State-Level Criminal Justice Progress in 2026

Despite a narrative that progress on criminal justice reform has slowed—or even died—the movement proved resilient in state houses across the country. In 2026, legislatures in 45 states with active sessions, plus Washington, DC, passed 425 criminal justice reform laws, in red, blue, and purple states alike. Reform held its ground through a national turn toward "tough-on-crime" politics rather than giving way to it, and there are signs the tide is beginning to turn in favor of progress.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

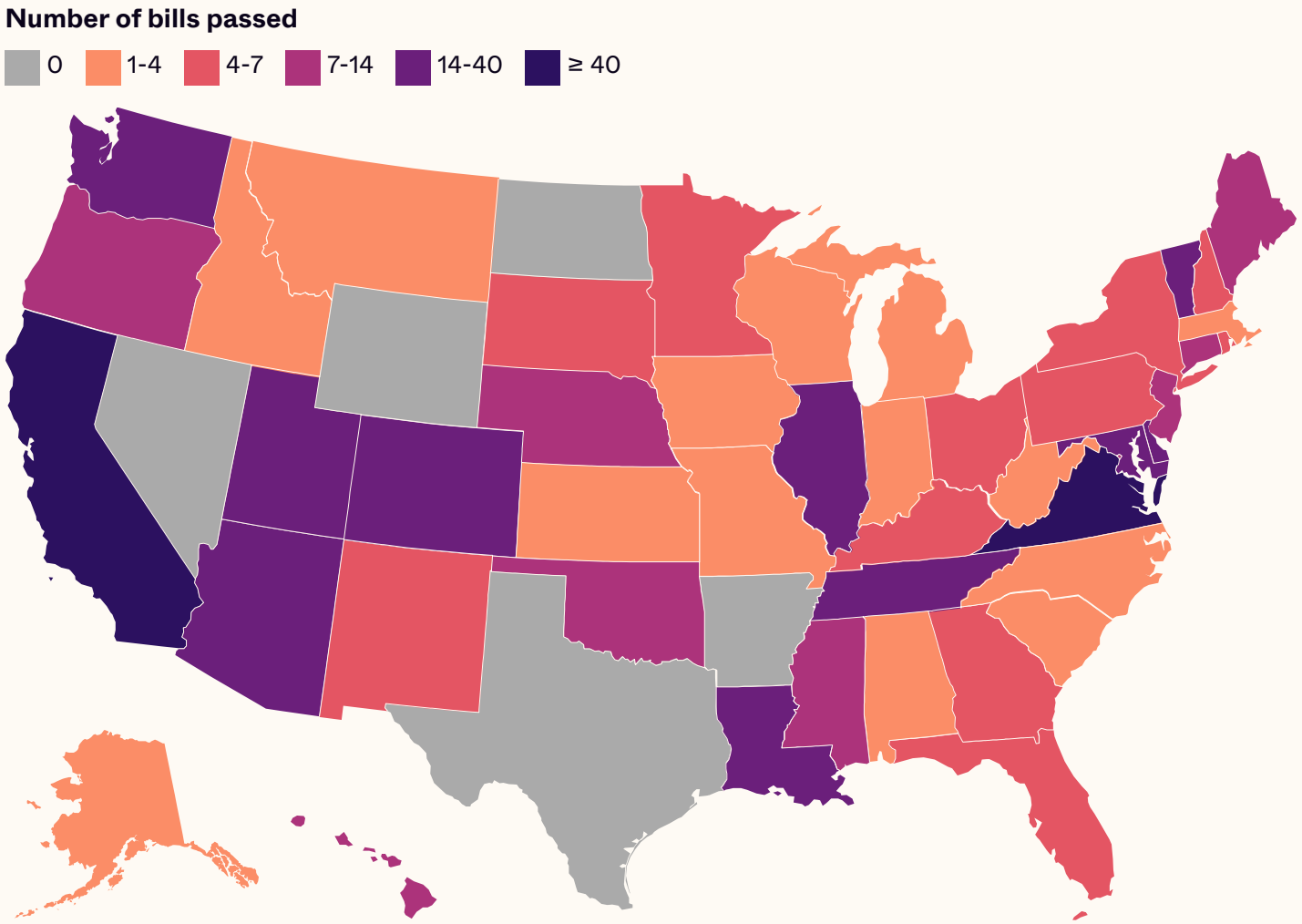
2026 at a glance:

