

RESOURCE GUIDE

# Forget Reform, They Want Abolition



MacArthur  
Foundation

70 Million is made possible by a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.



million

ONE JAIL AT A TIME.

*story*



# Reform & Abolition:

## CLOSING JAILS AND PRISONS

The abolitionist movement to close jails and prisons doesn't just end when elected officials decide to enact reform. Activists and carceral system reform advocates in St. Louis and New York City say that even when one jail or prison closes, there's often another issue that arises or a contingency plan that can get in the way of reform efforts. With activists now in the seat of power in St. Louis and across the country, prison abolitionists are focusing their efforts in ensuring the system that leads people to being incarcerated changes. Many activists say that this is a harder battle to fight, pointing out that even when reforms are made to the criminal legal system, it adjusts itself to continue the incarceration model. *Critical Resistance* notes, "As we work to dismantle incarceration in all its forms, we must resist common reforms that create or expand cages anywhere, including under the guise of 'addressing needs' or as 'updated' replacements. Jails and prisons deprive communities of resources like medical and mental health care, transportation, food, and housing. In our fights, it is critical to uplift and strategically contribute to movements led by imprisoned people, both to address pressing conditions and for abolition. In all decarceration strategies, we must utilize tactics that will improve life for those most affected and make space to build the worlds we need." We can see reforms which aid in abolitionist goals of shrinking the prison industrial complex in, for example, #CLOSERikers' call to #buildCOMMUNITIES which would both close Rikers then divert resources systematically to spaces such as public health, housing, employment & economic development, education, community programs & services, and conflict transformation.

**"REFORM IS ALSO A STRATEGY TO GET TO ABOLITION. AND SO YES, WE NEED TO FIGHT FOR ELECTORAL POLITICS AROUND PROSECUTORS, BECAUSE WE ALSO HAVE TO BE RESPONSIBLE AND MITIGATE HARM RIGHT NOW FOR ONE SOUL THAT CAN BE DIVERTED FROM THE LEGAL SYSTEM."**

- MIKE MILTON, Founder of the Freedom Community Center

**PHOTO: MIKE MILTON AT THE FREEDOM COMMUNITY CENTER IN ST. LOUIS, MO. BY JOE MARTINEZ.**

### REFLECTION QUESTION:

What are some considerations for effecting change from within the criminal legal system and elected government versus outside of that system? In what ways do both realms cooperate?





# PEOPLE DOING THE WORK

KAYLA REED, EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR OF ACTION ST. LOUIS,  
POSES FOR A PHOTO AT THE  
DEACONNESS FOUNDATION  
IN ST. LOUIS, MISSOURI.  
PHOTO BY JOE MARTINEZ.



*Check out the following orgs to learn more and get involved.*

### **Freedom Community Center**

"The Freedom Community Center (FCC) is a new, Black-led organization in North St. Louis that was founded to dismantle systems of oppression that inflict harm and trauma on Black communities in St. Louis City, particularly the police and the criminal punishment system."

### **Close The Workhouse**

"The Close the Workhouse campaign aims to attack mass incarceration, without legitimizing or justifying the continued caging of people as punishment. We call for the closure of the Medium Security Institution, better known in St. Louis as the Workhouse, an end to wealth based pretrial detention, and the reinvestment of the money used to cage poor people and Black people into rebuilding the most impacted neighborhoods in this region."

### **Close Rikers**

"For decades, Rikers Island has been marked by violence and corruption. Stories regularly emerge documenting the abuse, brutality, and death in the institution. The #CLOSErikers campaign was formed in 2016 to break political gridlock and achieve solutions guided by directly impacted communities."  
[Sign the petition](#) to close Rikers without opening a new jail.

### **JustLeadershipUSA**

"We amplify the power of directly impacted people by investing, educating, empowering, and elevating their voices, so they have the tools and resources to self-organize and advocate for themselves, their families, and their communities."

### **The Bail Project**

"The Bail Project combats mass incarceration by disrupting the money bail system—one person at a time."

### **Arch City Defenders**

"ArchCity Defenders (ACD) is a holistic legal advocacy organization that combats the criminalization of poverty and state violence, especially in communities of color."

◀ **"What actually keeps our community safe? How do we prioritize the people and not the institution that's harming us?"** - KAYLA REED, Executive Director of Action St. Louis



# Keep learning...

## Reading



Chart: [Reformist reforms vs. abolitionist steps to end IMPRISONMENT](#) by Critical Resistance

[Becoming Abolitionists: Police, Protests, and the Pursuit of Freedom](#) by Derecka Purnell

[‘The fight has to change’: Why Ferguson activists ditched police reform](#) by Rebecca Rivas

[The Ferguson movement is on the cusp of revolutionizing political power in St. Louis](#) by Rebecca Rivas

[How Inspections of St. Louis' Workhouse Became a Battle of Belief](#) by Danny Wicentowski

[Video From Inside St. Louis Workhouse Jail Shows Leaks, Bugs and Decay](#) by Danny Wicentowski

[Freedom Community Center To Offer St. Louis New Model For Restorative Justice](#) by Sarah Fenske

[St. Louis To Close Workhouse This Week But Will House Temporary Detainees There](#) by Chad Davis

[As Campaign To Close The Workhouse Gains Support, Krewson Considers 'Repurposing' St. Louis Jail](#) by Lara Hamdan & Rachel Lippmann

## Audio



[Why police reform fails](#) from Reveal News

[The Work of Closing a Notorious Jail](#) from 70 Million

[What It Took to Close Rikers](#) from What Next

[Death and Desperation at Rikers](#) from What Next

"PEOPLE LITERALLY LAUGHED AT US...AND SAID YOU CAN'T CLOSE THIS JAIL. AND WE'RE LITERALLY THIS CLOSE TO CLOSING THIS JAIL AND WE DID THAT THROUGH JUST TALKING TO PEOPLE."

- INEZ BORDEAUX



INEZ BORDEAUX PHOTOGRAPHED IN THE DEACONESS FOUNDATION CENTER IN ST. LOUIS, MO.



# 70 Million Team

**Episode Co-Reporters:** Chad Davis & Carolina Hidalgo

**Executive Editor:** Jen Chien

**Episode Co-Editor:** Jimmy Gutierrez

**Host:** Mitzi Miller

**Sound Designer:** Elizabeth Nakano

**Photo Editor:** Michelle Baker

**Staff Writer and Designer:** Emma Forbes

**Lead Fact Checker:** Mark Betancourt

**Lead Producer:** Cedric Wilson

**Episode Photographer:** Joe Martinez

**Creator/Executive Producer:** Juleyka Lantigua



**million**  
ONE JAIL AT A TIME.  
*story*



[lwcstudios.com](http://lwcstudios.com)

[70MillionPod.com](http://70MillionPod.com)

@70MillionPod  

[Hello@70MillionPod.com](mailto:Hello@70MillionPod.com)

MacArthur  
Foundation

70 Million is made possible by a grant from the Safety and Justice Challenge at the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation.

