

Presentation title:

How California's "Second Look" Resentencing Could Address The Racialized Effects Of Environmental Injustice During a Dual Pandemic of COVID-19 and Racism

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No group of people, whether it be racial, ethnic, or socioeconomic, should bear a disproportionate share of negative environmental consequences of incarceration or pandemics. This paper examines the nexus between disasters (climate, fire, flood, pandemic, and other) environmental racism, California's treatment of people (particularly those deemed "a COVID risk") during the COVID crisis in California's prisons, and health outcomes in prisons and reentry. California's incarcerated population is drawn disproportionately from communities that face illness-causing environments and racial and economic inequities and heightened mortality and morbidity from COVID-19. The neighborhoods over-represented in California's incarcerated population were often formed by discriminatory redlining and relegating people to sub-standard and illness-causing housing. Black, Latinx, and Indigenous populations face pre-incarceration vulnerabilities due to poverty and a lack of access to medical care, transportation, and food. These groups are incarcerated at a disproportionately high rate. Then, when incarcerated, they are housed in facilities located in climate zones that experience extreme heat or cold and locations that may suffer from extreme rain events, wildfires, depletion of local water supplies, or similar climate-related concerns. The conditions of incarceration exacerbate inequality, and the effects of racism in health care and outcomes are particularly salient. Racialized people are sicker when they come into prison, at risk for contracting more illness, then more at risk for getting sicker from COVID. Subjecting people who are safe to release and return to their loved ones, communities, and the workforce to inhumane and undignified conditions worsened during a pandemic where particular groups of people in prison were more at risk than others for contracting COVID and dying from it, yet eligible for release under second look resentencing legislation that was underutilized.