- **425 laws** passed across **45 states**—every state with an active legislative session but Arkansas—and Washington, DC.
    - We identified notable areas of progress, including sentencing, reentry, juvenile justice, diversion, officer/first-responder wellness, alternative response, fines and fees, access to justice, immigrant rights, and law enforcement accountability.
- **Democratic-led states passed 58 percent of all reform laws, Republican-led states 28 percent, and divided states 14 percent**, evidence that reform remains a bipartisan project.
- **Reentry saw the most laws passed this year**, including Maryland's Fair Chance Housing Act, Louisiana's transitional reentry program for incarcerated women, and Nebraska's Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act.
- **Juvenile justice** reform also took major steps forward this year across 33 laws, despite a media frenzy about "teen takeovers" and federal calls for harsher punishment for youth crime.
- **The Trump administration's mass deportation campaign ignited momentum for law enforcement accountability and to protect immigrants, but only in Democratic-led states**. Nine states restricted state and local law enforcement cooperation with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) (along with a growing number of jurisdictions), while six states empowered residents to sue federal agents for constitutional violations. No red states, however, passed comparable accountability reforms, despite their widespread popularity.
- **Surveillance and policing** were thrust into the spotlight this year after a rapid expansion in surveillance tech and swift public backlash. **Five states**, including divided Kentucky, enacted new guardrails on automated license plate readers.
- **But progress was not unchallenged**. Iowa, Kansas, and Missouri passed sentencing packages that will expand their prison populations for years. Several Democratic governors, including in Virginia and Colorado, vetoed reforms passed by their legislatures.

Jurisdictions to watch: Blue states like Colorado, Maryland, New Jersey, and Virginia continued building on strong records of reform rather than resting on their laurels. Maryland enacted major reforms for the second consecutive year, including a Fair Chance Housing Act and the Youth Charging Reform Act, while Connecticut enacted one of the country's most sweeping responses to federal overreach, letting residents and the attorney general sue ICE directly. Purple and red states continued advancing reform as well: Oklahoma passed fines-and-fees reform, expungement, and voting rights restoration, and Missouri's Clean Slate law shows this agenda breaking through even in a Republican trifecta.

Bottom line: Although threats to progress still loom large and the federal climate remains challenging, the reform movement has built a durable, bipartisan foundation, and 2026 shows that it is resilient enough to weather fearmongering from the bully pulpit, media, and midterm campaign trail. Now, with crime at historic lows and voters increasingly wanting policies that deliver safety, justice, and accountability instead of simply more police, prisons, and punishment, there is an opening for lawmakers and advocates alike to continue building on progress.

Over the past six years, a popular narrative has taken hold that progress on criminal justice reform in the United States is stalled, or even dead. This narrative suggests that after landmark victories in the 2010s, the pendulum swung back against reform amid a backlash to the racial justice movement of 2020 and a pandemic-era rise in crime. This may be true at the federal level, where virtually every major issue remains gridlocked. But at the state level, criminal justice reform continued to thrive as a bipartisan issue in 2026, demonstrating that it has weathered a period during which the country turned toward a punitive politics of fear. As politics and public opinion continue to shift in favor of justice and immigrant rights while "tough-on-crime" fearmongering loses its potency amid a historic drop in crime, the reform movement is



positioned to accelerate in 2027 and beyond.

Various criminal justice experts have observed this trend in recent years. Princeton University's Udi Ofer and the Council on Criminal Justice's Marc Levin have written about the persistence of state-level progress. As Ofer wrote in The Atlantic in 2024, "The reform movement has entered a new era of quiet pragmatism, which focuses on practical solutions and consensus-building rather than ideological purity." Yet ill-informed critics, including the president, continue to fearmonger against popular, evidence-backed reforms, feeding the backlash narrative that the facts don't support.

