

FROM THE NUMBERS

2022

Lifting voices and changing narratives of those impacted by the criminal justice system.

 : bit.ly/MI-FTN

Safe & Just Michigan
www.safeandjustmi.org

Fresh Coast Alliance
www.freshcoastalliance.org

Table of Contents

01	Introduction
02	Message from FTN Founders
03 - 05	Talking Points
06 - 07	FAQs
08	The Numbers
09 - 11	Sample Letters to the Editor
12 - 15	Sample Social Media & Graphics
16	Acknowledgments

Introduction

From the Numbers is a storytelling project that lifts up the voices of formerly incarcerated people. Our storytellers' lived experiences transformed them, and they now make positive contributions to their communities every day.

In Michigan, the dominant narrative holds that long prison sentences provide the severe, long-term punishment that is deserved. The narrative reinforces an us vs them mentality and creates a caste of "others" that law-abiding citizens need protection from.

One in three people in America has some sort of a criminal record, whether it is a traffic misdemeanor or a serious felony. Even so, many people have never met someone who has been to prison – much less seen the inside of a prison themselves. The U.S. has the largest incarcerated population in the country – both in terms of raw numbers and per capita, but for many people, all they know about prisons and incarcerated people is what they see in the media.

From the Numbers elevates the voices of those impacted by the criminal justice system and strives to change the narrative about people who have been incarcerated. The stories you hear show that redemption is possible and people impacted by our justice system are capable of change.

Through this work, we hope to change hearts and minds and dismantle the dominant narrative about justice-impacted people. Join us in listening and sharing these stories.

Message from FTN Project Founders

Welcome to From the Numbers, a storytelling project that takes its name from the identifying number issued to every person incarcerated in a Michigan prison. Inside, people are called by their number rather than their name. In many ways, it's a metaphor for how being convicted of a crime overtakes a person's identity.

That identity doesn't disappear once a person is released and returns home. Most employers run background checks, and a large number routinely rule out job offers to anyone with a conviction on record. The same goes for landlords. It becomes incredibly difficult to reestablish yourself and turn your life around when you can't find a good job or a safe place to live.

It's a struggle we know personally. Both of us have been incarcerated, and both of us have returned home to navigate a world that saw us as "felons" first, and human beings second. Through some combination of hard work, help from loved ones, luck, and grace, we made our way.

So many narratives about people like us miss the mark. We are social workers and attorneys, entrepreneurs and artists, professors and ministers. As 1 in 3 adults in the U.S. have some sort of criminal record, you've undoubtedly met some of us already. Perhaps that person is you.

FTN tells the story of nine Michigan residents who have come home from prison and found their way to flourish. Each person who worked on this project represents millions of Americans who have been impacted by the criminal justice system. We are proud to stand with them. These are the faces of the returned. They are our brothers and sisters from the numbers.

Nate Johnson & Rick Speck, From the Numbers Project Founders

“For every story you hear of someone recidivating and going back to prison, there are dozens of stories untold of people thriving and becoming fully contributing members of their communities.”

Talking Points

A criminal record shouldn't be a lifetime sentence to poverty.

- According to the U.S. Department of Justice, the largest key predictor of whether a person will recidivate (return to prison after release) is poverty and lack of housing. Therefore, things that combat these conditions — such as good jobs, advanced education and safe, secure housing — lead to less recidivism, which means safer communities for everyone.
- However, a combination of laws and social stigmas often keep people with a criminal record out of good jobs and housing. These laws and stigmas are sometimes known as “collateral consequences.”
- Examples of collateral consequences can include being:
 - Summarily rejected from good jobs by employers who refuse to hire anyone with a criminal record.
 - Refused apartment leases by landlords who won't rent to anyone with a felony conviction.
 - Rejected by college admissions departments due to safety and PR fears.
 - Turned down by schools as chaperones for their children's field trips because of their criminal record.
- These collateral consequences can continue for years or even decades after a sentence has been served, even if there is no further involvement with the legal system.
- Formerly incarcerated people want to be known by what they have accomplished since their release. Some of them have become social workers or business owners. Others are ministers or founders of nonprofits. They volunteer for local charities and become active in local, state and national politics. Many have become parents or grandparents.
- When people are allowed to contribute all of their talents and abilities to their community, the community benefits as well as the person.

Talking Points

People who have survived crime — particularly a violent crime — deserve to see those who caused the harm held accountable and to feel safe in their communities again.

