As Women's Share of Arrests Doubles, National Commission Calls for Tailored Justice Responses

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Led by former AG Loretta Lynch, and advised by Oklahoma First Lady Sarah Stitt, CCJ panel releases strategic plan to prevent crime, strengthen families, and cut costs

WASHINGTON – Current criminal justice policies and practices undermine public safety and destabilize families by too often failing to address the unique pathways that lead women into the justice system in the first place, including trauma, economic hardship, and unmet behavioral health needs, the Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) Women's Justice Commission said today.

In its first policy report, *Stronger Families, Safer Communities: Improving Outcomes for Women at the Front End of the Justice System*, the Commission called for four priority measures to stem the flow of women into the criminal justice system and improve success rates for women and their families:

- Prioritize alternatives to arrest, and connections to services, for women who do not pose a serious threat to public safety.
- Base pretrial detention decisions on public safety and flight risk.
- Expand responses to and consideration of women's distinct circumstances at charging and sentencing.
- Prohibit all sexual contact between police officers and people in their control or custody.

"Understanding women's histories and pathways into the justice system has important implications for assessing risk, deploying system resources, and tailoring effective diversion programs and correctional interventions," the Commission said. "By better tailoring system responses for justice-involved women, states, local jurisdictions, and community organizations can prevent crime, strengthen families, improve health, cut taxpayer costs, and break cycles of victimization and incarceration."

The Commission is chaired by former U.S. Attorney General Loretta Lynch and includes Oklahoma First Lady Sarah Stitt as senior adviser and more than a dozen other top criminal justice, legislative, and community leaders.

The report comes as new FBI data show that in 2024 women accounted for 27% of adult arrests, twice the share (14%) than in 1980. While women generally engage in crime and violence at lower rates than men, women's share of violent offense arrests has steadily increased, rising from 11% in 1986 to 21% in 2024. In addition, between 2020 and 2023, women's jail incarceration rates rose twice as much as men's (33% vs 17%), and women's imprisonment rate grew 9%, while the rate for men dropped slightly (less than 1%).

"Women are no less responsible for their actions than men, and like men, they should be held accountable when they break the law," said Lynch. "As we learn more about what drives women to criminal behavior, we become better equipped to respond effectively and create pathways to more stable families and productive lives. Ultimately that is how we can better prevent future criminal behavior and interrupt cycles of crime and incarceration."

"Law enforcement leaders, faith-based organizations, advocates, and others across the nation and across the political aisle can find common ground in pursuing solutions that hold people accountable for crimes they commit while addressing the factors that drive their behavior," said Stitt. "This isn't just about compassion. It's about breaking generational cycles of crime and punishment, restoring families, and building safer, healthier communities."

"Safer communities, stronger families, more efficient policies and practices that are grounded in evidence and human dignity—these are the shared values that helped establish common ground for this diverse Commission as they worked together to create this roadmap," said Women's Justice Commission Director Stephanie Akhter. "We hope the report provides clear, actionable steps for policymakers and community leaders to make immediate impact while underscoring the need for expanded data collection and research that can help inform long-term solutions."

In addition to these proposals, the Women's Justice Commission also today released a new report examining community-based responses to women in crisis. The report finds that most crisis response systems are not designed to meet the individual needs of women. To improve crisis intervention efforts for women, the authors recommend that policymakers, funders, and researchers prioritize strengthening data infrastructure, focusing research on women's outcomes and public safety, and conducting longitudinal and cross-system studies.

The Commission will host a virtual webinar on October 16 to discuss the findings and recommendations in depth. Register for the webinar here.

A second set of Commission recommendations, to be released next year, will focus on the "back end" of the justice system, including how to promote success post-conviction and upon reentry.

About the Commission

CCJ launched the Women's Justice Commission in July 2024 to document and raise awareness of the unique challenges facing women in the justice system and build consensus for evidence-based reforms that enhance safety, health, and justice. Support for the Commission comes from Ford Foundation, the George Kaiser Family Foundation, the Joan Ganz Cooney & Holly Peterson Fund, The J.B. and M.K. Pritzker Family Foundation, the Ms. Foundation for Women, the Navigation Fund, the National Football League, The New York Women's Foundation, Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Philanthropies, and the Tow Foundation. The Commission also receives support from the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Just Trust, Southern Company Foundation, and other CCJ general operating contributors.

Commission Members

- Loretta Lynch (Chair) – Former U.S. Attorney General; Partner, Paul, Weiss LLP
- Sarah Stitt (Senior Adviser) – First Lady, Oklahoma
- Courtney Bryan – Executive Director, Center for Justice Innovation
- Norma Cumpian – Assistant Deputy Director, Anti-Recidivism Coalition
- Nancy Gertner – Retired Judge, U.S. District Court for the District of Massachusetts; Senior Lecturer, Harvard Law School
- Ed Gonzalez – Sheriff, Harris County (Houston), Texas
- Leticia Longoria-Navarro – Executive Director, The Pathfinder Network
- Chris Mathias – Representative, Idaho State Legislature
- Anne Precythe – Owner, Precythe Sturm Advisory Group, LLC; Former Director, Missouri Department of Corrections
- Emily Salisbury – Associate Professor of Social Work and Director, Utah Criminal Justice

Center, University of Utah

- Topeka K. Sam – Founder, The Ladies of Hope Ministries
- Brenda V. Smith – Professor, American University Washington College of Law; Director, Project on Addressing Prison Rape
- Jillian Snider – Resident Senior Fellow, R Street Institute and Retired NYPD Officer
- Carolyn Sufrin – Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine, Department of Gynecology and Obstetrics; Founder and Director, Advocacy and Research on Reproductive Wellness of Incarcerated People
- Tori Verber Salazar – Founder/CEO, Law Offices of Tori Verber Salazar; Former District Attorney, San Joaquin County
- Whitney Westerfield – Director of Legal and Government Affairs, LifeSkills; Former Chair, Kentucky State Senate Judiciary Committee
- Pamela Winn – President and CEO, RestoreHER US.America

About the Council on Criminal Justice

The Council on Criminal Justice (CCJ) is a nonpartisan think tank and invitational membership organization that advances understanding of the criminal justice policy choices facing the nation and builds consensus for solutions that enhance safety and justice for all.