In 2026, states passed 425 criminal justice reform and immigration laws across 45 states, plus Washington, DC, that held legislative sessions, from 76 laws in reentry to 52 in sentencing reform and 54 in law enforcement accountability. The movement remains bipartisan: Republican-led (trifecta) states account for 28 percent of all laws, Democratic-led states account for 58 percent, and divided states account for 14 percent. Many of these reforms are incremental, while some mark real breakthroughs. Maryland became the fourth state to pass a Fair Chance Housing Act to eliminate barriers to housing access for people returning from incarceration. Missouri became the 14th state to pass a Clean Slate law. Six states now have policies allowing people to sue federal agents for violating their constitutional rights.

Despite headwinds and continued setbacks, criminal justice reform remains a popular and personal issue in the United States. Nearly one in two adults has had an immediate family member incarcerated, and roughly one in three have some kind of conviction history. In 2024, FWD.us polling found that 81 percent of likely voters support justice reform, with strong support across battleground states, racial groups, and political parties. Vera Action research shows that voters consistently choose proven solutions that prevent crime and break its cycle, not simply more police and prisons. The political conditions that fueled the backlash are also changing. The pandemic-era rise in crime that drove much of the retreat has solidly

reversed. Historic-low crime rates have weakened the case for punitive responses.

This report unpacks state-level legislative progress in 2026 to help lawmakers and advocates prepare for the coming legislative sessions. Because several sessions are still in progress and some bills await governors' signatures, Vera is releasing it now to aid 2027 planning, and an addendum will follow in January. This kind of review relies on subjective criteria, as detailed at the end of the report, and thus should be read as informative rather than as an exact account.

Importantly, state legislation is only part of the story. Reform is also advancing through local governments, state budgets, courts, and other system actors. In 2026, for example, New York City and Chicago established violence-prevention offices; Pennsylvania invested in a new Medicaid reentry program; district attorneys fought to hold federal agents accountable; and a California court recently ruled that bail must be affordable, while a Pennsylvania court struck down mandatory life without parole for second-degree murder. States also made real headway funding deportation defense: State and local investments have climbed from approximately $260 million in 2025 to more than $500 million committed nationwide for 2027, helping ensure that the rising number of immigrants in detention can access their basic rights to due process.

As we enter 2027, mass incarceration still remains deeply entrenched, with many states enacting policies that worsen the problem and the federal government rapidly expanding immigrant detention, including using space in state and local jails and prisons to hold people in civil immigration custody. Yet the progress on reform has not retreated. This report shows how, in the face of rollbacks and a hostile federal government, states are still leading the charge toward a system grounded in evidence and focused on delivering safety, justice, and accountability.

Progress in 2026

States advanced reforms at every stage of the system. The breadth of this year's progress is notable, with certain issues standing out:

- Juvenile justice: Even as a media frenzy about "teen takeovers" threatened to derail progress, states passed 33 juvenile justice laws—including Maryland's Youth Charging Reform Act victory, which narrows the circumstances in which youth can be tried as adults.
- Conditions of incarceration: 50 laws sought to improve conditions in jails and prisons, from protecting transgender people from invasive strip searches to strengthening oversight of incarcerated people's medical care. Colorado, Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, and California also strengthened state oversight of deadly immigrant detention facilities.
- Reentry: At least 12 states passed laws making it easier for formerly incarcerated people to expunge or seal conviction records, while six expanded voting rights for people with convictions. This includes Republican strongholds: Missouri became the 14th state to enact a Clean Slate law, also joining Oklahoma and Tennessee in expanding voting rights to people with conviction histories. Other laws will help people secure housing, avoid technical violations of parole, access benefits like treatment and SNAP, serve on a jury, get identification, and much more.
- Sentencing: 52 laws continued efforts to revisit the lengthy, punitive sentences at the heart of mass incarceration. New Jersey and Tennessee passed variations of survivor justice laws that ensure courts weigh a survivor's history of abuse or trauma at sentencing when that history is connected to their criminal offense. Three states also reduced the collateral consequences of past cannabis convictions, while nine expanded parole opportunities.
- Diversion: 12 laws were based on evidence that treatment and community-based alternatives can build more safety than incarceration. Mississippi created a statewide youth community diversion program, while Tennessee allowed people who successfully complete a recovery-court program to seek expungement.
- Fines and fees: 13 laws continued dismantling the system of criminal justice debt trapping people in a cycle of poverty and incarceration, even as federal funding cuts threaten that progress. Vermont eliminated Department of Corrections supervisory fees, while Arizona prohibited imposing fees for

public defense, appeals, and jury trials.

