

NEW REPORT:
**U.S. WASTED \$3.4 TRILLION ON MASS INCARCERATION AND
 CRIMINALIZATION INSTEAD OF PRIORITIZING EDUCATION, JOBS,
 HEALTHCARE, HOUSING, AND ENVIRONMENT**

Communities United, Make the Road New York, and Padres & Jóvenes Unidos have just released a new report, *The \$3.4 Trillion Mistake: The Cost of Mass Incarceration and Criminalization, and How Justice Reinvestment Can Build a Better Future for All*, detailing how the U.S.'s misguided criminal justice policies wasted \$3.4 trillion over the last three decades that could have instead been used to more effectively address the root causes of crime and meet critical community needs. The report provides a national and state-by-state analysis of the country's investments in police, prisons, jails, prosecutors, and immigration enforcement. It shows 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% 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.



While the creation of an oversized justice system did not substantially improve public safety, it did result in there being nearly eight million adults and youth within the justice system in the U.S. In other words, 1 in 40 U.S. residents is either in prison, in jail, on probation or parole, or otherwise under control of the justice system.

Additional key findings include:

- 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 (see map below).
- 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% 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).

The report also details how these resources could have instead been used to invest in living-wage jobs, education, housing, healthcare, community wraparound supports, and clean, renewable energy sources. Indeed, the U.S. could have *ended inter-generational poverty* and created much healthier and safer

communities all across the country with that \$3.4 trillion. Here are some other examples of what could have been achieved with just one year's worth of "surplus justice spending" – \$206 billion:

- Create over one million new living-wage jobs: \$114 billion
- Increase spending by 25% at every K-12 public school in the country: \$159 billion
- Provide every household living in poverty with an additional \$10,000 per year in income or tax credits: \$87 billion
- Fund one million new social workers, psychologists, conflict mediators, mental health counselors, and drug treatment counselors to address public health and safety issues: \$67 billion
- Create 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: \$20 billion
- Eliminate tuition at every public college and university in the country: \$82 billion
- Provide healthcare to five million uninsured persons: \$30 billion

The report recommends robust and comprehensive justice reinvestment initiatives 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, particularly within the neighborhoods most affected by mass incarceration and criminalization.

Surplus Justice Expenditures, 1983-2012 (in Billions of 2016 Dollars)

Sources: Bureau of Justice Statistics, Department of Homeland Security, Department of Justice

