



Criminal Justice Reform

Stop extending criminal sentences for prior convictions

[SB 136 \(Wiener\): Sentencing](#)

Background

California has some of the harshest sentence laws in the nation, with over 100 separate sections in the California Penal Code which add time – called “enhancements” – to sentences based on an individual’s prior convictions. One of the most common enhancements is a one-year addition for people convicted of non-violent felonies. Currently, if an individual is convicted of a felony and has previously served time in prison or county jail for a felony, one year is added to their current sentence for each prior felony. According to the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, there were more than 15,000 counts of this one-year enhancement added to sentences of incarcerated individuals, as of December 2018.

This one-year sentence enhancement is extremely costly for California. Sentencing enhancements do not deter people from committing crimes or reduce recidivism. Rather, sentencing enhancements disproportionately impact nonviolent drug offenders and communities of color. Furthermore, each additional year in prison costs the state \$80,000 per person.

Legislative Summary

SB 136 (Wiener) repeals the mandatory one-year sentence enhancement for a prior violent felony. The bill does not alter the individual’s base sentence for the current felony charge, nor does it amend any other enhancements in the Penal Code. The three-year sentence enhancement for defendants with current and prior violent felony convictions will remain in place.

Jewish Values

It is our moral imperative to fight for compassionate and equitable practices at every level of our criminal justice system. Deuteronomy (16:20) teaches, “*Tzedek, tzedek tirdof* – Justice, justice you shall pursue.” As Jews, we are instructed to seek justice and ensure that the means we use to reach justice are just in themselves. A criminal justice system that punishes unjustly and discriminatorily violates this command. We are also guided by the words of Leviticus (19:15), “You shall do no unrighteousness in judgement; you shalt not respect the person of the poor, nor favor the person of the mighty; but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.”



The Religious Action Center pursues social justice and religious liberty by mobilizing the Reform Jewish community and serving as its advocate in Washington, D.C. The Center is led by the Commission on Social Action of the Central Conference of American Rabbis and the Union for Reform Judaism (and its affiliates) and is supported by the congregations of the Union.





In the Jewish tradition, the sanctity of all human life is a primary value. Our definitive goal should be rehabilitation—not excessive punishment.

Legislative Progress as of August 11, 2019

SB 136 passed the state Senate and the Assembly Public Safety Committee. The bill is now before the Assembly Appropriations Committee.