- Alternative response: 10 laws expanded the role of civilian responders, crisis teams, and treatment services, treating mental health crises as health and social matters rather than as policing ones. Indiana, for instance, officially designated 988 crisis response centers and mobile crisis teams as first responders.
- Access to justice: 38 laws worked to make the justice system more navigable and equitable. Louisiana established a statewide Sexual Assault Nurse Examiner (SANE) program, while Virginia expanded indigent defense attorneys' free access to court records.
- Immigrants: A wave of states answered demands to protect immigrant communities from an escalating federal crackdown—with 50 laws in total—though progress was divided sharply along party lines. California, Maryland, and New York all enacted No Kings Acts letting people sue federal agents for constitutional violations (led by Illinois in late 2025), while some states formed creative responses, like Hawai`i's law aiming to mitigate immigration consequences from a misdemeanor conviction.
- Law enforcement accountability: 54 laws advanced accountability and training measures for police, from arrest powers to surveillance tools. California's AB1854 bars police from arresting people for seeking legally protected reproductive or gender-affirming health care, and Delaware's HB145 sharply restricts officers' use of "reverse keyword" searches to obtain warrants. This work continued alongside a parallel wave of accountability measures aimed specifically at federal immigration agents.
- Officer/first-responder wellness: Officers and first responders who are supported and equipped to do their jobs are better positioned to serve their communities effectively. Six laws expanded access to behavioral health and supportive services in 2026, including Arizona's, which created confidential peer support and counseling programs for public safety employees.

Maryland continued to lead the way among Democratic-led states advancing justice reform

In 2025, Maryland took major strides forward for justice reform, including a Second Look Act and geriatric and medical parole reform, showing how states can move significant legislation even in the face of "tough-on-crime" headwinds.

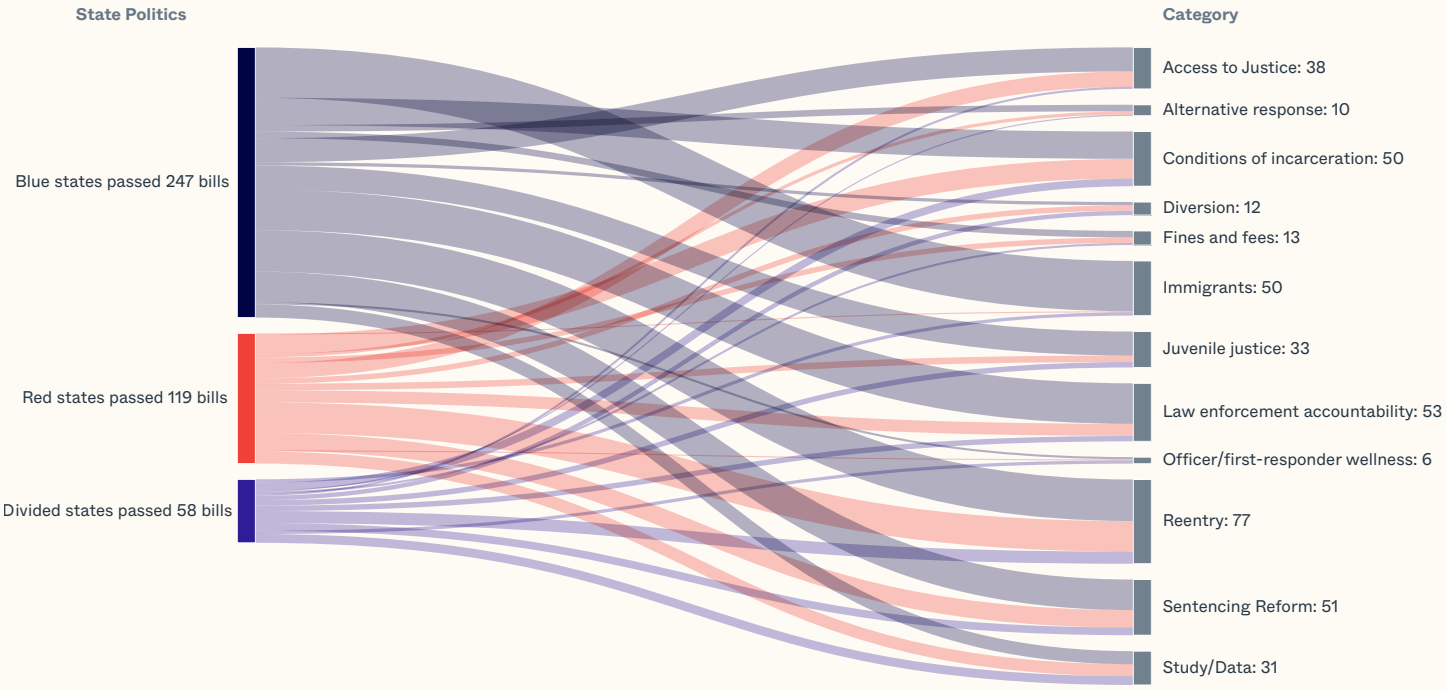
Rather than resting on that record, Maryland enacted 24 more laws this year. It became the fourth state (after New Jersey, Colorado, and Oregon) to pass a Fair Chance Housing Act, which limits the use of criminal background checks in rental applications. This is a critical step toward giving formerly incarcerated Marylanders a fairer chance to secure housing, one of the most important elements of successful reentry. Maryland also took on juvenile justice, despite a climate of concern over youth crime and major opposition. It passed the Youth Charging Reform Act to end automatically charging kids as adults for certain offenses and to prohibit children from being placed in adult jails. The state also enacted a significant parole reform law, restored the right of people with most convictions to serve on a jury, and allowed volunteers into prisons to help prepare people for release.

