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Dear Colleagues,

On January 1, 2020, New York State implemented new legislation to eliminate cash bail for most misdemeanors and Class E felonies. We at the Prisoner Reentry Institute want to thank the advocates and state and city officials whose efforts have crafted this important and overdue measure to instill greater fairness into the administration of justice.

New York's bail laws had remained largely unchanged since the early 1970s - the same period in which the U.S. prison population began growing exponentially due to increasingly punitive policies that disproportionately targeted low-income individuals and communities of color. For decades, cash bail contributed to perpetuating a two-tiered justice system: one for people who could afford to pay for release prior to trial, and another for everyone else. PRI commends Governor Cuomo and the State Legislature for overhauling our archaic bail system and ending cash bail for almost 90% of all arrests.

New York City also deserves enormous credit for effectively reducing crime, while simultaneously reducing detention, incarceration, and rates of recidivism. The City has done this by recognizing the failures of the "tough on crime" era and, instead, developing generative approaches to address the underlying issues. They have been focused on developing robust initiatives undertaken in partnership with the community that invest in increasing the ability of people, after arrest, to live successfully, support themselves, and live law-abiding lives.

We at PRI appreciate the leadership of the State in changing the law, and of the City for their forward thinking about how to best ensure public safety while realizing the promise of bail reform. Let's implement the law in good faith. We must not allow this reform to be derailed by efforts to sensationalize the law and to promote fear and division—and certainly not before it has even been given a chance.

Together, we can make 2020 a turning point in our collective journey toward justice. I wish you all a Happy New Year!

With Gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ann L. Jacobs".

Ann L. Jacobs  
Executive Director, Prisoner Reentry Institute