *Photo: Core-Visual*



At Liberation Summer Camp, youth learn strategies for creating social change through photography and filmmaking.

Transformative and restorative justice to deal with harm.

Instead of using violent systems to address violence, we ground our responses in the needs of those harmed and their communities, and look to root causes and personal accountability to prevent future harm.

Mediation and conflict resolution skills are taught at all levels.

Rather than having police in schools, young people learn the skills to resolve conflict themselves. Young people are supported, not criminalized.

People's basic needs are met.

Everyone has access to housing, health care, education, healthy food, employment, environmental protections—all the things communities need to thrive.

Free and accessible drug treatment and mental health services.

Community-based and trauma-informed addiction and mental health services help people address problems rather than exacerbating them.

Immigration processes are based on support, not punishment.

People are afforded access to the resources they need to adjust their immigration status, including legal representation.

Strong emergency response systems that don't involve the police.

In a crisis, skilled response teams can quickly be on the scene to help find solutions and keep everyone safe.

HOW DO WE GET THERE?

Policy changes that shrink the system.

Advocate for legislation that puts caps on sentencing length and expands avenues for release, end the use of bail and detainers, repeal harsh immigration laws, stop police-ICE collaboration, and get police out of schools.

Policy changes that shrink the budget.

Defunding ICE and CBP, police, jail, and prison systems can curtail the harm these agencies cause. That money can instead be invested in programs and services that benefit everyone.

Policy changes that nurture young people.

Ending policies and practices within school systems and the juvenile legal system that contribute to the disproportionate criminalization of Black, Latinx, and Indigenous youth.

Protect the life and health of those in cages right now.

While we work towards abolition, we can't forget that there are millions behind bars now. It is critical that we support them in improving their conditions and safeguarding their rights and health. Everyone—including people in immigration detention—should have access to due process and legal representation.

End deportations and welcome people home.

Ensure everyone who is incarcerated or in deportation proceedings can return to their families and communities. Advocate for and engage in community-based reentry services and just and humane immigration policies.

Remember that no one belongs in a cage.

EVERYONE deserves to have their rights and dignity respected, no matter where they came from or what they have been accused of. As we advocate for changes that chip away at incarceration, it is critically important that these reforms do not come at the expense of others who are left behind. Everyone should have the opportunity to rejoin their community.

While we won't be able to dismantle carceral systems overnight, there are concrete steps we can take to move us in the right direction.



Photo: Sarah-Ji @loveandstrugglephotos

Prisons and detention centers aren't just amplifiers of a public health crisis, they are a public health crisis.

It is time for us to envision something better.

It is time to **#FREE THEM ALL.**



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afsc.org/FreeThemAll

AFSC's work is based on the Quaker belief in the worth of every person and faith in the power of love to overcome violence and injustice.