Neighboring Virginia also saw a successful legislative session, marking a departure from a period of hostility to reform under previous governor Glenn Youngkin. This year, the state expanded earned time credits, limited the amount of time young people spend in their room or cell, and established a literacy program for incarcerated people reading below an eighth-grade level. Colorado was similarly active, passing measures to increase state oversight of correctional facilities and expanding opportunities for sentence reduction. However, in both states, governors undercut progress by vetoing important reforms.

New Jersey, long a leader in justice reform, had a productive 2026 as well. The Garden State followed in the steps of states like Oklahoma and Georgia in passing a Survivor Justice Act, allowing courts to consider shorter sentences (and resentencing) for survivors of abuse. Additionally, the Incarcerated Women's Protection Act provides new services for incarcerated women, including pre-release counseling and doula services for pregnant women, and a new Division of Women's Services under the Department of Corrections.

Bills passed per category in blue states, red states, and divided states

Band width is proportional to number of bills



Oklahoma and other Republican-led states are defying the stereotype that criminal justice is a partisan issue

Many perceive criminal justice reform as a "liberal" or "progressive" issue, especially as some Republican-led states, like Louisiana, have turned away from past progress. But Oklahoma has remained committed to reforms addressing its astronomically high incarceration rate and racial disparities. In recent years, the state has passed a Clean Slate law, the Oklahoma Survivors' Act, and a law to eliminate many criminal justice fees.

This year, Oklahoma continued to reform the use of fines and fees, requiring courts to assess a defendant's ability to pay fines, costs, and fees before imposing them and preventing incarcerating people solely for fines or costs they can't afford to pay. It also removed barriers to expungement (including automating the Clean Slate process), restored voting rights for people who have completed incarceration and probation for a felony offense, and established a mentoring program for children of incarcerated parents.

Oklahoma is not alone: in Nebraska, the Youth Reentry and Transitional Support Act improves reentry support for youth, and another law improves education and vocational training behind bars. South Carolina expanded a diversion program for people charged with a first offense, allowing them to participate again if enough time has passed. Tennessee passed a law establishing human trafficking as a justification for self-defense, and Indiana established a 988 crisis response center and mobile crisis team. Even Louisiana enacted some modest legislation, like establishing a new reentry program for women and a requirement to provide people leaving state prisons with identification. These laws will not offset Louisiana's return to failed punitive approaches, but they show that even in a challenging environment, advocates can still find openings that make a real difference in people's lives.

