

Breakout Session Brainstorming and Discussion (Duck Pond Room)

- One issue we are facing is that organizations are working separately and don't communicate with each other. They need to find a way to work together and collaborate.
- We need to bring attention to the many smaller communities and subgroups that exist within prisons, like religious groups (Muslims, for example). They often lack representation and we need to advocate for their rights.
- Detention is the civil rights issue of our time
 - "Detention" isn't just imprisonment, but also:
 - Detainment of immigrants,
 - Migrant workers being metaphorically "detained" in a permanent subclass because they lack rights and are exploited
 - Behavioral health centers detaining people against their will
 - Communities are forever changed and impacted by all the above forms of detainment. For example, we must contribute our tax dollars to allow these things to be perpetrated by the government.
- VA does NOT have parole. It was abolished because lawmakers were in favor of "true sentencing." This means offenders end up spending exorbitant amounts of time in prison because they cannot get out on parole.
- We must bring awareness to the aging geriatric prison population. They are costing us lots in tax dollars because of the health care they require.
- School to prison pipeline – We refer more students to law enforcement than any other state!
 - Black children and intellectually challenged children especially
- Prisons are often located far away from families.
 - Roanoke has a new video chat system. This should be something that is implemented across the country so that families are able to chat with their loved ones. Many cannot afford to travel to see them in prison because it is too far.
- Gerrymandering is a huge issue we must address. District attorneys, judges, parole board are all either elected or appointed BY elected officials.
 - Criminal reform bills go to committee and usually die there. These committees are gerrymandered! Therefore, little change is being made with regard to criminal justice reform.
- In VA, you can apply for conditional parole, but it must be approved by the governor. Therefore, we must put pressure on elected officials and/or be more thoughtful about who we elect to influential positions. We must hold our officials accountable.
 - We need a review committee that provides a level of oversight to our elected officials and investigates/reports and potential wrongdoing or corruption.

- In our area (New River Valley), we don't have large racial/ethnic minority populations, but we do have many impoverished people. These people need us to advocate for them.
- A possible solution to keeping elected officials accountable is The Rollins Memo, a guideline all DAs should follow.
- Something we can do to make a difference in the lives of those incarcerated is to write to prisoners. We can then stand up for them and act on the grievances that they voice since they are not able to. This puts pressure on officials to keep prisons safe and maintain adequate living conditions for prisoners.
- We should also push for community policing policies. In addition, police departments should be required to release data on who they stop and frisk, etc. This level of oversight will not only put pressure on them to ensure they are not engaging in profiling, but also allow data to be available to the public.
 - Another issue with the criminal justice system is that data is not collected uniformly. Departments choose what they report. We need a uniform reporting system so that police departments can't use this loophole to their advantage.
- From a white perspective, people don't acknowledge their bias because they think, "I'm a good guy; I'm not biased." White people need to acknowledge their privilege and be cognizant of their bias. Everyone is biased; we all must make an ongoing effort to question our assumptions and biases.
 - For more information and to continue learning about pertinent ideas, read *White Fragility*
- We need to offer distance education/online classes in prison. Many prisons have computers they do not take full advantage of. Inmates could take a variety of online classes to prepare them for reentry and assimilation into society. For example, they could take finance classes to help them learn budgeting.
- Something to consider: If an individual kills a police officer, he is automatically sentenced to life without parole. If a police officer kills an individual, he is often excused and faces no penalty. What does this say about our society? Do we value the life a police officer more than the life of an ordinary citizen? Why aren't all lives equally important?