- Research from Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice finds that crime survivors in Michigan feel the criminal justice system doesn't address their needs:
 - 1 in 4 Michiganders have been a victim of a crime between 2008-2018, and of those, 48 percent survived a violent crime.
 - By a margin of 4 to 1, survivors of crime believe that prison makes people more likely to commit further crimes rather than rehabilitating them.
 - By a margin of 8 to 1, crime survivors want Michigan to invest more in job training and workforce development rather than prisons and jails.
 - The survey found that crime survivors support services such as financial assistance to offset losses associated with the crime, help with medical costs arising from the harm, counseling, legal assistance, housing and information about available resources — but these needs often go unmet.
 - Most of all, crime survivors said that what they want is to make sure what happened to them does not happen to anyone else.
- If we want to honor survivors of crime and their wishes, supporting the full reintegration of people returning home from incarceration is the best way to prevent crime and make communities safe.

Talking Points

The Center for Economic and Policy Research estimates that unemployment due to a past criminal record costs the U.S. \$78 to \$87 billion annually in lost GDP.

- “Second chance hiring” — or the practice of giving justice-involved people an opportunity to demonstrate they are able and enthusiastic employees — can be a lifeline to businesses that have found it difficult to find and keep people on the job.
- Studies of U.S. Army service members and from the American Civil Liberties Union and the human resources organization SHRM, among others, have found that formerly incarcerated people can be among the most reliable workers available.

Most — if not all — faith traditions hold redemption and second chances to be core values.

- By helping meet the spiritual needs of formerly incarcerated people, faith communities are helping to curb recidivism. A recent study found that the closer a person released from prison adhered to a faith community, the less likely they were to return to prison.
- Churches, mosques, synagogues, temples and other communities of faith can play an integral part in helping people become fully contributing members of their community, which in turn makes their neighborhoods safer for everyone.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is From the Numbers?

From the Numbers is a collaborative project between Safe & Just Michigan, a Lansing-based nonprofit working on state-level criminal justice reform policy, and Fresh Coast Alliance, a Muskegon-based nonprofit that helps people reintegrate into the community following incarceration. The project takes its name from the numbers used to identify people inside prison and is a reminder that behind each number is a human being and a story waiting to be heard.

Who are the participants?

Each participant in From the Numbers is sharing their own unique story. The time they spent incarcerated ranges from two to more than 30 years. Today, they are entrepreneurs, ministers, community organizers, founders of nonprofits, parents and grandparents and more. Each of them demonstrate the capacity people have to learn from their past and change.

What is the message?

The state of Michigan — and the country — has recently enacted several laws that reformed our criminal justice system. Laws that have expanded access to expungement, enabled people with a criminal record to get professional and occupational licenses, end the practice of suspending drivers licenses for nondriving offenses, and more.

While these new laws are highly impactful, they don't necessarily change the way people think. Many people become nervous or afraid when they learn someone they know has a criminal record, even if their conviction is years or decades old. This fear has led to people being summarily rejected from jobs, apartments, and learning opportunities without any other details of their life being taken into consideration.

From the Numbers introduces you to some of the people living with these lingering consequences of being involved with the justice system, and to demonstrate that people can — and do — learn and grow.

Frequently Asked Questions

I have a criminal record. How can I find out if I'm eligible for expungement?

In April of 2020, Michigan passed into law "**Clean Slate**" legislation which makes it easier for people who have committed certain felonies and misdemeanors to have their criminal record expunged (barred from public view). Expungement can lead to dramatic increases in quality of life. Explore your eligibility now:

Safe & Just Michigan Clean Slate Resources: bit.ly/CleanSlateforMI.

MI Attorney General's Office Expungement Resources: bit.ly/MI-AG-CleanSlate.

Michigan Works! State-Wide Expungement Help Directory: 1-800-285-WORKS.

Detroit Project Clean Slate (free for residents): bit.ly/DetroitCleanSlate.

Oakland County Project Clean Slate (free for residents): oakgov.com/cleanslate.

Explore self-filing options through MI Legal Help: bit.ly/MILegalHelpExpunge.

How can I get involved?

Addressing stigma involves a cultural shift. You can be an ambassador for that shift by sharing what you learned from the From the Numbers project with friends, family, and co-workers. Start a conversation!

Easily share From the Numbers takeaways by downloading our pre-made graphics or copying suggested posts and sharing on social media.

Speak up! Call out biased language when you hear it in conversation; send a letter to the editor when publications publish misinformation or reinforce negative stereotypes about formerly incarcerated people.