Many states took action to protect immigrant communities from overreach by federal law enforcement

As federal immigration enforcement has grown vastly more aggressive under the Trump administration, state legislatures have responded with bills limiting local entanglement with ICE and attempting to

safeguard the rights of people at risk of detention and deportation. Some states already had such laws, like Maine's 1989 Civil Rights Act and New York's 2019 Protect Our Courts Act. This year brought a renewed push, with states and localities building on one another's work.

Many of the new laws answer accountability demands that federal Democrats attempted to win during the shutdown this year: Seven states have banned masked enforcement, nine have required judicial warrants for certain civil immigration arrests, six have created civil remedies for agents who violate constitutional rights, and 11 have declared schools, hospitals, and other sensitive locations off-limits to ICE arrests. Four have also banned 287(g) agreements, bringing the total number of states banning cooperation between local and federal law enforcement to 10. Maryland's Community Trust Act and No Kings Act, New Jersey and Virginia's mask bans and ICE limits, and California's ban on electric shock gloves are among the measures in this wave.

Connecticut's bipartisan omnibus bill, SB 397, was one of the most sweeping responses: in addition to the above measures, it allows residents and the attorney general to sue ICE for constitutional violations, empowers the state inspector general to probe federal use-of-force incidents, protects the right to record enforcement actions, and ensures that all peace officers, including federal agents, meet Connecticut's basic police training requirements. Other states targeted ICE's dangerous and deadly detention facilities, with Delaware, Maryland, and New Mexico largely banning private detention contracts.

Nevertheless, states are running up against ICE's apparent impunity. Even in states with 287(g) bans, local police and jail staff have continued to informally collaborate with federal agents, and ICE has already flouted its constitutional obligation to obtain judicial warrants. Even the most consequential reforms face an uncertain future: Colorado's law mandating annual health and safety inspections of detention facilities was partially blocked after a lawsuit from detention contractor GEO Group, and the DOJ is suing Maryland over its Community Trust Act, among a litany of other suits against blue states.

These laws establish a vital line of defense, but they cannot end the harm: immigrants across the country continue to face the violence, chaos, and lethal consequences of enforcement. No state law can match the breadth of federal enforcement. And in much of the country, people have no protections at all: in July 2026, 39 percent of people detained by ICE were held in Republican-dominated Texas and Louisiana, and ICE arrests are climbing fastest in Republican-led jurisdictions. Meanwhile, significant legislation that would bring fairness and dignity into the immigration system remains stalled—like New York's Access to Representation Act and California's AB 2600, which would guarantee legal representation for anyone facing deportation. Next year, lawmakers at every level, including in Congress, can continue to learn from one another and find new ways to rein in ICE, safeguard due process, and establish accountability, rather than rest on these 2026 victories.

Advances in surveillance technology and uproar over Flock cameras led many states to address surveillance

As more information emerges about how law enforcement—federal and state/local—is using emerging surveillance technologies, states are moving to regulate what data they can collect and share. In particular, automated license plate readers (ALPRs) emerged as a flashpoint this session: unlike a single traffic camera, networked ALPR systems like Flock Safety's link thousands of individual devices into a searchable, potentially nationwide database.

Investigations this year found that local police departments were running thousands of searches on ICE's behalf, effectively granting them warrantless access to a massive nationwide surveillance network. Though ALPRs are marketed as a crime prevention tool, police have wielded them to track women seeking legal abortions across state lines, stalk women, target journalists, and accuse people of crimes they did not commit. The backlash to this mass surveillance technology has been bipartisan and geographically broad—as of October 9, 2026, 417 cities and counties had dropped their Flock contracts, 367 of those in 2026 alone. Both Florida Governor Ron DeSantis and Texas Governor Greg Abbott recently moved to restrict police use of Flock surveillance systems.

This has also become a bipartisan issue in state legislatures. This year, five states codified enforceable

guardrails: New Mexico's Driver Privacy and Safety Act bars ALPR data from being used or shared for federal immigration enforcement or to investigate activity that is legal under state law, including seeking reproductive or gender-affirming health care. Kentucky's Republican-backed HB 58 caps ALPR data retention at 90 days and mandates public-facing use policies. This progress is evidence that privacy concerns, which will only continue to grow with advances in artificial intelligence, are beginning to cut across party lines.

