

**Statement by Sen. Bernard Sanders on the Justice is Not For Sale  
Act of 2015**

**September 17, 2015 at 10:00am**

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Thank you all for coming. Let me say a special thanks to Congressman Raul Grijalva. He could not be here today, but I want to thank him for his leadership. I want to also thank Rep. Keith Ellison from Minnesota for joining me today.

There is no doubt that our criminal justice system is broken and in need of major reforms.

It is a national tragedy that the United States of America has more people living in jail than any other country on earth, including China, a communist authoritarian country with a population over four times our size.

It is a national tragedy that a disproportionate number of those who are in jail are black and Hispanic.

We have got to end that tragic reality and we have got to do it now.

The number of people who have been incarcerated in America has quadrupled – from about 500,000 in 1980 to more than 2.2 million today. That is unacceptable.

African Americans are incarcerated at nearly six times the rate of white Americans. That is unacceptable.

It makes no sense to me that the United States of America has more jails and prisons than colleges and universities.

As a nation, our goal must be to do everything we can to create the conditions that prevent mass incarceration. At a time when we are spending \$80 billion a year on our correctional system, it makes a lot more sense to me to be investing in jobs and education than in jails and incarceration.

Not only can we prevent thousands of lives from being destroyed, we can save billions of taxpayer dollars. It is a lot more expensive to throw people in jail than to provide them with a decent education and the training they need to get a good paying job.

In my view, we need bold change in our criminal justice system.

As a first step, we need to start treating prisoners like human beings. Private companies should not be profiting from their incarceration.

Our emphasis must be on rehabilitation, not incarceration and longer prison sentences. The basic decisions regarding criminal justice and public safety must be the responsibility of the citizens of our country and not the investors in private corporations.

It is morally repugnant and a national tragedy that we have privatized prisons all over America.

In my view, corporations should not be allowed to make a profit by building more jails and keeping more Americans behind bars. We have got to end the private-for-profit prison racket in America.

It is unacceptable that companies like Corrections Corporation of America and the Geo Group are spending tens of millions of dollars lobbying Members of Congress and state legislatures all over this country to keep more Americans behind bars for longer and longer sentences. That has got to end.

Today, this situation has gotten so out of hand that our prisoners are no longer people — they have simply become ways to make profits.

And, as we have seen, the profit motivation of private companies works at cross purposes with the goals of criminal justice.

There is no incentive to offer programming to reduce recidivism rates when you make money based on the number of prisoners you house.

And there is no incentive to make your prisons safer, when you can cut corners and save on costs.

Study after study after study has shown private prisons are not cheaper, they are not safer, and they do not provide better outcomes for either the prisoners or the state.

Criminal justice and public safety are, without a doubt, the responsibility of government. They should be carried out by those who answer to voters, not those who answer to investors.

The bill we are introducing today, the Justice is Not for Sale Act, eliminates federal, state and local contracts for privately run prisons within 2 years.

But while we must end the private for profit prison racket, we must also address the harder question of responsibly reducing the prison population.

That's why this bill will also reinstate the federal parole system.

And, by doing this, we will provide a real incentive for prisoners to engage in good behavior and get out of prison sooner.

In my view, we must move away from the one-size-fits-all era of sentencing. If a person has demonstrated he or she is truly rehabilitated, and is ready to be reintegrated into society, they should be given the opportunity to be paroled.

We will also end the arbitrary requirement that Immigration and Customs Enforcement detain 34,000 people on any given day. This so-called "bed quota" is costly and harmful.

Allowing ICE to utilize Alternatives to Detention would save taxpayers over \$5 million per day, or around \$1.4 billion per year.

Finally, we will get other profit motives out of our prison system by requiring the Federal Communications Commission and the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau to regulate services in prisons such as banking and phone calls.

It is outrageous that a fifteen-minute phone call could cost upwards of twelve dollars, or that inmates are charged any number of service fees to access their own money upon release.

This crisis of over incarceration has greatly harmed our society, pulling families apart, and straining government budgets. This bill will begin to turn that around.