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Newsroom

The Jail Trap: Mass Incarceration in RI

Minorities are sent to prison and put on probation far more than whites, creating a cycle that repeats over generations. RWU Law is at the center of efforts to help.

From the Providence Sunday Journal: [“The Jail Trap: Minorities are sent to prison and put on probation far more than whites,”](#) by John Hill, Journal Staff Writer



PROVIDENCE, Nov. 6, 2015: In the movies and on television, when the crime is solved and the wrongdoer convicted, the story ends, usually with someone headed to prison.

But in the real world, those in the criminal justice system say, it's not the end. A whole other story starts when the convict gets out. It's a story about not being able to find a job or a place to live. It's about families losing a significant part of their income and children more likely to suffer childhood trauma, fall behind in school and end up arrested in a cycle that can last generations.

And if you're a black Rhode Islander, the odds of that being your story are much higher than if you are white. [...]

[Retired Superior Court judge Judith C. Savage](#), who co-chairs Governor Raimondo's Justice Reinvestment Working Group, a panel charged with recommending changes to the state's sentencing, probation and parole policies, said those imbalances can't be ignored.

When those numbers went up on a screen at [a March conference at Roger Williams University Law School](#), where she's now on the faculty, virtually the whole room gasped, she said.

"When you start to look at the data and the portrayal of our system, there are immediate things that don't make sense," she said.

"On some level," she added, "we know this isn't right." [...]

Atty. Gen. Peter F. Kilmartin [RWU Law '98] agreed with Paré that the problem is a combination of poverty, education and unemployment. "There are so many pieces to the puzzle."

"If I knew the answer to that I would probably be able to fix the criminal justice system across the country," he said. [...]

Andrew Horwitz, director of the Roger Williams University Law School's criminal-defense clinic, said that low standard means that just being arrested while on probation is enough to get you sent back to prison, even if the offender is acquitted of the new charge. [...]