Progress also means defeating harmful bills

Despite such broad progress, states are still passing laws that lengthen sentences, undermine police accountability, and criminalize homelessness, among many other harmful actions. That makes stopping harmful bills a central part of any honest account of progress. These wins are worth recognizing, and they often demand as much work as passing new laws.

In California, dedicated advocates flock to Sacramento every year to help lawmakers understand how criminal justice bills that may appear sensible will actually cause real damage. This year, one such bill would have enhanced sentences for domestic violence. As advocate and survivor Claudia Gonzalez testified, "AB 292 is framed as a measure to prevent domestic violence and hold people accountable. It will do neither. Instead, AB 292 will expand punishment that risks deepening the criminalization of domestic violence survivors who are often arrested for acts connected to self-defense or survival." The bill passed the assembly but failed to make it out of the Senate Public Safety Committee, ensuring its demise.

Another important win came in Arizona, where Governor Katie Hobbs vetoed SB 1061. This bill, which the governor also vetoed in 2025, would have reduced the threshold for mandatory minimums for fentanyl possession with intent to sell from 200 grams to just nine grams. Advocates argued that the state should invest in treatment instead and that harsher punishment wouldn't deter people from using drugs. In her veto letter, Hobbs touted her administration's actions to fight the overdose crisis and explained that this bill "does not effectively target the high-level drug dealers and cartels who are responsible for pushing poison on our streets."

Somewhat similarly, in Wisconsin, Governor Tony Evers vetoed a sentencing enhancement for distributing drugs in or near a shelter, explaining, "Wisconsin should be taking an evidence-based, data-driven approach to corrections and justice reform—this can help make our communities safer and reduce the likelihood that someone might reoffend when they are released."

Progress has come alongside significant rollbacks

While this progress should be celebrated, it shouldn't distract from the parallel rollbacks that hit red and blue states alike. Even as criminal justice reform advances, many states continue to undermine it with outdated "tough-on-crime" measures like sentencing enhancements.

At least three states passed major packages this year that will fill their prisons—and drain their budgets—for years to come. A Missouri law increased mandatory minimums for prison sentences, with the law's fiscal note stating that it will require the construction of a new $825 million maximum security prison. An Iowa law creates a "three-strikes" rule for "habitual offenders," while Kansas similarly passed a law effectively instituting a "two-strikes" rule for juveniles—threatening to unwind decades of past successful juvenile justice reforms in the state.

In the wake of the Supreme Court's 2024 Grants Pass decision allowing cities to punish people for sleeping outside, states like Indiana and Louisiana also continue to pass laws criminalizing public camping that punish people experiencing homelessness. Louisiana's law even authorizes courts to order unhoused people into unpaid labor programs if they cannot afford treatment.

This year, several red states walked in lockstep with the president's agenda. Kansas lawmakers overrode Democratic Governor Laura Kelly's veto to let county jails hold people without charges pending ICE transfer. In advance of Trump's Model Cities Initiative that seeks to enlist local governments under a unified federal enforcement agenda, numerous states, including Indiana and Mississippi, passed anti-

sanctuary laws requiring police to collaborate with ICE. Idaho and Tennessee, meanwhile, created new state crimes tied to violations of federal immigration law. And in the wake of the Trump administration's memo pushing states to expand capital punishment, Alabama, Mississippi, and Tennessee all moved to make child sex crimes death-eligible, effectively inviting a challenge against Supreme Court precedent.

In some blue states, governors remain an obstacle to progress. Virginia Governor Abigail Spanberger, despite leading a Democratic trifecta, vetoed bills that would have banned ICE courthouse arrests and created a regulated legal cannabis market, among others. In Democratic-controlled Colorado, Governor Jared Polis vetoed a bill to let residents sue federal immigration agents for civil rights violations. And in purple Maine, Governor Janet Mills vetoed the bipartisan Clean Slate bill.

Blue states also actively advanced legislation harmful to criminal justice: California's AB 46 makes it easier for judges to deny diversion for defendants who otherwise qualify for community mental-health treatment. California, Maryland, Oregon, and Rhode Island enhanced criminal penalties for metal theft, responding to (and in some cases amplifying) public anxiety over visible property crime.

