Mission & Vision

#cut50

#cut50, a Dream Corps program, is a bipartisan effort to cut crime and incarceration across all 50 states. We bring together leaders impacted by the criminal justice system with unlikely allies spanning the political divide to push for criminal justice solutions.

All of #cut50’s campaigns are led by people who have been impacted by the justice system and lived through the issues we are working to address. The people most harmed by our current system are uniquely qualified to create and champion the solutions that will begin to transform it.

Our annual grassroots day of action is the Day of Empathy. This year we moved it entirely online.
#cut50 builds and coordinates an ever expanding Empathy Network composed of partners in all 50 states, Washington, D.C., and Canada. These grassroots organizations, primarily led by people directly impacted by the justice system, act as "Empathy Ambassadors" and promote criminal justice reform at the local, state, and federal levels throughout the year.

Our Empathy Network partners ensure that those most impacted by the justice system have a seat at the table. They lend their voice and expertise to help develop the policy solutions that will impact their lives, families and communities.
Through extensive personal relationships, research, and our referral network, we identify and support organizations and organizers that are dedicated to uplifting the leadership of people directly impacted by the justice system.

We invest in our partners with funding, communications support, advocacy training, toolkits, and collateral. These resources help unite groups under a singular banner with shared messaging and goals.

We activate our network on the Day of Empathy, encouraging partners to host meetings, events, and conversations between lawmakers and people who have been personally impacted by the justice system.
Day of Empathy
CAPACITY BUILDING

The Day of Empathy isn’t just a single Day of Action. It is a celebration of our year-round effort to build capacity among small but mighty groups that make up the Empathy Network. Throughout the year, we provide communications support, advocacy training, introductions to lawmakers, policy development, connections to influencers, and support from national partners.

Leading up to the Day of Empathy, we host a series of webinars and conference calls to stay closely connected to our partners and provide support. Our Empathy platform builds a digital community for the Network to share their challenges, work, ideas, and solutions.
Due to the outbreak of COVID-19, our team made the difficult but necessary decision to move our National Day of Empathy from in-person convenings to a digital day of action.

On two weeks notice, our staff and members of our Empathy Network created online town halls, forums, webinars and informational sessions. In addition to shining a light on the impact the criminal justice system has made to our communities, they also included ways to continue our fight for freedom -- especially during a pandemic that makes prisons and communities less safe.

AND IT WAS A SUCCESS
#cut50 hosted 18 virtual events in 13 states and Canada. 43,000 people around the world tuned into our live online events. This included:

- 957 family members of formerly or currently incarcerated people
- 677 allies
- 456 former or current justice system workers
- 388 formerly incarcerated individuals registered for Day of Empathy events across the continent.
- 18 elected officials
As more and more people living and working in prisons and jails test positive for COVID-19, we need empathy more than ever. Thank you @cut_50 for focusing nationaldayofempathy on keeping ppl who are incarcerated safe from coronavirus.

TODAY IS THE NATIONAL DAY OF EMPATHY!! We must be intentional about getting non-violent offenders out of MassIncarceration!

The US incarcerates over 2.2 million people in prisons & jails, w/many facilities operating well over capacity. Incarcerated persons have higher rates of underlying health issues than the general public, that suppress immune response. Keep them safe=keeping us safe COVID—19

A message from me about #DayofEmpathy @POTUS @WhiteHouse @SenateGOP @SenateDems

My friends at #Cut50 - a prisoner’s advocacy group - have declared today as a national Day of Empathy. It’s a day where we are asked to speak out for the voiceless. So I’m tagging the White House and Congress.

During this virus crisis, as you dole out this historic trillion dollar stimulus package — I understand you have to help the big businesses and protect our economy. Thank you. But I also urge you to have mercy on the criminals. Too many non-violent people are wasting space in overcrowded prisons. Many of them are older and vulnerable to getting the virus, so please give them a speedy release.

And please have mercy on those on the streets and in the shelters. A roof is a human right.

Mr. President - Right now you and I are working out of our warm comfortable houses - but not everybody has it so good.

Please do the right thing and take care of the people at the bottom first. You’ll be a legend.

And thank you for canceling the Olympics.

