



# Public Safety Priorities in New Jersey

## PRETRIAL REFORM AND JUDICIAL DISCRETION

New Jersey's bail reform, implemented in 2017, has served as a national model, reducing the pretrial jail population by over 40% while maintaining public safety. Despite this success, efforts to roll back these reforms persist, which could undermine progress. AV supports legislative initiatives to preserve and enhance these reforms and has engaged defensively against meritless policies that seek to unravel New Jersey's pretrial reform.

## SENTENCING REFORM

AV supports policies like those found in A4464/S3722, which eliminate mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses. This legislation reflects a core recommendation from the New Jersey Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission since 2019. Data from the Commission highlights that mandatory minimums contribute to excessive incarceration rates without improving community safety. Assemblywoman Shavonda Sumter and Senator Raj Mukherji champion this critical reform, which would grant judges the discretion to impose sentences tailored to the individual circumstances of each case, reducing disparities in sentencing and refining the calculation of sentences in line with evidence-based practices.

Similarly, advocates funded by AV support A4740, which introduces a mitigating factor for defendants who are survivors of abuse. Sponsored by Assemblywoman Jessica Ramirez, this legislation stems from the Sentencing Commission's 2023 recommendation and acknowledges the impact of trauma on behavior.

## REHABILITATIVE RELEASE FOR OLDER INCARCERATED INDIVIDUALS

The proposed Second Look bill (S2338), sponsored by Senators Raj Mukherji and Angela McKnight, establishes a rehabilitative release program for individuals aged 60 and older who have served significant portions of their sentences. This policy is rooted in the Sentencing Commission's 2023 recommendations, which emphasize the fiscal and moral imperatives of addressing the state's aging prison population. Research shows that older incarcerated individuals have the lowest recidivism rates, posing minimal risk to public safety while also being major contributors to prison costs, especially medical-related expenses and other care services. AV supports this policy as it would enable the state to redirect resources from costly incarceration toward community reintegration and supportive services, promoting justice and fiscal responsibility.

## REDUCING THE BURDEN OF FINES AND FEES

AV also hopes to support legislative efforts to address the inequities stemming from excessive fines, fees, and other legal financial obligations. These penalties disproportionately impact low-income individuals and perpetuate cycles of poverty and incarceration. Drawing from the New Jersey Criminal Sentencing and Disposition Commission's 2023 recommendations, AV and FFJC support granting trial courts discretion to adjust or waive these financial burdens based on an individual's ability to pay. This reform promotes rehabilitation over punishment and ensures that financial penalties do not undermine reentry efforts or perpetuate systemic inequalities.

## ENHANCING YOUTH JUSTICE

Arnold Ventures is working with partners in New Jersey to support the expansion of summer youth employment programs. These programs have been shown to reduce juvenile justice system involvement and improve behavioral and educational outcomes for participants. These initiatives not only provide economic opportunities but also foster personal growth, mentorship, and a sense of community, all of which are critical for preventing justice system contact in young people.



## **COMMUNITY-LED CRISIS RESPONSE AND POLICING STANDARDS**

The Seabrooks-Washington Community-Led Crisis Response Act, enacted in 2024, represents a transformative step in addressing mental health crises without police intervention. AV partner SandSJ is supporting ongoing efforts to implement this law, which provides an evidence-based alternative to traditional law enforcement for nonviolent emergencies. Additionally, SandSJ is advocating for codifying the Attorney General’s Use of Force Directive through S2348/A4175. These measures, championed by Senator Troy Singleton and Assemblywoman Ellen Park, would establish stronger accountability and reduce the misuse of force, ensuring that New Jersey’s policing practices prioritize de-escalation and other policies that reduce the likelihood of harm to law enforcement and the public.

## **EXECUTIVE CLEMENCY**

Governor Murphy launched an ambitious clemency initiative, taking aim at extreme sentences. Using pardons can also alleviate the long-term burdens of a criminal record, including barriers to employment and housing. AV supports more targeted use of incarceration and therefore supports mechanisms, including executive clemency, to review lengthy sentences.