



Families for Justice Reform



FAMM: Who we are

FAMM launched **its statewide effort** to reform Florida's sentencing and prison policies in 2011. Since then, FAMM has led successful efforts to reduce drug trafficking penalties, eliminate excessive mandatory minimum sentences for aggravated assault, and amend the Florida Constitution to allow the legislature to make sentencing reforms retroactive.

WHY IS FAMM IN FLORIDA?

Florida has one of the **largest prison populations in the United States** and some of the **strictest sentencing laws**. FAMM's work aims to fix both.

For nearly three decades, **FAMM** has united the voices of affected families, the formerly incarcerated, and a range of stakeholders and advocates to fight for a fairer and more effective justice system. FAMM's focus on ending a one-size-fits-all punishment structure has led to reforms to sentencing and prison policies at the federal level and in multiple states, and helps establish rehabilitative programs for the 94 percent of all prisoners who will be released one day.

FLORIDA BY THE NUMBERS

While similarly situated states have seen their prison populations and corrections budgets fall meaningfully in recent years, Florida's prison population remains stubbornly high, with around 96,000 prisoners serving time in Florida prisons. Florida's incarceration rate has fallen modestly in recent years, but Florida's Criminal Justice Estimating Conference estimates that Florida's prison population will **increase over the next five years**.

UNNECESSARY AND COUNTERPRODUCTIVE SENTENCING LAWS

Florida has more than 100 mandatory minimum sentencing laws, covering everything from first-degree murder to obscure offenses such as "misrepresenting the financial condition of an entity that manages a phosphogypsum stack" (five years in prison!). The overwhelming balance of the evidence suggests that each one of these laws is counterproductive to public

safety, wastes tax dollars, contributes to unnecessarily high prison populations, and creates gross injustices in individual cases. FAMM's top legislative priority is restoring fairness, discretion, and individual assessment in criminal sentencing.

PRISON REFORM: IMPROVING LIVING CONDITIONS AND PROMOTING TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

The Florida Department of Corrections remains significantly underfunded relative to the number of prisoners in its care. This discrepancy has led to dangerous staff shortages and high staff turnover rates, along with steep cuts in drug treatment and other rehabilitative programming. Moreover, it's estimated that more than 80,000 of Florida's prisoners are housed in facilities without air conditioning, leaving prisoners exposed to dangerously high temperatures in the summer months. Additionally, ensuring access to quality health care in prisons is a top concern for prisoners' families around the state and for FAMM.

FAMM works with thousands of families around the state to promote a prison system that provides for the basic needs of the people in its care in a healthy environment; protects them from abuse and exploitation; ensures due process in decisions that affect prisoners' lives; creates incentives for work, good behavior, and rehabilitation; and protects important ties to family and friends through liberal visitation.

A VOICE FOR FLORIDA'S FAMILIES

In 2018, FAMM partnered with Florida Cares, a Florida-based grassroots group that organizes and mobilizes directly impacted families to improve living conditions in Florida prisons and advocate changes to Florida's sentencing laws. FAMM works with Florida Cares to identify, organize, and mobilize affected families and individuals, using proven best practices in grassroots organizing, targeted volunteer recruitment and mobilization, and state-of-the-art engagement tools.

LEGISLATIVE EFFORTS

During the 2019 legislative session, FAMM supported meaningful changes to Florida's sentencing laws through bills like the Florida First Step Act. Going forward, FAMM intends to continue leading the effort for fairer sentencing in Florida, including encouraging the legislature to pass retroactive reforms to provide relief for people currently serving irrational sentences.

STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE

FAMM's storytelling team continually shares the stories of currently and formerly incarcerated Floridians and their families, as well as those on probation or in reentry. These stories illustrate the need for reform in ways that statistics never can. Many of the subjects of our stories go on to become powerful advocates for reform in the state.

Michael Giles is a veteran serving a mandatory 25-year sentence under Florida's 10-20-Life law after he fired two shots in self-defense that did not seriously injure his attacker.

William Forrester became addicted to pain medication after surgery. In the fierce grip of his disease, he obtained oxycodone with a fake prescription. He badly needed help with his addiction; instead, he is now in state prison.

Erik Weyant, threatened in a parking lot by a group of men and fearing a beating or even worse, pulled out his legal handgun and fired shots into the air. He was sentenced to 20 years in prison for aggravated assault with a firearm. If convicted of the same offense today, Erik would face a maximum of five years in prison.

Cynthia Powell was not an addict. She was not a dealer. She sold 35 of her diabetes pain pills to a confidential informant – for \$300. Just enough to make ends meet that month. Next thing she knew, she was arrested, charged, and convicted. Her sentence? Twenty-five years.