

# Squandered Resources

## INCARCERATION

Its Cost, Consequences, and Alternatives

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Lessons Learned and the Path Forward



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This past spring, the Urban Health Institute and Office of the Provost co-sponsored *Squandered Resources: Incarceration—Its Costs, Consequences, and Alternatives* as the focus of the third annual Johns Hopkins University Social Determinants of Health Symposium. The topic and much of the content was the result of multiple consultations with over 125 community and university colleagues. The high rates of incarceration, recidivism, and pressing health issues related to imprisonment are some of the most immediate problems in the United States, and particularly in the city of Baltimore. Incarceration and criminalization have far-reaching detrimental effects on individuals, neighborhoods, and the health and morale of the city.

More than 500 people attended the symposium, including students (ranging from Hopkins graduate students to community high schoolers), teachers and professors, community residents, service professionals, and leaders from the Baltimore area and beyond to learn about the impact of incarceration on health and to identify ways to change the current trajectory.

Nearly 25 invited speakers participated on seven diverse panels sharing evidence-based strategies to reduce incarceration, decrease recidivism, and mitigate the impacts of incarceration on individual and community health. Panelists ranged from community workers to policy experts to ex-offenders, and

shared both research-based and personal experiences.

Speakers included James Garbarino, Professor and Maude C. Clarke Chair in Humanistic Psychology at Loyola University Chicago; Joe Jones, President and CEO of the Center for Urban Families in Baltimore; Kathryn Edin, co-author of *Doing the Best I Can* and an inaugural Bloomberg Distinguished Professor; Nancy LaVigne, Director of the Justice Policy Center; and David Kennedy, Director of the National Network for Safe Communities. Congressman Elijah Cummings also attended and delivered a powerful address titled *A Charge for Change*.

Community and youth engagement were essential parts of the event. Members of DewMore Baltimore delivered brilliant spoken word performances, a string duet from the Baltimore Youth Initiative School entertained guests during breaks, and Baltimore United ViewFinders displayed photographs on the theme of the conference.

The symposium was a collaborative effort to identify priorities for Baltimore over the next few years to alter existing policies, strengthen service systems, and promote awareness of incarceration as a health issue. What follows is a summary of lessons learned and recommendations for the path forward.

To view videos of the events, please visit: <http://tinyurl.com/kf765en>.

# Lessons Learned and the Path Forward

1. Incarceration costs three-times more than education
2. Criminal justice system as a primary punitive force leads to disconnect with community
3. War on drugs is lost: it is time to treat substance abuse
4. Early intervention is needed to change a life
5. Zero-tolerance school policies fuel the school-to-prison pipeline and should be abandoned
6. Programs for at-risk youth: a good investment
7. Young people need better options than crime
8. Reform the prison system: remove profit and eliminate privatization
9. Give equal opportunity & second chance to ex-offenders

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# 1 In the U.S., we spend \$30,000 a year to incarcerate each prisoner—more than three times what we spend educating our children—but the true cost is exponentially higher.

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One in five young men in Baltimore has been incarcerated, and the city has the highest incarceration rate of any major city in the United States. When a person is incarcerated, his life as well as that of his family is disrupted. His employability and earnings potential is permanently compromised. Incarceration also has long-term psychological, sociological, physical, and physiological consequences. It limits an individual's social networks, and impacts community and spiritual connections. Its toll is felt by not only the individual and his family, but by the community and the economy as well. And when incarceration happens on a mass scale, it is detrimental to an entire generation.

What's even more tragic is that our punitive criminal justice system squanders opportunities to reduce the human capital costs of incarceration. Over a five-year period, we spend about \$10,000 on one person in a community program to provide GED and job-readiness training, compared to \$150,000 for incarcerating a person. The average income of a person coming out of a community-readiness program is about \$33,000 a year, whereas someone in prison earns a maximum of \$2,500. But, there is only a fraction of people in community programs compared to prisons.

If we know the benefits of community diversion programs outweigh those of incarceration, why then, are our rates of incarceration so high? Part of the answer is that we, as a society, place a higher priority on punishment than rehabilitation; and we have an unjust system rooted in social disparity, with our most vulnerable populations suffering.