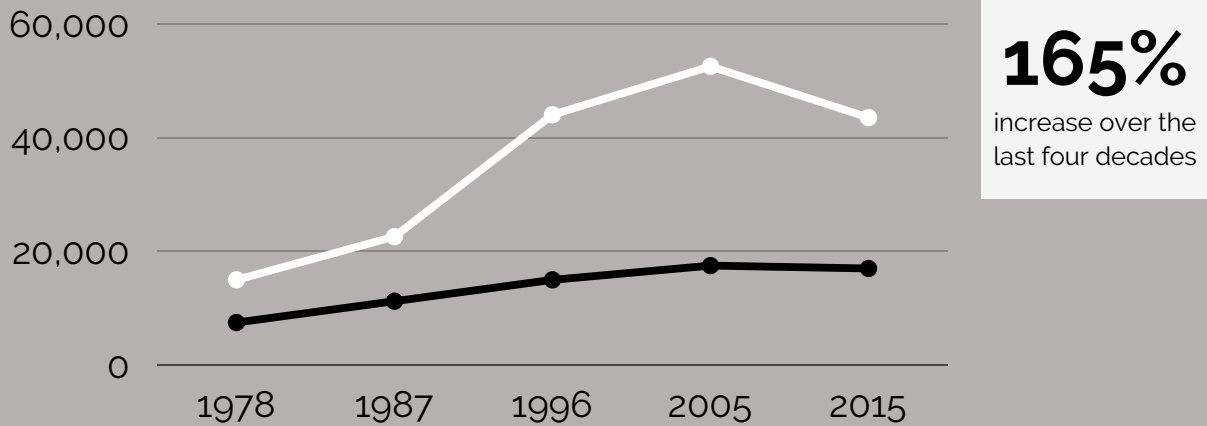
Follow criminal justice reform legislation in Michigan and reach out to your representatives to let them know you support or oppose the measures:

- Stay up-to-date on MI criminal justice reform efforts: bit.ly/SJMJoinUs.
- Top tips for contacting your MI legislator: bit.ly/ContactMILegislator.

The Numbers

MI Prison and Jail Populations


Number of people incarcerated in state prisons and local jails, 1978-2015



People of color are consistently overrepresented in Michigan's correctional facilities.



In Michigan, Black people constitute 15% of state residents, but 37% of people in jail and 53% of people in prison.



Michigan devotes a bigger share of its general fund budget to prisons than any other state.

Sample Letters to the Editor

A letter to the editor is a letter sent to a publication about issues of concern from its readers. A letter to the editor can be an important advocacy tool as it provides an opportunity to challenge misinformation, call out biased language, or add pertinent facts or viewpoints to articles.

Jane Smith
123 Alphabet Dr
City, MI Zip

May 5, 2022

The Editor
Michigan Newspaper
999 Numbers Ln
City, MI Zip

Dear Editor (use their name if available, but "Editor" is fine if you don't know),

I often hear that people must "do their time" after being convicted of a crime. That happens once a person has served a sentence handed down by a judge. But in truth, people with criminal convictions go on "doing time" long after their sentence is complete. At bit.ly/MI-FTN, I heard their stories and about the challenges they face as they reintegrate into the community. About 80 percent of employers run background checks on potential employees, often to rule out anyone with a conviction. The same goes for landlords, who often rule out people with a felony conviction as tenants, even if the conviction is decades old. This keeps people who have paid their debt to society from rejoining the rest of us. It prevents them from getting the good jobs and safe places to live so they can raise families and fully participate in our community — something we all want.

Sample Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Holding people who harmed others accountable is as important to crime survivors as it is to the people who caused the harm in the first place. That's why you hear people say that people convicted of a crime need to "pay their debt to our society." Ensuring that debt is paid is the job of our justice system.

However, many employers, landlords and even schools take that role into their own hands and continue punishing people long after the court considers a person's debt to society paid in full. People with a criminal record are routinely denied good jobs, safe and affordable places to live, or even a seat in a classroom. This can go on for years or even decades after a court-ordered sentence is completed. At bit.ly/MI-FTN, I heard the stories of people trapped in this situation, and how they struggle to overcome it.

The stigma they face ultimately hurts us all. Rather than making it harder to work, we should encourage formerly incarcerated people to find good jobs. Work brings dignity. It allows people to become self-sufficient and create dreams for their future. It gives them a stake in their community. It lifts local economies and makes our hometowns better for everyone in them.

Having a safe place to call home is equally important. It's difficult to find a job without an address. If someone in that situation does get a job, they may focus more on finding the next place to stay rather than on their work.

Research finds that having a good job and place to live prevents people from returning to prison. The last thing anyone wants is people committing more crime and going back to prison.

Rather than ostracizing people who've "done their time," we must welcome them home to rejoin our community.

Sample Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Michigan businesses face an unprecedented labor shortage. Trends in retirement, the pandemic and other factors may drive it, but one thing is certain: it's hard to find good help out there.

One in 3 Americans has a criminal record, according to the FBI. That's devastating news when it comes time to look for a job, because about 80 percent of employers routinely run background checks as part of the hiring process. Many of those employers routinely rule out anyone with a conviction on record. Those employers are ruling out a third of the potential workforce right off the bat. This is both a great problem and a great opportunity.

It's a problem because when people come home from prison and can't find a good job, they're more likely to be pushed to the corners of society and return to prison. Formerly incarcerated people with good jobs have been shown to be less likely to recidivate.

