



2025 VOCAL-NY Civil Rights Union Platform

What is VOCAL-NY: VOCAL-NY is building a movement of low-income people dedicated to ending the HIV/AIDS epidemic, the war on drugs, mass incarceration, and homelessness. We fight for systemic change rooted in justice, compassion, and love. We approach this work with a firm belief in reducing harm and ending stigma, and the knowledge that the issues impacting our communities are driven by institutional oppression, not personal failings. Our campaigns have saved or improved the lives of hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers across the state.

What is the Civil Rights Union: The VOCAL-NY CRU leads the organization's work to end mass incarceration. The CRU is made up of members and leaders who are formerly incarcerated or otherwise directly impacted by mass incarceration or policing and criminalization. Along with other Unions at VOCAL-NY we operate through a politics of love and compassion and are working to build safe, healthy communities through policies of justice & equity.

Why do we want to end mass incarceration: Because we want safe and healthy communities where everyone has the opportunity and resources to thrive. For too long politicians have leaned on criminalization and incarceration as interventions to social challenges and as a way to manage marginalized and vulnerable populations - especially people of color. This has been a costly, racist and ultimately ineffective strategy that must end.

How are we working to end mass incarceration: The VOCAL-NY CRU is building a base of directly impacted people and developing them to lead our fight to both change the narratives around mass incarceration and advance concrete policy wins at the local, state and federal levels to decrease the number of people currently incarcerated as well as the number of people who come in contact with the police. As part of our work to eliminate incarceration overall we are also working to decrease the amount of public resources spent on policing, prisons and jails and winning investments to support our communities, particularly people who are formerly incarcerated or otherwise criminalized as the long-term solution required for both safe and healthy communities and to end mass incarceration.

Specifically our campaigns fall into four categories:

- Get people out of jail & prison and other aspects of the system (parole, probation, supervision, criminal records).
- Remove police from responding to homelessness, drug use and mental health
- Win community investments particularly to support people coming home or people impacted by mass incarceration & criminalization
- Holding police accountable



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- **Challenging Wrongful Convictions Act**
 - Creates a legitimate pathway to exoneration for people who were wrongfully convicted. The bill will provide for the assignment of counsel, the right to an appeal, the right to a hearing and the right to review evidence. It will also allow more people who plead guilty to seek relief on actual innocence grounds and remove additional procedural barriers to relief.
- **Elder Parole [S454 Hoylman-Sigal/A514 Davila](#) & Fair and Timely Parole [S159 Salazar/A127 Weprin](#)**
 - Fair and Timely Parole ensures that the parole release process is based on who people are today and their many accomplishments in prison, not their crime of conviction. Elder Parole allows for the consideration of parole release for people aged 55 and older who have served at least 15 consecutive years in prison.
- **Daniel's Law**
 - Daniel's Law would remove police officers as first responders to people experiencing a mental health or substance use crisis, and allow social workers, mental health counselors, peers and other health workers to become first responders to people experiencing behavioral health crises.
- **Restoring the Right to VOTE for Incarcerated People**
 - New York's voter ban has racist origins and has a racist impact today. Once you have registered to vote, you should never lose this right. Two states, Maine and Vermont, already provide for this. So too should New York.
- **Gate Money**
 - The Gate Money Bill would provide meaningful financial support to people leaving prison through the creation of a Gate Money Fund. This bill would address current reentry challenges in two ways: 1) It will require that New York make a targeted investment in returning people at the most critical time of reentry. 2) It will require New York to codify gate money, and to produce annual reports - increasing transparency for policymakers and the public.
- **Medicaid Enrollment Before Re-Entry**
 - Executive Action: Governor Hochul must direct the Department of Health to submit a revised waiver to Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) to reactivate their original application which will ensure Medicaid coverage is turned on 90 days pre-release. [Eleven states, red and blue](#), have been authorized to expand this lifesaving healthcare coverage.
- **End Qualified Immunity**
 - Enables New Yorkers whose state or federal constitutional rights have been violated to sue officials in NY State court where the defense of qualified immunity would be prohibited. The bill also incentivizes attorneys to take on cases so victims get their day in court and stand a chance to get justice.