Respectfully,

Jeff Ross
LEGISLATOR ENGAGEMENT

SPEAKERS ON LIVE EVENTS

Michigan
- State Sen. Erika Geiss (D)
- Bridget McCormack – Michigan Supreme Court Chief Justice

Georgia
- Rep. David Dreyer (D)
- Rep. Bee Nguyen (D)
- Rep. Kim Schofield (D)
- Sen. Harold Jones (D)

Pennsylvania
- District Attorney Larry Krasner
- Rep. Morgan Cephus (D)
- Rep. Mike Jones (R)
- Rep. Joanna McClinton (D)
- Chief Defender Keir Bradford Grey

Illinois
- Former warden of Cook County jail - Nneka Jones Tapia

California
- Asm. Reggie Jones Sawyer (D)
- Asm. Maria Walderon (R)
- Former Assemblymember Nicole Para (D)
- SF City Councilman Matt Haney

SOCIAL MEDIA SHOUT OUTS

- Former IL Governor Rod Blagojevich
- Alderwoman Jameesha Harris (North Carolina)
- Asm. Nathalia Fernandez (New York)
- Asm. Harvey Epstein (New York)
- Judge Michelle Rick (Michigan)
SOCIAL MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

It was a pleasure to join @VanJones68 and the @cut_50 team for the #DayOfEmpathy townhall today!

We are going to continue speaking out on behalf of the millions of people locked up in cages in crowded conditions who are helpless against the #coronavirus. States should take action now to address the crisis.

I'm joining the #DayOfEmpathy virtual town hall with criminal justice reformers. Walls don't protect us from viruses or other dangers. Only solidarity and shared humanity make us truly safe.

On this #DayOfEmpathy there are millions of people, locked up behind bars, living in crowded conditions—and helpless against #COVID19. I plead with every state to take immediate action & support reforms that protect people behind bars. Take action now. @VanJones68 @Cut50

We are live on Facebook and Zoom with the #DayOfEmpathy.

The SAFER PLAN: PREVENTING THE SPREAD OF COMMUNICABLE DISEASES

Findings at medium.com

I am joining the #DayOfEmpathy virtual town hall with @RyanForRecovery.

Virtually enjoying the #DayOfEmpathy with @safetandjasmn
THE NATIONAL TOWN HALL

THE EVENT
The #cut50 team co-founders, Van Jones, Jessica Jackson and Matt Haney alongside some of our incredible organizers and Martin Luther King Jr. III hosted a digital town hall to celebrate the fourth annual Day of Empathy.

THE 4PM COUNT
At 4PM, Tony Lewis Jr. hosted a symbolic “4PM count” to bring awareness solidarity to the men and women being counted at 4PM daily in prisons.

CLICK HERE TO WATCH THE TOWN HALL

Other speakers included Shaka Senghor, Valarie Kaur, Christina & David Arquette, Pamela Winn, Erin Haney, Louis Reed, Nisha Anand & Michael Mendoza
LOCAL EVENT REPORTS

We envision a criminal justice system that recognizes the humanity of the 2.3 million people currently behind bars & moves toward compassion and treatment rather than punishment and incarceration. With empathy, understanding, and love, we can build the political will needed to rectify the damage caused by the incarceration industry on individuals, families, and our communities.
SPOTLIGHT ON ARIZONA

THE EVENT
Empathy Network partner, Sue Ellen Allen and partner organization, Reinventing ReEntry, created an online panel to bring awareness around the diverse backgrounds of the advocates and allies fighting for criminal justice reform.

When Sue Ellen Allen was incarcerated she met Douglas Reed, a prison guard. Together the two created a podcast called Empathy In Corrections. Their collaboration has led to in-depth conversations about prison, relationships, and empathy. It also shows the potential of deep and meaningful friendship across differences.

SOCIAL STATS: 3000 views, 366 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON CALIFORNIA

THE EVENT
The #cut50 State Policy Director, Esteban Nunez and Program Associate, Olivia McLarnan hosted discussion surrounding three important California bills – presented by #cut50, Californians for Safety and Justice, and Young Women’s Freedom Center.

Our team was joined by Assembly members Reggie Jones Sawyer and Marie Waldron and activist Javier Stauring.

SOCIAL STATS: 1000 views, 590 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON CANADA

THE EVENT

Empathy Network organizer, Jessica Santonato hosted our first ever International Day of Empathy event.

The Day of Empathy online forum in Canada served as an opportunity to shine the light on people impacted by the criminal justice system in order to uplift and amplify their voices, and win over hearts and minds towards the idea that transformation is possible.

SOCIAL STATS: 647 views, 59 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON GEORGIA

THE EVENT

Empathy Network organizer Pamela Winn and our partner organization, RestoreHER, organized Restore Power To The People by restoring voting rights, providing housing, eliminating solitary confinement, improving conditions of confinement, and providing dignity of justice-involved people in Georgia for our Day of Empathy.