Here the data are clear, the research has been done, but there is still a belief that “being tough on crime” equates to being tough on the criminal. The evidence strongly suggests our failure to implement what we know diverts offenders from repeat criminal behavior perpetuates. We need to make a clear and compelling case for effective diversion programs so that employment discrimination, housing disadvantage and educational disruption do not permanently disable the ex-offender.

**“Incarceration undermines one’s human capital and basic capacity to be an active, thriving member of the community, the larger community, and also to be economically viable.”**

—Debra Furr-Holden, PhD, Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health

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## ACTION ITEMS

### Change the social narrative on incarceration

1. Use social media, traditional media, speaking platforms, and advertising to focus on the fact that rehabilitation and community programs are effective, less costly, and provide education and employment opportunities, whereas incarceration is detrimental to prisoners, communities, families, and the economy.
2. Focus on audiences who may not already share the same point of view in order to educate them, rather than “preaching to the choir.”

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## 2 Using the criminal justice system as a primarily punitive force leads citizens to avoid participation in community and government programs.

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If we are to reduce the rates of incarceration, we, as a society, need to have a frank discussion about the root causes of incarceration, which include overt and covert racism.

Studies on the racial inequality of our prison system have turned up startling statistics: half of young black men in Baltimore are either incarcerated or under criminal justice supervision. In the U.S., black males have a one in three chance of ending up with a prison felony sentence. Seventy percent of black males who drop out of high school go to prison. These are alarming statistics, but it is even more disturbing when you consider what is behind these statistics.

Certain low-income minority neighborhoods are commonly patrolled by police, with young black men aggressively searched and often for minor offenses are led off in handcuffs for all to see... only to be booked, released and return to the streets. Black children learn at an early age to distrust and avoid authorities and keep a low profile. They watch their fathers, uncles, and older brothers get arrested and incarcerated. Rather than perceiving the criminal justice system as fair and just, they come to view it as a means of control and dominance, a way to keep citizens who look like them in line.

Increasingly, the only interaction minorities in some neighborhoods have with the government is the criminal justice system. Distrust for police becomes ingrained and then transfers to distrust of political authorities, government, schools and other institutions established to help. From a minor stop to incarceration, at each level, having any encounter with the criminal justice

system decreases positive engagement with the government and limits opportunity to participate in the democratic processes such as voting. And the cycle continues....

The inequities carry over to sentencing. Up until 2010, there was a 1 to 100 sentencing disparity in crack versus powder cocaine. President Obama reduced the disparity, but it is still not a 1 to 1 ratio, and African Americans end up with harsher sentences for what is essentially the same drug as their wealthier white cocaine using counterparts.

**“The criminal justice system is the only government I know.”**

- Reynard as quoted by Vesla Weaver

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### **ACTION ITEMS**

#### **Change discriminatory surveillance and sentencing practices**

1. Decriminalize marijuana.
2. Alter the sentencing disparities for crack and other forms of cocaine.
3. Initiate police and community dialogue on repressive police practices in low-income communities.

# 3

We lost the war on drugs. It's time to start treating substance abuse instead of criminalizing it.

There is a strong link between substance use and incarceration—one quarter of all arrests are for substance use and many more are indirectly caused by drugs. Those with addictions may commit crimes while under the influence or in an attempt to attain drugs. We know that drug use impairs decision-making and increases risky behavior.

Higher rates of substance use are associated with our most vulnerable populations—low-income individuals and individuals with mental health disorders.

When addiction takes hold, individuals no longer can control their use predisposing them to obtain the drugs by any means possible leading to risky behavior and unemployment. Unemployment, in turn, can lead to criminal behavior. It's a never-ending cycle that lands many non-violent drug offenders in jail without addressing the root problem.

**“In the neighborhoods I work in, young black men are dying at the rate of over 500 per 100,000 every single year...As you walk these neighborhoods, you walk by over and over and over again, all over the country, the makeshift, heartbreaking street shrines to the dead that have become folk art in these neighborhoods. This is our modern America.”**

- David Kennedy, Director of the National Network for Safe Communities

## ACTION ITEMS

### Reform drug laws and prioritize treatment over punishment

1. Handle non-violent drug offenses through drug courts, leading to treatment for substance users, lower incarceration rates, and decreased recidivism.
2. Advocate for passage of the Smarter Sentencing Act, which would reduce mandatory minimum sentences for drug-related charges and grant judges sentencing discretion for drug offenders.
3. Explore decriminalization of substance use to reduce incarceration rates and the costs of unnecessary incarceration. These funds could be reinvested in treatment and legal access.
4. Refocus federal grants to states from prison support to support for community programs.
5. Lower or eliminate bail bonds for petty larceny crimes, especially for first time offenders.