It's also an immense opportunity. As formerly incarcerated people are overlooked in hiring, smart employers can turn to them to find great employees. These "second-chance" hires are often first-rate workers. Studies from the U.S. Army, the ACLU and other organizations found that formerly incarcerated people are more loyal workers than the general population.

It's a mistake to think of people with a record as unskilled. Among them are professors, social workers, licensed skilled trades workers, community organizers and more. They have the skill — what's missing are opportunities. At bit.ly/MI-FTN, I heard several formerly incarcerated talk about how they struggled to find work when they came home. Over and over, I heard them say they want to work and fully participate in their community. Giving them a chance is a win-win for employers and workers.

Sample Social Media & Graphics

Twitter

"Once you go to prison, you lose your name - your given name and your surname - to 'inmate' and a number." E.B. Jordan, minister, president of her neighborhood block, precinct delegate, founder of **#Detroit**-based nonprofit, and **#FromtheNumbers**.

Her story: bit.ly/MI-FTN.

#FromtheNumbers elevates the voices of those impacted by the **#cjsystem** and strives to change the narrative about people who have been incarcerated. We believe **#redemption** is possible and people impacted by our justice system are capable of change.

FTN: bit.ly/MI-FTN.

Ending the stigma of being **#FromtheNumbers** can help people impacted by the criminal justice system get back to work. That's a win for the entire national economy.

End the stigma: bit.ly/MI-FTN.

Most - if not all - faith traditions hold **#redemption** and **#secondchances** to be core values. The **#faith** community has an important role to play in ending stigma and welcoming home those **#FromtheNumbers**.

View personal stories at: bit.ly/MI-FTN.

Sample Social Media & Graphics

Facebook

"We're all more than the sum of our worst decisions. We have redeeming qualities and are an asset to our communities," Rick Speck, husband, father, grandfather, business owner, community organizer, advocate, and **#FromtheNumbers**.

From the Numbers aims to challenge the dominant narrative that people with a past criminal record are irredeemable and fundamentally different than "law-abiding" citizens. Hear their stories by following the link below ↓

www.safeandjustmi.org/our-work/from-the-numbers

Supporting the full reintegration of people returning home from incarceration is the best way to prevent crime and make communities safe. (**The United States Department of Justice**).

But to do this, it takes a shift in hearts and minds - we must end the stigma of being **#FromtheNumbers** - people returning home from incarceration have served their time and are eager to prove they're more than their worst mistake.

www.safeandjustmi.org/our-work/from-the-numbers

Sample Social Media & Graphics

Twitter

The Center for Economic and Policy Research estimates that unemployment due to past criminal records costs the U.S. \$78 to \$87 billion annually in lost GDP.

Ending the stigma of being #FromtheNumbers can help people impacted by the criminal justice system get back to work.



End the stigma: bit.ly/MI-FTN.

“ Once you go to prison, you lose your name - your given name and your surname - to 'inmate' and a number. ”

— E.B. Jordan, ordained minister, president of her neighborhood block club, precinct delegate, bookkeeper and tax preparer, founder of a women-focused nonprofit, and #FromtheNumbers.

Change the narrative about people who have been incarcerated: bit.ly/MI-FTN.

Facebook



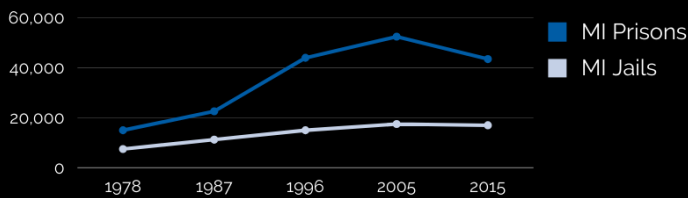
Michigan devotes a bigger share of its general budget to prisons than any other state.

Help reduce recidivism and end the stigma of being #FromtheNumbers

www.safeandjustmi.org/our-work/from-the-numbers

MI Prison and Jail Populations

People incarcerated in state prisons and local jails, 1978-2015.



Although crime rates in MI have steadily dropped since the 1990s, rates of incarceration continue to grow.

Meet some of the **2-3 MILLION** Michiganders with a past criminal conviction and help end the stigma of being #FromtheNumbers: bit.ly/MI-FTN.

Acknowledgements

We want to thank the men and women that shared their stories for their courage and honesty. Thank you for your vulnerability in the name of changing hearts and minds:

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Nate Johnson

Rick Speck

Terry Johnson

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**We thank you for your continued support
in our efforts to destigmatize.**

Contact

Safe & Just Michigan
521 Seymour Ave, Lansing, MI 48933
517-482-7753
www.safeandjustmi.org
info@safeandjustmi.org

Fresh Coast Alliance
1190 Apple Ave, Muskegon, MI 49442
231-286-1992
www.freshcoastalliance.org
natej@freshcoastalliance.org