The conversation included the leadership of formerly incarcerated men and women that shared the personal stories that motivated them to fight for justice reform.

SOCIAL STATS: 718 views, 173 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON ILLINOIS

THE EVENT

Celia Colon, Empathy Network organizer, hosted a panel to discuss the impact that COVID-19 will have on our incarcerated populations. She brought attention to the 20% of the Illinois Department Of Corrections population—8,000 people—that is elderly, with many that are also disabled, chronically ill, or medically fragile. This over-60 group is not just the most vulnerable, but also the most reformed, least likely to offend (near zero) most costly ($70,000 annually) of any group in prison.

SOCIAL STATS: 468 views
SPOTLIGHT ON MICHIGAN

THE EVENT

Our Michigan organizer, Josh Hoe and our Empathy partner, Safe and Just Michigan, organized four online events that covered:

- Pregnancy inside of prisons
- Clean Slate legislation
- Survivors of crime advocating for safety
- Justice, jails and pretrial services

The panel featured Michigan Supreme Court Justice Bridget McCormack.

SOCIAL STATS: 4857 views, 779 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON NEBRASKA

THE EVENT
Advocates and activists in Nebraska came together to discuss the need for a comprehensive approach to the impact COVID-19 has on people who are incarcerated, returning home, living with HIV/AIDS and juvenile justice involved. They discussed topics like healthcare, staffing in overcrowded systems, and dispelling rumors during the pandemic and how we can get our officials to take action NOW through empathy.

SOCIAL STATS: 1100 views, 47 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON NORTH CAROLINA

THE EVENT
Empathy Network organizer, Corey Purdie organized #Empathy4NC for a full 12 hour online Day of Empathy in North Carolina, beginning at 9am when courts usually open. The schedule provided 21 time slots of varying lengths that included 15 individual speaking slots and covered a range of topics relating to Empathy 4 NC, #cut50, The NC Second Chance Act, health in prison populations, business, activism, and more.

SOCIAL STATS: 4483 views, 266 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON OKLAHOMA

THE EVENT
D’Marria Monday, Empathy Network organizer and Block Builderz created a call to action to support the millions of people sitting behind bars, defenseless to the spread of the Coronavirus – a vulnerable population. Their discussion highlighted the harsh conditions of confinement for incarcerated men and women and the changes needed in the fight for justice. Their online event shared what people can do to protect incarcerated people during this pandemic.

SOCIAL STATS: 41 views
THE EVENT

Tonie Willis, Empathy Network organizer and Ardella’s House, Empathy Partner, hosted a nationwide online rally for Americans impacted by the criminal justice system. Attendees met with lawmakers to share their stories and experiences.

The rally called for dignity for incarcerated women and alternatives to incarceration (ATI). They discussed the impact of keeping individuals out of prison and the need to invest in programs that more “effectively and efficiently address behavioral health conditions.

SOCIAL STATS: 1200 views, 489 engagements
SPOTLIGHT ON TENNESSEE

THE EVENT
DeAndre and Vinessa Brown organized an online panel that included people directly impacted and representatives from partner programs and organizations. Each participant shared a word on the importance of our shared humanity. They discussed how important it is to truly support our brothers and sisters that are incarcerated both before and after their release. Each speaker shared their own personal journey of how to “walk the talk.”

SOCIAL STATS: 520 views, 328 engagements
THE EVENT

Empathy Network organizer, Karen Morrison, hosted an event with the Parole and Probation Accountability project to discuss next steps for mass supervision in Virginia.

The workshop was designed to prepare families and their loved ones to meet with the Virginia Parole Board and Probation Officers for Parole and Probation Supervision.

SOCIAL STATS: 945 views, 568 engagements
MOVING FORWARD
And Looking Beyond the Pandemic

#cut50 will continue to work with every state, local and federal lawmaker to take urgent action to prevent a prison pandemic while ensuring Dignity and safety for people behind bars and our communities.

During this pandemic, our state and federal policy making will continue to:

- Demand that jails and prisons are prepared for a potential outbreak and can ensure health care coverage for all the people inside.
- Identify SAFE releases to prevent the spread of COVID-19 in prisons while keeping our communities safe.

We are mobilizing our vast Empathy Network ONLINE to bring people together and build a community of support. Our network will continue to share our stories, humanize the impact of the virus in our communities, and fight for the dignity of all people impacted by the criminal justice system.
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