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# 4 Early intervention can change the course of a life.

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If we want to change the rates of incarceration, we need to look upstream: what happens early on in the lives of those who end up incarcerated?

Intervention can begin in the earliest stages of development by a concerted effort to identify young people who are anti-social and have trouble with disruptive behavior, and self regulation, and to connect them to peer-based and adult intervention programs. We know antisocial behavior happens more frequently in disadvantaged neighborhoods, so it is important to focus efforts there.

As children enter adolescence, drug use may begin, which can open the gateway to crime. Adolescence is a critical time in terms of brain development, particularly in the area responsible for decision-making, so it's important to identify the problem early and to intervene. The good news is that the period of adolescence is largely one of plasticity and is responsive to interventions.

For young people who enter the juvenile justice system, it's important to identify those on the trajectory for recidivism. Evidence has shown there are many risk factors that can help predict who will offend again. Applying risk assessments can identify kids who can benefit from appropriate intervention.

**“We must be willing to go upstream against the squandered resources, against the waste of human talent in our society.”**

- Michael Higginbotham, Dean, University of Baltimore School of Law

We know that most of the young people in the juvenile justice system are not on the path to crime. And research has shown that keeping young offenders in custody may do far more harm than societal benefit. When adolescents are kept in custody with other deviant peers, it has a contagion effect. This “social contagion” affects the pathway to criminality for adolescents. Allowing the juvenile to receive treatment without removing him or her from the family, when appropriate, can be a more effective option.



New Lens

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## ACTION ITEMS

### Reduce probabilities and rates of kids on the path to crime

1. Invest in early intervention programs.
2. Build data-driven and evidence-based decision-making tools into justice system policy and practice.
3. Allow juveniles to receive treatment without unnecessarily removing them from families.

# 5

## Zero-tolerance school policies fuel the school-to-prison pipeline.

If students are suspended, they are three times more likely to leave school, whether by choice or by expulsion. They are also three times more likely to end up in prison than peers. Instead, teachers need to implement a school-wide strategy using very consistent and clear expectations and support for positive behavior rather than punitive consequences.

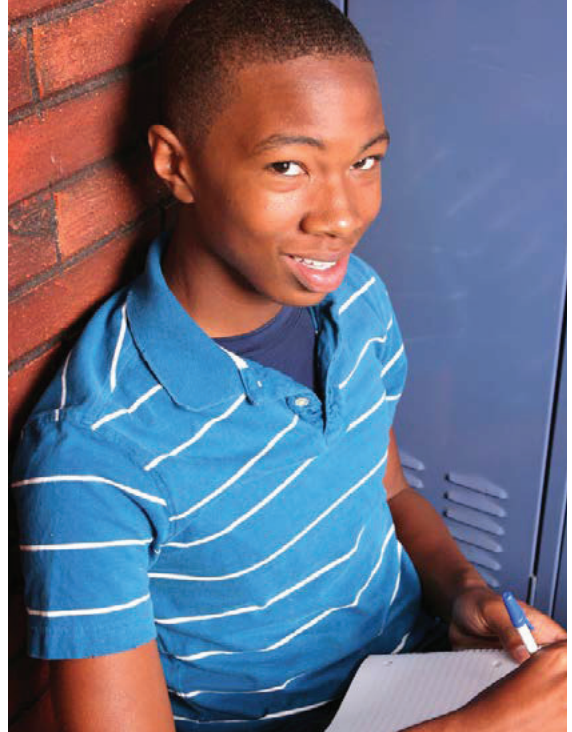
Instead of suspension and expulsion, teachers should implement consequences that allow students to stay in school and restore what has been damaged, whether reputation with teachers or peers, or property. We need to retain students and implement evidence-based interventions and alternatives, rather than encouraging them to leave the system, which leads to a higher probability of incarceration.

