

# Crime and the Criminal Justice System - 1983

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## Issue

Crime and punishment are matters of very grave concern in contemporary society. The causes of crime and weaknesses in the criminal justice system demand intense study and remedial action.

## Background

Our Jewish perspectives include from Bible and Talmud: "Justice, justice shall you pursue that you may thrive" and the admonition, "Do not make a mockery of justice for it is one of the... pillars of the world."

The tragic loss of life from crime, damage to property, punishment that is vengeful not rehabilitative, sometimes more emphasis on the perpetrator's rights than those of the victim are only a few of the many problems. Director Webster of the U.S. Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has noted that drug abuse even in upper class suburban families has become in the United States "the number one crime problem." Drugs and alcoholism are among the major causes of crime.

The public response has been a cry for more correctional institutions, more judges and swifter court action, more and better trained police and other improvements. Yet budgets at all levels of government are being slashed. In cases of loss of life from crime a return to a wider use of the death penalty is being urged and ordered. But Judaism believes in the redemptive possibilities and qualities of humankind. The National Federation of Temple Sisterhoods has adopted strong resolutions against capital punishment.

## Resolution

The complex causes of crime and critically needed improvements in the criminal justice system urgently require informed understanding leading to effective remedial action. Therefore, we urge Sisterhoods to initiate or cooperate with existing citizen groups to study these issues and advocate:

1. Adequate funding, both private and governmental, for social research.
2. The rigorous protection of constitutional and other legal rights of children in Family Courts and other jurisdictions.
3. Careful study, research and action by civic, religious and governmental groups to improve the criminal justice system to the end of increased efficiency and justice with special attention to:
  1. Reducing in all jurisdictions the time between arrest and trial.
  2. Improving legal aid for the under-privileged.
  3. Encouraging uniform sentencing and alternative sentencing such as community assignments, weekend or night confinements for first offenders of non-violent crimes.
  4. Humanization and modernization of correctional institutions and special emphasis on providing prisoners improved opportunities for educational courses and meaningful work programs.
  5. Improving the parole system.
  6. Indemnification of victims.
  7. Greater emphasis on rehabilitation involving personal and family counseling and preparation for life outside confinement; better trained prison officials.
  8. Investigation and supervision of juvenile detention homes and schools.
4. Better-trained police forces which include ethnic and minority members eligible to reach positions in all levels of command for which they qualify and improved programs of police and community relations.

5. Participation in crime-control planning boards and juvenile justice advisory councils as well as in Safe Street and Crime Watch programs. (In various communities the names of these groups may differ.)