

Executive Summary

This policy report aims to center the challenges and needs of Black women returning to their communities from carceral institutions. It highlights promising practices and policy solutions. This report is informed by informational interviews and listening sessions with formerly incarcerated Black women, surveys of California-based reentry organizations, NBWJI's extensive research and evaluation of reentry needs and services in California, literature reviews, and legislative analysis. We recommend policymakers take action in the following five critical areas of reentry for Black women:

Address Black women's basic needs and better prepare them for release.

- Provide gender- and culturally-responsive reentry assessment, planning, and care continuity to better prepare women to reenter their communities.
- Ensure that women are equipped with basic personal care essentials upon release.
- Increase the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation release allowance to an amount that accounts for present-day economic realities.
- The United States Department of Agriculture Food and Nutrition Service (FNS) must grant California a statewide federal waiver to implement pre-release enrollment in CalFresh for individuals incarcerated in state prison or county jail.
- Allow incarcerated people to have their birth certificates at no cost before they are released.

Increase Black women's access to stable housing.

- Repeal crime-free laws that disproportionately exclude and evict formerly incarcerated Black women from housing.
- Enact statewide Fair Chance Housing legislation.

- Invest in new and build the capacity of existing supportive housing, allowing for flexibility and innovation in how housing programs utilize funds.

Increase opportunities for Black women's economic prosperity.

- Ensure that conviction history does not prevent qualified candidates from securing employment through additional protections beyond “banning the box.”
- Raise the minimum wage to a living wage.
- Provide a temporary guaranteed basic income.
- Eliminate criminal legal system debts.
- Ensure that workforce development and employment-focused reentry programs include formerly incarcerated people without regard to supervision status.
- Invest in the provision of gender-specific employment-focused reentry services.

Support the preservation and reunification of families separated by incarceration.

- Pass legislation that makes it easier for parents to plan for reunification during incarceration or residential drug treatment.
- Eliminate timelines for termination of parental rights from existing law.
- Remove barriers to placement with non-relative or extended family members with conviction histories that do not endanger the child.

Support formerly incarcerated Black women's health and well-being.

- Build the capacity of community-based providers to provide care coordination for people in carceral facilities that helps establish

relationships with primary and behavioral health care providers, transition medical records, and set up community-based care before release.

- Provide incentives for community-based primary and behavioral health care clinics to adopt trauma-informed, gender-responsive, and culturally affirming models to care for the reentry population and to hire community health workers with lived experience of incarceration.
- Close the Medicaid coverage gap for people leaving carceral facilities across the country with federal legislation.

Black women's success in reentry is not solely indicated by avoiding re-arrest or re-incarceration but is also characterized by the ability to establish stability, build and repair meaningful connections, and restore dignity and self-worth. The investments and policy changes outlined in this report will help ensure that Black women returning to their communities from confinement have access to all of the resources they need to thrive.