**“The last thing that we want to do with students who are struggling in school is to send the message that they no longer need to come to school ...the long term consequences of that are clearly associated with a higher probability of incarceration.”**

-David Andrews, PhD, Dean, Johns Hopkins School of Education

**“We need to give them an option of choosing education and employment, rather than criminal activities and the risk of incarceration. We need to give them a real choice.”**

-Michael Higginbotham, Dean, University of Baltimore School of Law



### ACTION ITEMS

1. Abolish zero-tolerance disciplinary policies in schools and institute restorative justice programs, which will keep students in a healthy, pro-social peer environment and teach conflict resolution strategies.
2. Train school resource officers to link children in trouble to support rather than expelling them.
3. Train all school personnel in management strategies for children and youth exposed to significant trauma (e.g., trauma informed education approaches).



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# 6 Programs for at-risk youth are a good investment.

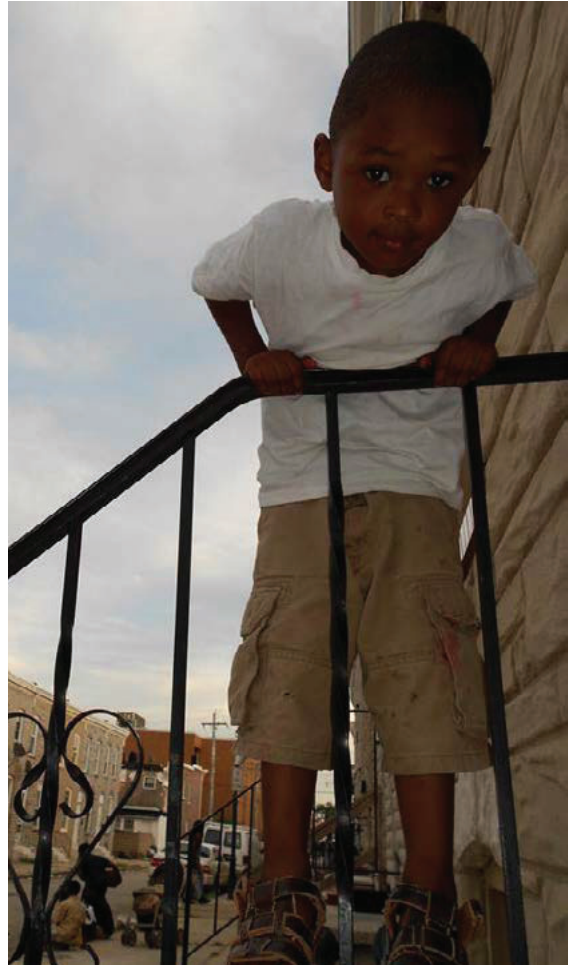
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Being involved in community and education is key to preventing children from coming in contact with the penal system. In the most distressed communities many children do not get the guidance they need from their parents, so school and community programs become all the more critical. We need to help children understand the importance of staying on a successful path by remaining in school, avoiding pregnancy, and not following peers down the wrong path. They need to see that there are possibilities for them—that they have a choice about their future. We also need programs to help parents learn to be effective parents and help them be good citizens of Baltimore.

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## ACTION ITEMS

1. Create one-on-one mentorship programs for students, train teachers in working with at-risk youth, and provide programs for teen parents.
2. Support programs in which students can express themselves creatively through drama, poetry, song, or art.
3. Increase opportunities for recreation in schools and communities.
4. Engage youth in positive after-school programs with a service learning component, so that they have something to look forward to.
5. Create programs to help parents with young children relocate to less damaging environments.



**“Investing in disadvantaged teens can affect key decisions that alter their life course.”**

—Kathryn Edin, PhD, Bloomberg Distinguished Professor, Johns Hopkins University

# 7 Young people need a better option than crime.

To reduce incarceration rates, it is critical to provide job and education opportunities to give young people in disadvantaged neighborhoods options other than criminal activities. We can do that through legislation, such as the American Jobs Act, that targets high unemployment areas for job education and training programs, and job creation programs, so that individuals can secure jobs and take care of their families. We also need to address the different pay scales between illicit and licit marketplaces, so that these individuals can earn a fair living in the formal economy without resorting to crime.



