



Families for Justice Reform

FAMM: Who we are

Since 2017, FAMM has worked to change North Carolina's sentencing and prison policies through engagement, education, and advocacy.



FAMM supports reforms to mandatory minimum sentences and habitual offender sentencing laws; increased use of early release for elderly and ill prisoners; more use of executive clemency; prison policies and programs that lead to rehabilitation and keep families connected; and reforms that make prisons safe, humane places to live and work.

WHY IS FAMM IN NORTH CAROLINA?

In December 2018, after more than a year of study, the North Carolina legislature's **Task Force on Sentencing Reforms for Opioid Drug Convictions** recommended that the legislature enact opioid sentencing reforms. **Read the Task Force's recommendations here.** FAMM supports reforms to North Carolina's lengthy mandatory minimum sentences for drug offenses, as well as reforms to prison conditions and policies.

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 has helped establish rehabilitative programs for the 94 percent of all prisoners who will be released one day.

MANDATORY MINIMUMS IN NORTH CAROLINA

North Carolina's **mandatory minimum drug sentences** are some of the longest in the country and force courts to put low-level or addicted drug offenders in prison for decades, driving up prison populations and costs without increasing public safety or reducing drug abuse and addiction.

NORTH CAROLINA BY THE NUMBERS

North Carolina's prison population has more than doubled since 1980. As of October 2019, the state's prison population was over 35,000. Corrections spending has jumped 254 percent since 1986. In FY 2016-2017 alone, the state spent \$1.55 billion on corrections. North Carolina's Department of Public Safety has projected that the state will exceed its current prison capacity by 2025. In FY 2016-2017, 24 percent of all people admitted to prisons were drug offenders.



ADVOCATING BETTER SENTENCING LAWS

FAMM is supporting sentencing reforms that give judges flexibility to depart from the mandatory minimum sentence when that mandatory term is not necessary to protect the public. By permitting – not requiring – courts to depart from the mandatory minimum, North Carolina can avoid unjust sentences, restore fiscal responsibility, and reserve prison resources for higher-risk and more dangerous offenders. FAMM is also supportive of reforming habitual

offender enhancements that require lengthy prison sentences for people with prior convictions for old, minor, or nonviolent offenses, and allowing courts to reconsider lengthy sentences in a “second look” process after the person has served a portion of the sentence. [Learn more about the need for better sentencing laws here.](#)

ADVOCATING BETTER PRISONS

North Carolina prisons are in need of greater oversight and accountability. In 2019, the state had to temporarily close three facilities because of **extreme staffing shortages**, and one in five prison staff positions are unfilled. Lack of sufficient staff makes it more difficult to provide rehabilitative programming and makes prisons more dangerous. Ten prison facilities in North Carolina **do not have air conditioning**, subjecting **staff and prisoners alike** to extreme heat that can cause illness, injury, or even death.

FAMM supports greater oversight of North Carolina prisons through regular and independent performance and financial

audits of the Department of Public Safety, greater legislative oversight, and the creation of citizen oversight boards, an independent ombudsman’s office, or a similar independent office with oversight powers. FAMM also advocates the funding and creation of more education, job training, and substance and mental health treatment programs in prisons. FAMM also supports making North Carolina prison facilities safer, cooler, and more humane for both staff and incarcerated people.

STORYTELLING FOR CHANGE

FAMM’s storytelling team continually shares the stories of currently and formerly incarcerated North Carolinians 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.

Kenneth “Graham” Stanley was a first-time offender who spiraled into selling drugs – “the worst decision I’ve ever made” – after his addiction took fierce hold and wouldn’t let go. The judge at his trial said the long mandatory sentence was “quite harsh,” but he had no choice but to impose it. Now Graham is behind bars for almost 15 years.