

Let's Be Clear:

Criminal justice data has a story to tell.

Conversation Guide



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A Note from Amy Bach, Founder and CEO of Measures for Justice

After spending years in courtrooms across the country, one thing became abundantly clear - most people had no idea what was happening in their criminal justice system.

There was little-to-no data. No transparency. And as a result, policymakers were flying blind and the public had no means of holding the system accountable.

That's why I created Measures for Justice. To solve these problems.

Measures for Justice helps communities make informed decisions about how to make the system work for them. We do this work because criminal justice should have the same oversight and measurement as many other public institutions like schools and hospitals. We feel called to this work because we are reminded every day of what's at stake for the lives behind every data point we put out there.

When we first started thinking about ways to help make the case for the power of criminal justice data to change lives, we wanted to find the most compelling stories we could. Stories that would shake people. Upset them. Surprise and move them.

Because **every data point represents a life.**

Let's Be Clear features 12 people who have experienced the criminal justice system in multiple ways. Each person's story reminds us that data isn't abstract or heartless. A woman assaulted behind bars. A sheriff fighting the opioid epidemic. A man who loses everything waiting for due process.

We interviewed over a hundred people. And while every story we heard was amazing in its own way, we still never planned for the feeling we got hearing the stories we selected for this series.

I'm humbled and inspired to share these stories with you and I hope that they will spark important conversations about criminal justice, data, and transparency in your own communities.

Amy Bach, Founder and CEO
Measures for Justice



How to Use this Conversation Guide

This companion guide invites you to host your own viewings of the series in your community and continue the conversation about the themes presented in **Let's Be Clear**.

Between 70 and 100 million people have a criminal record in this country, according to [The Sentencing Project](#). When you think about them, their families, friends, neighbors, and all the people who work in the criminal justice system, we're looking at a third of the country, if not more. That's a lot of stories. A lot of turmoil and pain, confusion and chaos.

And it's hard to talk about. This guide can help you facilitate these hard conversations - to create a safe space for people to be authentic and vulnerable, and to pave the way for future conversations. Because, while challenging, it's important to have these conversations so we can make our own informed decisions about our local criminal justice systems.

Measures for Justice's mission is to change the future of criminal justice by developing tools that help communities reshape how the system works. Because **communities have the power to make change**. This is one of those tools.



Suggested Event Itinerary

- Allot 2-3 hours for most events.
- Check in guests as they arrive.
- View all of the **Let's Be Clear** series (approx 40 minutes) and review the photo essays.
- Have an event host/moderator set agreements to encourage dialogue, mutual respect, and deep listening to what others share - such as "Practice Active Listening," "Don't Interrupt," and "Assume Good Intentions" - in a visible place in your meeting room.
- Have a host moderate the conversation:
 - Open the conversation with the general questions below,
 - Deepen the conversation by asking questions about each episode, and
 - Close the conversation and extend gratitude to everyone for their courage and willingness to participate.
- Thank guests for coming, let them know that if they want more information they can visit measuresforjustice.org and sign up for our newsletter.
- Close out the event.

Overall Story Questions

- Did anything surprise you about these stories?
- How do you feel after viewing these stories?
- What do you wish you knew about your local criminal justice system?
- What data do you wish you had?
- How would you use it?
- How do you think broader access to criminal justice data would change the system? Would it make it better or worse?
- What do you think needs to happen to get your local court/DA/police department to partner with an organization to make their data public and accessible?



Individual Story Questions

Episode 1: Waiving Right to Counsel in Juvenile Court

Something was wrong in the Luzerne County juvenile court. Kids were being sent away for minor infractions. Most did not have attorneys. The judge was unforgiving and relentless. The kids and families suspected something was wrong, but it wasn't until the Luzerne Juvenile Law Center uncovered shocking data patterns that the real story came out: the Judge was sending kids to a for-profit jail in exchange for kickbacks. Here we meet Hillary Transue, who was sentenced as a teenager for publishing a MySpace page that made fun of her school principal.

Questions:

1. Why do you think the judge was able to get away with what he was doing for so long?
2. Who or what do you think could have helped Hillary and her mother as they were going through all this?
3. What do you think about Hillary's decision to work with juveniles in detention?

Notes:



Episode 2: Mental Health in Law Enforcement

Major Ailen Mitchell was just twenty one years old on his first night on the job when he witnessed a gruesome murder. Today he commands 120 officers in a section of Atlanta, Georgia. Over the years, he's been able to seek therapy to help process the horrors he's witnessed, but not all police have the same resources. Here he talks about that first night and the effect it had on him.

Questions:

1. Police forces nationwide answer millions of calls a year. Many of these calls are to help with high-stakes, emotionally devastating situations—not only for victims, but for the officers as well. What role, if any, do you think officer wellness has to play in how the police do their work?
2. Data on officer wellness tells us that more officers are succumbing to depression and despair than officers who die in the line of duty. If you were in charge of a police force, how would you act on data like this?
3. How might you know the difference between an officer who needs help and an officer who shouldn't be an officer?

Notes:



Episode 3: Overrepresentation of Black and Brown Defendants in Prison

Jason Hernandez was arrested at age 21 for a nonviolent felony drug offense and sentenced to life without parole. Over the years, he began to notice that sentences for Black and Brown defendants were significantly more punitive than for white defendants for the same crimes.

Jason managed to commute his sentence by appealing for clemency from the President of the United States—a long shot that turned into a miracle.

Questions:

1. How do you think data showing racial disparities in sentencing and arrest practices could have helped Jason had it been widely available at the time?
2. Do you know anyone who's been treated differently by the criminal justice system based on their ethnicity, race, gender, or other characteristic?
3. What do you think can help reduce bias in the system?
4. Do you think Jason would still be in prison if not for his clemency appeal?