**Dew More Baltimore Poets**  
Front left to right: Nakia Brown, Carolyn Lynch  
Back left to right: Mohamed Tall, Kenneth Morrison

**“Black men and black women and others are not liberated. You cannot be liberated with a record. You cannot be liberated if you can’t vote. You’re not liberated if you can’t take advantage of living in certain types of housing. You are not liberated if nobody hears you.”**

-Congressman Elijah Cummings

**“We as a society that claim to embrace the notion of equal opportunity for all, we need to give them that hope. We owe them more than simply what we are doing now. If we do that, we can all make sure that we have, in fact, done everything we could do to deal with this alarmingly wide disparity that is wasting—that is squandering—human resources in our society today.”**

-Michael Higginbotham, Dean, University of Baltimore School of Law

## **ACTION ITEMS**

1. Invest in job creation programs and support legislation such as the American Jobs Act.
2. Increase minimum wage and expand the earned income tax credit to men and childless workers.

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# 8

We need to reform the prison system to remove profit and make prisons accountable to the communities whose safety they are committed to serve.

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Perhaps the most shocking and disturbing element about our country's incarceration epidemic is the trend toward privatization of prisons, creating a profit incentive to maximize arrests, incarceration and high occupancy rates. How can we hope to reverse the incarceration epidemic if prisons are outsourced and the very things that might improve the system—more prison rehabilitation, educational, vocational, and life skills programs—represent a conflict of interest to the corporate interests of private prisons? Much like private, for-profit hospitals drive up medical costs, so too, private prisons drive up occupancy and costs of the criminal justice system.

Consider these statistics:

- Since 1980, the prison population has grown by about 800 percent in the U.S.
- The U.S. has 5 percent of the world's population, but 25 percent of its prisoners.
- Nonviolent offenders account for 90 percent of federal prisoners.

Without steps to reform prisons, the problem will continue. Taxpayers will spend billions of dollars on prisons instead of schools. Non-violent offenders will continue to be imprisoned with violent ones—a veritable training ground for criminality. Individuals with substance use problems or mental illness will not receive the treatment they need. Prisoners will not have access to the rehabilitation programs so vital for reentry into society. The incentives driving prison operations should be to rehabilitate those incarcerated so they can become contributing members of society and not return to crime.

**“Across the country, we've now seen a real shift in philosophy in state legislature, where they are beginning to pass reforms [that] mandate the use of evidence-based programs, and more importantly, they are beginning to focus on what is the most critical aspect of turning around our criminal justice system...figuring out who really needs to be in prison in the first place.”**

-Nancy LaVigne, Director of the Justice Policy Center

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## **ACTION ITEMS**

1. Outlaw private prisons and stop privatizing the criminal justice system.
2. Take steps to keep prisoners connected to family.
3. Increase access to mental health providers inside the prison for long-term mental health services.
4. Increase investment in high quality educational, vocational, and life skills training programs for prisoners, so they develop skills they need upon re-entry and to help reduce recidivism.
5. Connect prisoners to programs and services that will assist with reentry prior to their release.

# 9

Ex-offenders deserve equal opportunity and a second chance to start over.

We need to recognize that once a sentence has been served, individuals have paid their debt to society. Society should view them not in terms of what they were, but who they are now. Hiring policies that require applicants to respond to questions about their criminal history are discriminatory. If you have a criminal history, your record follows you for the rest of your life. Your employability and earnings potential is forever compromised. These hiring practices lead to underemployment and a higher likelihood of individuals returning to crime. If we as a society claim equal opportunity for all, we need to offer these individuals hope that their lives are not over and that they will get a second chance. Giving them a chance to start over is not only fair to the individuals who have paid their dues, it will benefit the overall economy and reduce crime, incarceration, drug use, and unemployment. Instead of all of us suffering the consequences, we will all reap the rewards.

## ACTION ITEMS

### Ban the Felony Box

1. This legislation would change hiring practices for some businesses by prohibiting certain employers from asking about a job applicant's criminal history. Passage of this legislation has huge potential to address employment and recidivism in Baltimore. Baltimore has accomplished this since the symposium was held. Other jurisdictions need to follow suit.

