Second Chance
Agenda for New York
The Second Chance Agenda for New York reimagines the path home for incarcerated New Yorkers by prioritizing fairness, public safety, and cost-saving, data-driven solutions to improve the lives of returning citizens and keep our communities safe.

This transformative agenda, developed by New Yorkers United for Justice (NYUJ), a bipartisan coalition of national and local advocacy and criminal legal reform organizations, is a package of legislative proposals that will reduce recidivism and incarceration rates, enhance public safety, and cut wasteful public spending.

For more information about NYUJ’s Second Chance Agenda for New York, visit www.nyuj.org/secondchances
Today, there are hundreds of people serving pointlessly long sentences in New York’s prisons. And when people do leave prison, there’s a high likelihood that they’ll return because our state has failed to provide the infrastructure needed to make successful reentry possible.

All of that means higher crime and incarceration rates, broken families and communities, and untold millions of wasted tax dollars.

The Second Chance Agenda for New York changes all of that by providing a safe and permanent way home for incarcerated New Yorkers through four key initiatives: easing lifelong barriers to successful reentry; addressing unjust and inhumane prison sentences; ensuring people have the tools they need to live productive lives; and providing new data-driven insights into what really works when it comes to making our communities safer and our criminal legal system fairer.
Decades of research demonstrates that community-based services and programs that holistically address people’s reentry needs can dramatically reduce the likelihood of recidivism and, in turn, increase their chances of successful, permanent reintegration with family and society.

Yet despite this evidence, New York State provides few resources to returning citizens, leaving the burden of reentry to families, underfunded nonprofits, and the individuals returning home, themselves. NYU’s bold new vision proposes building a coordinated statewide ecosystem of proven reentry programs, including workforce development programs and behavioral health treatment services, that will reduce recidivism, empower individuals and their communities, and lower wasteful taxpayer spending on incarceration.

This vision of statewide reentry will integrate services into the state’s parole framework and scale up in-community services to create a continuum of care, pre- and post-release, that facilitates successful and sustainable reentry for New Yorkers using data-validated crime prevention and recidivism reduction strategies.
Clean Slate to Empower Second Chance Opportunities

We can reduce the lifelong, disabling burden of criminal records.

A criminal record can often lead to lifelong barriers to basic necessities like employment, housing, and other needs critical to successful reentry. And in New York, as many as one in three people have had contact with the criminal legal system.

The collateral consequences of a criminal conviction, especially criminal records, have become instruments of unfair punishment, one that lasts long after people have fully paid their debts to society and served their prison sentences, with no benefit to public safety or an individual’s rehabilitation.

That’s why the NYUJ Coalition supports advancing Clean Slate legislation (S1553A/A6399) that will seal certain criminal convictions after a reasonable period of time has elapsed after their supervision period has ended and provide more New Yorkers a fair chance at a stable, healthy, and law-abiding life.
Second Look
Sentencing to Safely Reduce Prison Population

We can end the cruelty of harsh and unjust prison sentences.

Despite recent conclusive data showing that long prison sentences do not prevent future crimes, a significant portion of New York’s incarcerated population is still serving harsh and excessively lengthy prison sentences that have no benefit to public safety or the individual’s rehabilitation.

“Second Look” sentencing legislation, such as model legislation developed by the National Association of Criminal Defense Lawyers (NACDL), will allow courts to review individuals’ sentences on a case-by-case basis after they’ve served a certain amount of time in prison, and assess their rehabilitation and whether their original sentences are still serving justice.

“Second Look” legislation will provide judges an important tool to safely reduce New York’s prison population and provide more New Yorkers a second chance outside of prison walls and home with their families. In addition, safely reducing the number of people in prisons will help address the psychological, economic, and generational trauma that lengthy periods of incarceration continue to have on families, especially in disproportionately impacted Black and Brown communities.
Modernize New York’s Criminal Justice Data System

We can leverage accurate, comprehensive, and accessible data to create safer communities and a fair legal system.

An effective system of criminal legal policy and practice must be driven by accurate and accessible data. This evidence-based approach allows jurisdictions to determine whether programs or policies are producing meaningful results, such as reducing recidivism. Unfortunately, New York’s criminal legal system currently faces significant gaps in its data practices that make it practically impossible to properly plan and evaluate public safety strategies.

Developed in partnership with Measures for Justice, the NYUJ Coalition proposes new legislation that closes the gaps in New York’s system to collect, measure, and access critical cross-system criminal law data, in addition to making the data accessible to the public. This legislation also requires the state to collect and provide important data necessary to ensure fairness in the criminal legal system, such as information regarding plea bargain negotiations.