

Faith in Florida

Orlando, FL

www.faithinflorida.org


NCRP: *What is Faith in Florida and how does its faith-based organizing approach make it uniquely suited to address systemic racial and economic barriers?*

Faith in Florida: A member of the PICO National Network, Faith in Florida is a multifaith, multiracial community organization that builds power in communities across Florida to address issues that cause suffering for our families. Our faith calls us to speak with one voice and constructively engage decision-makers and institutions to address systemic racial and economic issues. Particularly in the Black community, the church continues to be a hub that holds communities together, a place where people learn and share information. Our faith-based organizing approach draws from these strengths.

NCRP: *Florida has a unique cultural and political environment, especially around its relationship to prisons and incarcerated people. How has this affected your work?*

Faith in Florida: Returning citizens in Florida are set up for an ongoing cycle of failure, facing barriers to housing, employment and social services. Close to two million Floridians have lost their right to vote. Florida is one of only three states where all people with felony convictions are permanently disenfranchised unless they are pardoned.

Sadly, money dominates our state's political system. Florida policymakers enjoy a beneficial relationship with private prison companies and the American Legislative Exchange Council. We have seen this in recent attempts to privatize a majority of Florida's prisons, significant campaign contributions made to the governor by pri-



Image courtesy of Faith in Florida.

vate prison corporation The GEO Group and a reluctance to implement policies to reduce the recidivism rate. We must fight against this political context to restore the rights of people in our communities.

NCRP: *What are the goals of your Live Free Campaign? What challenges and successes have you encountered?*

Faith in Florida: Our state Live Free campaign, in coordination with the national campaign led by PICO, seeks to address the systematic criminalization of people of color. We work to promote fair employment opportunity for returning citizens by banning the box, restoring voting rights through clemency reform, implementing "Ceasefire" programs to policing and reduce gun violence, and deepening our communities' understanding of race's role in our criminal justice system.

In the past year, we helped to lead efforts in partnership with St. Vincent DePaul and the National Employment Law Project that have successfully "banned the box" in four Florida cities. We are working to build support across the state for voting rights restoration. Largely as a result of our efforts, the cities of North Miami Beach, Florida City, Opa Locka, Miami Gardens and El Portal have passed resolutions urging the governor and his cabinet to revise the clemency policy.

We also have held key meetings with law enforcement in Miami and Orlando to gain support for a Ceasefire initiative.

At the same time, we are up against opponents with a huge war chest. Raising sufficient resources to combat resistance to reform is a challenge.

NCRP: *Why is rights restoration for previously incarcerated individuals crucial to criminal justice reform?*

Faith in Florida: With rights restoration, returning citizens and their families would form a sizable voting bloc. This would help convince elected officials to embrace sensible criminal justice reform and enact policies that remove reentry barriers in employment and housing.

NCRP: *How can foundations best support efforts to end mass incarceration?*

Faith in Florida: Foundations should invest meaningfully in the recruitment, training and leadership development of formerly incarcerated individuals to lead campaigns for reform in their communities and states. We need moral clarity to win on these issues. Foundations should invest in organizations like Faith in Florida and our sister organizations in the PICO network that appeal to people's moral values, not just their economic interests. ■