These setbacks will take years to undo, and they show how fragile progress can be. Even as evidence continues to favor reform, many lawmakers remain convinced that "tough-on-crime" policy is the only answer, and others lack the courage to defend sensible policy. That is why this moment of resilience matters—reform does not advance in a straight line, and every gain must be defended.

Conclusion

The 2026 sessions continue to challenge the narrative that the country has lost its appetite for criminal justice and immigration reform. Criminal justice reform no longer commands the attention it did in 2020, but it is advancing, quietly and unevenly, out of the spotlight. This remains a bipartisan issue that can improve safety and community stability, while in many cases saving significant taxpayer money. Lawmakers, advocates, funders, and voters all have good reason to be encouraged, and no one should write off red states as having abandoned the issue.

Still, the familiar obstacles remain, including powerful lobbies, politicians, and pundits who fearmonger to score political points. The president continues to use the bully pulpit to rail against U.S. cities and advocate for policies like harsher bail laws and more capital punishment, while advancing his own false narrative that unchecked immigration enforcement and federal deployments are making the country safer. Already, states like Texas are planning to advance "tough" policies in 2027.

The present moment offers both peril and opportunity. Many states whose leaders are allied with the president will likely keep pursuing "tough-on-crime" policies that serve his agenda, and resisting such efforts will sap energy that could otherwise go toward progress. But slowly, the ground is shifting. Many states are channeling their opposition to the administration into action, and that energy can carry into criminal justice—for example, by turning public concern about federal law enforcement into renewed demand for police accountability. Voters are also increasingly noticing that crime is at record lows, and majorities already back a long list of reforms. The fear that drove the last six years of backlash is losing its hold. Lawmakers who champion reforms will be on solid ground.

The lesson of 2026 is one of persistence. Reform has not run its course; advocates this year have maintained a steady drumbeat of progress—some victories sweeping, some incremental but meaningful nonetheless—even amid a national turn toward a punitive politics of fear. Now, with the political winds shifting again, they are well positioned to seize the moment and accelerate the reform agenda in 2027 and beyond, in city halls, statehouses, and Congress.

Methodology

This report is not—and should not be interpreted as—a purely objective tally. There are many questions at play in defining "progress" in criminal justice reform. For example, what degree of incremental reform constitutes progress? In many cases, answering these questions simply meant discussing a given bill with

subject experts at Vera and elsewhere to arrive at a conclusion. But we have established certain criteria that may be useful to readers:

- We included bills with both good and bad provisions, unless the negative aspects clearly overwhelmed the positive.
- We did not include appropriations bills unless they established a noteworthy new program.
- Especially given current events in 2026, we included immigration-related bills on grounds that they are regulating the activity of federal law enforcement (for example, ICE agents).
- For certain complex criminal justice issues like electronic monitoring, we included bills only when they explicitly intended to reduce the footprint of mass incarceration.
- We did not include bills related to family court, child welfare, or civil court.
- We did not include court procedural bills that address issues like competency and crime survivors. We did include survivor bills that did not predicate protections on cooperation with law enforcement.
- For issues tangentially related to criminal justice, like surveillance, we only included bills that address their interaction with the criminal justice system, such as how law enforcement may use the data.
- We did not include bills that were largely legislated in 2025 but technically signed in 2026, like Illinois's Clean Slate law.
- In general, we tried to balance our principles of reform with recognition of broader harm. For example, we did not include bills restoring gun rights, even though we broadly support restoration of rights for people with convictions.
- We generally included marginal reforms even if systemic reform would be better. For example, we included bills improving conditions for pregnant and postpartum people even though a truly just system would endeavor to keep them out of incarceration entirely. But we excluded, for example, a minor accountability measure for private probation providers, as such a small measure will do little to address the harms of private probation.
- We included bills calling for data access or reports. Even though these may appear marginal and often result from the failure of more substantive legislation, they can enable progress in the long run.

Additionally, research for this report required combing through thousands of 2026 bills, and despite our meticulous efforts, we have surely missed bills that some might count as progress. Nevertheless, in service of producing a report that would be useful to lawmakers and advocates, we have done our best to establish criteria to facilitate such a report. Should you note any missing bills or included bills you think should clearly be struck, we would welcome your feedback at tmazaj@vera.org.