

Myths and Facts: Parole Reform in New York

New York's parole system has been a major driver of overincarceration and wasteful correctional spending, setting people up to fail by imposing a harsh set of requirements and then routinely putting people back in jail or prison for even minor noncriminal rules violations. Recent [reforms](#) that have been adopted by the legislature promise to help address many of these issues.

However, opponents of commonsense parole reform often argue that addressing these systemic issues will diminish public safety or that individuals on parole are more likely to commit crimes, and therefore parole should be harder to get and have harsher consequences for individuals who violate their conditions of parole. Research shows the opposite is true; evidence-based policies that reduce re-incarceration for people on parole do not diminish public safety. In fact, in many cases around the country, parole reforms have improved public safety and reduced crime.

The truth about parole reform is that it supports public safety, makes the criminal legal system safer and fairer, and dramatically reduces costs to taxpayers. Below we explore and dispel some common myths about parole reform.

MYTH

Reducing the length of parole supervision will lead to more crime.

FACT

Decades of data show that [keeping people](#) on parole longer than necessary does not make communities any safer and that shorter parole sentences can actually reduce crime.

In states that reduced lengthy supervision sentences for people on parole, the data [overwhelmingly show](#) that people released on parole were not more likely to commit new crimes. In fact, once these reforms were implemented, many jurisdictions experienced lower recidivism, reconviction, and crime rates.



For example, in Missouri, 36,000 individuals had their terms of supervision cut by an average of 14 months. This produced no decline in public safety and no statistically significant increase in two-year reconviction

rates. In Utah, similar changes led to a decrease in violent crime and property crime rates. After South Carolina implemented sweeping parole reform legislation, recidivism rates went down.

MYTH

People on parole supervision are more likely to commit new crimes and therefore should be put back in prison.

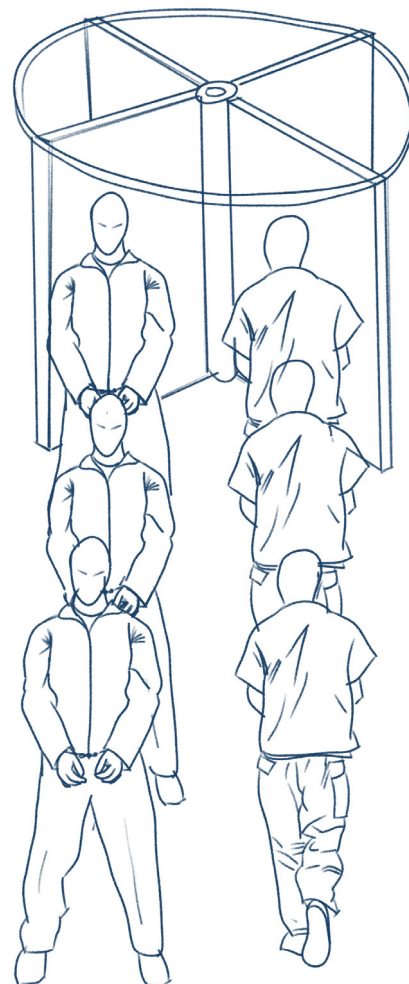
FACT

The overwhelming majority of people on parole return to prison or jail not for committing new crimes, but due to noncriminal, nonviolent, so-called “technical” violations (e.g., staying out past curfew, failing a urine test, missing an appointment with a parole officer). Yet New York has typically treated these individuals in the same manner as those who have committed new crimes by incarcerating them for these violations.

In New York State, a [2016 report](#) by the Department of Corrections and Community Supervision found that only 2.6% of New Yorkers on parole were reincarcerated based on a new criminal conviction.

Nationally, an incarceration-first approach to noncriminal, technical supervision violations play a role in driving up prison populations. [One out of four](#) state prison admissions nationwide is the result of a technical violation of parole or probation (parole technical violations make up 14%), rather than a conviction for a new crime.

Evidence also shows that reincarceration for technical violations destabilize a person on the pathway to success, and further, that imposing lengthy prison sentences simply does not improve public safety or the rehabilitation of an individual. In fact, longer prison sentences are not likely to [reduce recidivism](#) compared to shorter sentences for the same types of crimes.



MYTH

Lengthy parole supervision terms and harsh penalties for technical violations are designed to help individuals stay out of trouble.

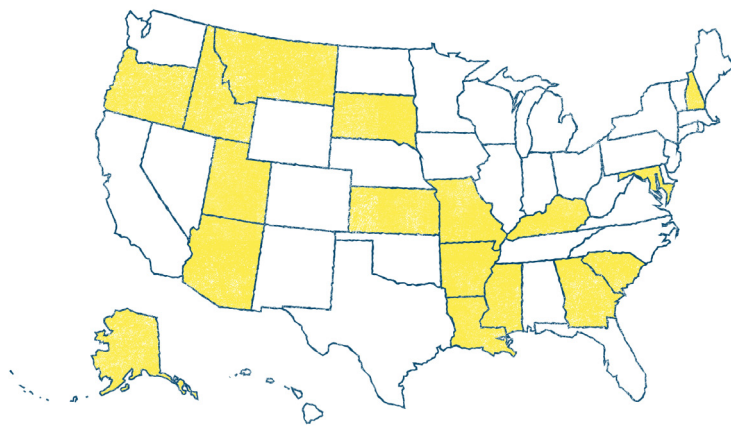
FACT

Studies show that [lengthy incarceration periods](#) and parole supervision requirements make it more

challenging for individuals to reenter their communities by [frustrating their ability](#) to find and maintain employment and housing, reintegrate with family and social supports, care for their children, and meet other needs critical to successful reentry.

A [report](#) funded by the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance recommended that, to reduce recidivism, policies should move “individuals who are reliably assessed as presenting a low risk to public safety out of [correctional] institutions and into the community where they can receive interventions in a setting where those interventions are less costly and more effective.”

In short, needlessly and indiscriminately putting people behind bars for petty, noncriminal violations is a waste of time and money. Instead of an approach to parole supervision that prioritizes incarceration, individuals on parole should be provided with needs-based tools and resources that increase, not reduce, their likelihood of successful reentry (e.g., substance use and mental health treatment programs, employment programs, housing assistance).



MYTH

Parole reform is “liberal” and only implemented in blue states.

FACT

Nationally, parole reform is a non-partisan issue that has garnered wide support across the political spectrum. In recent years, a growing number of states across the country—including far more red states than blue states—have adopted parole reforms that have reduced public spending and decreased prison populations, in addition to producing declines in various crime rates.

Many of these reforms are similar to policies that will be implemented under the “Less is More” Act, a key parole reform legislation that was passed in June 2021. For example, [18 states](#) have already established a system of earned time credits that reduce an individual’s period of supervision—a key provision of the “Less is More” Act.

These states are Alaska, Arkansas, Arizona, Delaware, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, New Hampshire, Oregon, South Carolina, South Dakota, and Utah.

MYTH

New York isn't like other states, so enacting parole reforms that may have been successful elsewhere will still lead to higher crime rates here.

FACT

New York lags behind many other states when it comes to fixing its parole system. In fact, the Empire State ranks [second in the nation](#) when it comes to incarcerating people for technical violations. Furthermore, New York has successfully implemented other types of evidence-based reform that have resulted in measurable improvements in public safety.

For example, in 1996, New York City implemented major reforms to its probation system, chief among them a reduction in lengths of supervision for individuals on probation. These system-wide reforms resulted in a [69% reduction](#) in the population under probation and a [statistical decline](#) in crime, incarceration, and rearrests for individuals on probation.

