



For Immediate Release

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Contact:

Courtney Holsworth, cholsworth@rabengroup.com, (989) 572-8162

Reducing Harms of Incarceration: New Report from Square One Project on Ways Correctional Leaders Can Make Change

Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia, one of the first clinical psychologists to ever run a jail, releases new framework on lessons learned from piloting innovative healing-centered programs at Cook County Jail

New York, NY— Prisons and jails aren't only traumatic for those who are incarcerated but also for the staff who work inside, their families and the broader community according to a new paper from the Square One Project, written by Dr. Nneka Jones Tapia, one of the first-ever clinical psychologists to run a jail. The paper includes a framework for correctional leaders on how to shift their institutions away from punishment and toward healing and harm reduction.

[*Harm Reduction at the Center of Incarceration*](#), offers the distinctive perspective of a jail warden, family member of a formerly incarcerated loved one, and family member of a correctional professional. Jones Tapia shares lessons learned from piloting and implementing innovative family visitation and harm-reducing practices in the Cook County Jail. The paper explains the ways existing trauma-informed care models and policies fail to acknowledge staff, families and communities. Addressing the obstacles that Sheriffs and Correctional Commissioners face in moving from a system of punishment, Jones Tapia offers short and long-term strategies.

“Jails are often monuments to trauma, and their transformation into institutions of healing may indeed leave us with no more jails at all,” said **Nneka Jones Tapia, author of the paper and Managing Director of Justice Initiatives at impact investor Chicago Beyond**. “The lives of millions of men, women and children are harmed by the effects of mass incarceration, and correctional leaders can help make change. When we treat people with humanity and compassion and invest in their strengths, we effectively take steps to reduce the harms that these institutions cause.”

Drawing on her experience of having a parent who was formerly incarcerated and following her tenure as warden of Cook County Jail, Jones Tapia and her colleagues at Chicago Beyond developed a model for family-friendly visitation in correctional institutions. The model emphasizes the importance of stakeholder and community voice in the development of visitation programs, as well as policies and practices that center human dignity and supportive resources for the individuals who are confined and their families.

Now, Jones Tapia has created a first of its kind framework for correctional leaders to better support the people detained, staff and their families. The framework provides recommendations for correctional leaders centering on safety, transparency, agency, asset-based approaches, and interpersonal connections for the people who are incarcerated, staff and families to minimize the harm created by jails and prisons.

The scope of the impact of trauma stemming from mass incarceration is substantial. Each of these people is connected to families and larger communities, extending the reach of trauma far beyond what has been measured.

- Approximately 2.3 million people are confined in our nation's jails and prisons. Every year, people are placed in jails 10.6 million times and more than 600,000 people enter our nation's prisons.
- On any given day, approximately 2.7 million US children have a parent who is incarcerated, and more than 5 million children have experienced parental incarceration in their lifetime.
- Approximately 415,000 correctional officers work in our jails and prisons.

This report is released through Square One's Executive Session on the Future of Justice Policy, which seeks to generate and cultivate new ideas around the work to reimagine justice. Read the full report [HERE](#). Learn more about Chicago Beyond and Dr. Jones Tapia's work leading their justice initiatives [here](#).

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About the Square One Project

The Square One Project at the Columbia Justice Lab aims to reimagine justice and create a pathway for reckoning in our country. Square One incubates new thinking on responses to racism, poverty and violence; promotes equitable safety and community thriving; and advances narrative and cultural change. Learn more about the Square One Project at squareonejustice.org.