

PRESS RELEASE

Sanders Discusses Criminal Justice Reform in Chicago

DECEMBER 23, 2015

CHICAGO – U.S. Sen. Bernie Sanders discussed criminal justice reform during a round-table meeting Monday at the Village Leadership Academy on the city’s near West Side. Illinois State Rep. La Shawn K. Ford of Chicago led the discussion.



At a news conference afterward, Sanders recalled his participation in civil rights demonstrations in the 1960s when he was a student at the University of Chicago. “Institutional racism existed then. Institutional racism exists today. The criminal justice system was broken then. The criminal justice system is broken today,” he said. “I consider reforming our criminal justice system one of the most important things that a president of the United States can do.”





Sanders called it an international embarrassment that the United States has more prisoners than any other country and a disproportionate number of those behind bars are minorities. And reciting shocking statistics, Sanders said one in four black males born today can expect to spend time in prison during their lifetime. He said blacks are imprisoned at six times the rate of whites and that minorities are sentenced to death at significantly higher rates than whites, which is one reason why he would end capital punishment. He also noted that the Department of Justice found that blacks were three times more likely to be searched during a traffic stop compared to white motorists. “That is unacceptable,” Sanders said.

Sanders also mentioned the prison death of Sandra Bland who died last July in a Texas jail cell after her arrest and jailing for a routine traffic violation. Bland, 28, had lived in Naperville, Illinois, a Chicago suburb. A grand jury on Monday declined to press charges against personnel in the sheriff’s office jail where she was found dead.

Sanders’ criminal justice reform proposals include eliminating for-profit prisons; ending mandatory minimum sentencing and giving judges the discretion to better tailor sentences to the specific facts of a given case. He also would remove marijuana from the federal list of controlled substances and let states decide whether possession should be a crime.



He also called for ensuring that police forces reflect the diversity of our communities. The senator would require greater civilian oversight of police departments. He would make law enforcement officers wear body cameras to help hold them accountable while protecting the privacy of innocent people. And he would provide federal funding to help state and local governments adopt new policing standards.