Notes:



Episode 4: Addiction and Recidivism

In 2016, Sheriff Karl Leonard realized that over 90% of the people coming into the Chesterfield County Jail suffered from drug addiction. Overwhelmed and desperate, he began HARP (Helping Addicts Recover Progressively) and offered it to anyone who needed help.

Questions:

1. Do you think drug recovery programs should be offered in every jail? If so, why?
2. Could the program Sheriff Leonard created be replicated in other facilities, or was there something unique about his jail?
3. Do you think treating addiction can help reduce crime and recidivism rates nationwide?

Notes:



Episode 5: Drug Possession

With so many drug possession cases coming into the Hobbs public defender's office, the team needed data to underscore their suspicions that something wasn't right and to open up a dialogue about what to do. The office found that most of the cases started with people simply riding their bicycles to work. But why? Public Defender Ibukun Adepoju went on a mission to find out.

Questions:

1. Data helped the public defender's office petition for funding and buy-in for a program to mitigate the problem they uncovered. How else do you think public defenders can be using data to make a difference?
2. What other solutions come to mind to help solve the bike-ride-to-felony problem?
3. In the cases Ibukun spoke of, small offenses lead to big charges—do you know anyone that's happened to?

Notes:



Episode 6: Sexual Violence Behind Bars

Cynthia Alvarado was assaulted behind bars. The data tells us that thousands and thousands of assaults are reported every year. The data don't tell us who, what, when, or where, but they do scream very loudly that there is a devastating problem that needs solving, and solving fast.

Questions:

1. Why do you think it's so hard to stop sexual violence behind bars?
2. There are so many experiences in Cynthia's life that led her to that moment in the park. How did each one build on the previous one?
3. Do you agree the statute of limitations should be waived for sexual offenses behind bars?
4. Do you think everyone behind bars should have the chance and resources to become a lawyer?

Notes:



Episode 7: Pretrial Detention

Linnel Bruce was accosted one day outside of his church. In self defense, he struck his attacker with a glass bottle. Linnel then spent months in jail while waiting for a bond hearing.

Questions:

1. Linnel spent months in jail waiting for his day in court—essentially punished before being found guilty or innocent. Why do you think the system violates due process in this way?
2. Linnel says the system works for some people and not others. What do you think he means by that?
3. Bail can be used to keep poor people in jail. Bail can also be used to keep violent criminals off the streets. How do you feel about abolishing bail?

Notes:



Episode 8: No Data, No Change

Selma, Alabama. A city best known as the catalyst for the Civil Rights Movement with a call for racial equity met with bloodshed. To its citizens, Selma isn't just a place in the history books, it's home. Today, its population is shrinking. A tornado recently leveled whole communities. And the criminal justice system has left a lot of people in the dark. Judge Vernetta Perkins shares her vision for how to put this city back on the right track.

Questions:

1. Judge Perkins talks about needing data to paint a picture of what's happening today to argue for why change is needed. What kind of data would you like to see for your community?
2. What questions would you most like data to answer about what's happening in your community?
3. Judge Perkins mentions a restorative criminal justice system. What does that mean to you?
4. What steps can you take to get your local criminal justice system to be more transparent?

Notes:



Photo Essay: Sebastian Yoon

Sebastian Yoon was incarcerated as a teenager. While in prison, he found a lifeline through education. Today, he works as a program officer for a national nonprofit. His story is about how getting a degree in prison changed his life.

Questions:

1. Do you think every facility should offer inmates the chance to get a high school and college degree?
2. Why do you think getting an education was so important for Sebastian?
3. Have you experienced learning as an antidote to depression?

Notes:



Photo Essay: Brett Tolman

For Brett Tolman, the best way to make system change is to skip the partisanship and look at the data. His view is that 95% of incarcerated people get out. And if about 80% of them are reoffending, what does that tell us about how well incarceration rehabilitated them?

Questions:

1. Brett has seen the criminal justice system from all sides. Do you think every defense attorney and prosecutor should be required to serve in both capacities?
2. Do you think the role of a prison is to rehabilitate those incarcerated there?
3. How do you think data can play a role in bringing people together across party lines?

Notes:



Photo Essay: Ivonne Roman

As Ivonne Roman puts it: “Research tells us that women officers are less likely to use excessive force, less likely to use force at all, less likely to engage in ‘contempt of cop’ arrests, like if you hurt my feelings or you cursed at me, you’re going to jail.” And yet the data is clear and undeniable: women are underrepresented in the police force. This is why Ivonne is fighting to change those numbers.

Questions:

1. Why do you think women are underrepresented in the police force?
2. What steps do you think need to be taken to get more women on the force?
3. Have you ever seen a female police officer in action? How did people respond to her?

Notes:



Photo Essay: Tyrone Millard III

Criminal justice data available in Yolo County, California, played a powerful role in Tyrone's story. Thanks to a policy change in the Yolo County D.A.'s office, he got a second chance. Today, Tyrone spends his free time refereeing basketball games and enjoying every day with his wife and daughter. As Tyrone puts it, "I get to do all this because I don't have a felony on my record."

Questions:

1. Were you familiar with diversion programs before reading Tyrone's story? What is your opinion of them?
2. Do you know what diversion programs are available in your community?
3. Is there anything in your life that you could do-over? If yes, what would you do differently?

Notes:



About Measures for Justice

Measures for Justice is a nonpartisan nonprofit that's bringing transparency and accountability into the mix of how justice gets pursued in this country.

Our Vision

We envision a world in which the criminal justice system is fully transparent, accessible, and accountable.

Our Mission

We are changing the future of criminal justice by developing tools that help communities, including the institutions that serve them, reshape how the system works.

For more information, visit measuresforjustice.org.