## ACTION ITEMS

### Invest in programs to create fair opportunity after release

1. Create and promote employment opportunities upon release. A job with a fair wage is the surest way of reducing prison recidivism.
2. Educate employers on the valuable human capital they may be discounting because of a criminal record.
3. Create support networks for securing jobs, housing, healthcare, and transportation.
4. Offer addiction treatment programs.
5. Offer re-entry help focused on women.



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# SUCCESS STORIES

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## **Baltimore United Viewfinders**

Baltimore United Viewfinders is a youth-driven organization using the arts to help young people explore their own definitions of self and place. Its mission is to foster the leadership potential of young people as social entrepreneurs producing multimedia arts for community action and income. For more information, please visit: <http://baltimoreviewfinders.org/>.

## **Baltimore Youth Initiative High School**

Baltimore Youth Initiative High School is a non public school led by youth initiative, family commitment, and community, with a focus on fostering a sense of community. The cost of attendance is equity-based and dependent on a family's ability to contribute a combination of money, time, and resources. For more information, please visit: <http://www.byih.org/>.

## **Come Home Baltimore**

After Earl Johnson was released from prison, he co-founded Come Home Baltimore, a privately funded initiative that is rebuilding entire Baltimore City neighborhoods. Come Home Baltimore has focused specifically on Earl's Oliver community, the infamous neighborhood where the HBO series "The Wire" was filmed. Since 2010, they have been leading the effort to bring 10,000 families back to Baltimore. For more information, please visit: <http://comehomebaltimore.com/>.

## **Dew More Baltimore**

Dew More Baltimore is a community-based-organization dedicated to using art and community organizing as tools to increase community engagement in the greater Baltimore community. Its programs support over 700 youth in various communities. For more information, please visit: <http://dewmorebmore.nationbuilder.com/>.

## **Friend of a Friend Program**

Mr. Eddie Conway is a former prisoner who founded the Friend of a Friend Program—a mentoring program to help change the culture within the prison system. Mentors focus on helping incarcerated men learn to build healthy relationships, create support structures, and develop effective communication skills. For more information, please visit: <http://www.afsc.org/program/friend-friend-program>.

## **Girl Scouts Beyond Bars**

A project between the Girl Scouts and the National Institute of Justice, Girl Scouts Beyond Bars arranges formal visits between Scouts and their incarcerated mothers in an effort to keep the vital mother-daughter connection alive, and prevent daughters from following in the footsteps of their mothers. For more information, please visit: <http://www.gscm.org/>.

## **The Men and Families Center**

The Men and Families Center focuses on improving the quality of relationships between fathers and their children, thus enhancing the preservation of families and community in East Baltimore. For more information, please visit: <http://www.menandfamiliescenter.org>.



## **National Prison Project**

This nonprofit is dedicated to helping women get back on their feet after being released from prison. It was founded by Alfreda Robinson Dawkins after serving nearly 10 years in prison on charges related to her son's drug dealing. For more information, please visit:

<http://nicic.gov/wodp/program/358-national-womens-prison-project-inc>.

## **National Network for Safe Communities**

This organization is based on the understanding that core violent crime is driven by a very small number of people—5 percent of people in the most dangerous neighborhoods. A local partnership between police, prosecutors, elders from the community, and other community citizens who offer help can reduce violence in these neighborhoods.

These partnerships seek to improve public safety, minimize arrests and incarceration, enhance police legitimacy, and rebuild relationships between law enforcement and distressed communities. For more information, please visit: <http://www.nnscommunities.org/>.

## **Safe Streets**

Safe Streets is an initiative led by the Baltimore City Health Department to reduce violence in Baltimore through community organization, public education, and outreach. Outreach workers canvas neighborhoods and connect with high-risk youth and young adults during evenings and weekends to diffuse situations and link them to services.

Safe Streets is a tool that communities can use to restore the safety of their streets and strengthen community bonds through community mobilization, outreach, public education, faith, and criminal justice community involvement. For more information, please visit:

<http://health.baltimorecity.gov/node/184>.



For more information on the Social Determinants of Health symposium or the Johns Hopkins Urban Health Institute, please visit: [www.urbanhealth.jhu.edu](http://www.urbanhealth.jhu.edu).



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