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Dear United States of America,

Criminal justice reform in recent years has become a social justice issue that has been addressed on both sides of the political aisle. Many individuals have varying opinions on what direction reforms should take but fail to consider the various systemic issues that lead to an overburdened criminal justice system. From the school to prison pipeline which impacts the juvenile justice system, to the ease with which a mom trying to send her child to a better school finds herself incarcerated, there are many systemic issues that fuel our prison system. To add to the systemic issues, is the incentive for a high-prison population, cheap labor. The for-profit prison institutions benefit the most from this cheap labor. An inmate in one of these prisons will receive \$0.50 per hour for a 6-hour workday, or \$20 per month maximum. Federal prisons pay the most at \$1.20 per hour. Cheap labor is so enticing, that companies have closed factories to contract the services of prison workers. To ensure a steady supply of cheap labor, private prison corporations readily donate to political campaigns and have often lobbied for mandatory minimum sentences. It is no wonder that much of the recent efforts to curb incarceration has seemed like removing a drop of water from an ever-increasing ocean.

Criminal justice reform is a social justice issue of race, as America's prisons are disproportionately filled with people of color. This racial enigma can be witnessed not just in the male prison population, but the women's and juvenile prison populations as well. It is further evidenced in the ability to justify the incarceration of predominantly Hispanic migrants from South America fleeing poverty, famine, and massive violence. These detention facilities are increasingly being run by for-profit prison corporations. Furthermore, the types of crimes that are given mandatory minimum sentences are typically those that affect minority communities. In contrast, hate crimes are more often not committed by minority groups, and have no mandatory minimum sentences.

So then, if the need for criminal justice reform is a symptom of the racial divide in America, what then can be the solution? A recommendation would be to include better education for young persons and training for current educators on race relations. Education should include how to broach the topic of race and engage in meaningful dialogue in schools. Facilitators of this dialogue must be taught how to guide the conversation with a common goal. To further this goal a secondary recommendation is that our public-school system equally distribute funding throughout the public schools in the state. In many current public-school systems, the amount of funding that a school has access to is based on the quality of living of the neighborhood. This impedes learning in poorer communities and creates a cycle of poverty which in turn feeds the prison system. Education alone is not enough but creates an opportunity for the future society of our children to thrive. Education is necessary for youths and adults, as youths coming from varying socio-economic backgrounds may not be readily exposed to minorities that have not had similar life experiences.

It is quite evident that criminal justice reform and race relations are inexorably entwined when one considers that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, a hero for the civil rights movement, wrote some of the most quoted and memorable words from jail. Another famed civil rights activist that greatly benefited the civil rights movement, Malcolm X, was also incarcerated. In order to make significant impact on criminal justice reform, radical to some, and uncomfortable for many, steps must be taken by those in a position to act.