

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Merced County has adopted overly aggressive policing and prosecution strategies that are entangling far too many Black and Latino men and women in the criminal justice system, while doing little to make the community safer. The city and county are failing to follow best practices for reducing incarceration, improving police community relationships and preventing violence.

- **Between 1985 and 2014 the per capita jail population in Merced County increased by 16 percent.**
- **The number of women incarcerated increased by 274%.**
- **Blacks in Merced are almost 4 times more likely to be in jail than the general population. The percent of Latinos in jail in the county has been increasing faster than Latino population growth and Latinos in low-income communities in Downtown, Southeast and Southwest Merced are subjected to aggressive policing and law enforcement.**
- **Six of ten inmates in behind bars in Merced in 2014 had not been convicted of any crime**

The County's District Attorney and Sheriff, and Merced's Police Chief are responsible for the safety and wellbeing of all people in the county. But they have pursued policies that effectively criminalize Black and Latino communities.

Mass incarceration may be a national issue, but solving it requires sustained local action in Merced. The good news is that there are tested research-based policies that **other counties in California and across the nation have adopted that have succeeded in reducing the number of people of color in jail and under the supervision of the criminal justice system, while making communities safer** and refocusing public resources on education, training, drug treatment and violence prevention.

- Homicide rates in Merced are double the state average, but the city has not adopted evidenced based procedural justice approaches to policing, such as Ceasefire, that have been successful implemented in other cities to reduce gun violence. Nor has it been willing to have city police participation in implicit bias training.
- Instead the Department has adopted discredited gang enforcement practices (Los Angeles' 5-point gang criteria and the new VIPER program) that do not work, result in racial profiling and the criminalization of Black and Latino communities, and exacerbate tensions between the police and community.
- As part of gentrification of Downtown Merced, the Merced Police Department "has been pressured" to engage in aggressive enforcement practices that harass people of color, homeless people and others who are seen as a threat to local business. These practices undermine community trust in the police, and result in incidents such as the videotaped abusive arrest of Jordan Lloyd, for riding a bicycle on the sidewalk, and arrest of Bryce Snell, for videotaping the abuse.
- Merced has not put in place policies – such as eliminating cash bail and setting fees and fines based on ability to pay – designed to prevent people from spending time in jail simply because they are poor.
- There are a host of strategies that Merced could adopt to divert people with mental health and drug problems out of the jail system.
- Merced County continues to collaborate with ICE detainers rather than complying with the Trust Act.
- Merced County District Larry D. Morse II has not adopted responsible prosecutor practices, such as reporting on racial disparities in charging and providing pre-trial services within 24 hours to people who've been arrested