Definitions of Criminal Justice Terms

Alternatives to incarceration - includes types of punishment or treatment other than time in prison. Alternatives can include fines, restorative justice, substance abuse treatment, community service and seek to reduce prison populations and focus more on rehabilitation than punishment.

Broken windows - a theory that indicates that visible signs of crime, anti-social behavior, and civil disorder create an urban environment that encourages more serious crimes. The theory suggests that policing methods that target minor crimes such as vandalism, public drinking, and fare evasion help to create an atmosphere of order and lawfulness, thereby preventing more serious crimes. This may be experienced in targeted communities as "stop-and-frisk" policing.

California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation (CDCR) - the state body that is responsible for the operation of the California state prison and parole systems.

Community policing - a law enforcement philosophy that allows officers to continuously operate in the same area in order to create a stronger and more positive bond with the citizens living and working in that area. This allows public safety officers to engage with local residents and prevent crime from happening instead of responding to incidents after they occur.

Constitutional policing - policing that operates within the parameters set by the U.S. Constitution, state constitutions, the body of court decisions that have interpreted and spelled out in greater detail what the text of the Constitution means in terms of the everyday practices of policing. The police policies and practices that are most often the subject of investigations for unconstitutionality include police use of force and implicit bias.

Data collection - all state and local criminal justice agencies should be required to collect a core set of data elements necessary for tracking how people and cases move through the criminal process.

Data centralization and standardization - all data should be standardized and housed in a single, centralized data repository

Data access - data should be available, with varying levels of anonymization, to policymakers, practitioners, researchers, journalists, and the general public.

De-escalation - use of force policy that officers implement, when safe to do so, in order to control an incident by using time, distance, communications, and available resources in an effort to maintain safety and to avoid deadly force.

Diversion - pre-trial programs intended to relieve overburdened courts and jails, and to spare people charged with non-violent offenses from the consequences of a criminal record.

Implicit bias - refers to the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions of others based on their gender, race, or age in an unconscious manner. These biases are activated involuntarily and without an individual's awareness or intentional control.

Parole - a conditional program of early release before the jail/prison sentence is completed and is subject to supervision

Probation - a type of criminal sentence that permits an individual to remain in the community setting in lieu of serving time in a jail environment; ordered by the court to follow certain conditions set forth by the court, often under the supervision of a probation officer. During the period of probation an individual faces the threat of being incarcerated if found breaking the rules set by the court or probation officer.

Procedural Justice - the way police and other legal authorities interact with the public, and how the characteristics of those interactions shape the public's views of the police, their willingness to obey the law, and actual crime rates.

Protective Custody - is a type of imprisonment (or care) to protect a person from harm, either from outside sources or other prisoners. Many prison administrators believe the level of violence, or the underlying threat of violence within prisons, is a chief factor causing the need for PC units.

Public Safety - the welfare and protection of the general public.

Restorative Justice - a facilitated dialogue or meeting between the victim and the person who committed an offense in order to share their experience of what happened, to discuss who was harmed by the crime and how, and to create a consensus for what the responsible party will do to repair the harm from the offense.

Rehabilitation - the action of restoring someone to health or normal life through training and therapy after imprisonment, addiction, or illness.

Risk Assessment Tools - algorithmic tools designed to predict a defendant's future risk for misconduct. These predictions inform high-stakes judicial decisions, such as whether to incarcerate an individual before their trial.

Solitary Confinement - different terms are used by different jurisdictions, e.g. segregated confinement, secured housing units, administrative segregation, long-term medicated housing; however defined, prisons and jails must adhere to the United Nations Nelson Mandela Rules for Solitary Confinement, beyond which the practice is considered to be torture. "confinement of prisoners for 22 hours or more a day without meaningful human contact, for a time period in excess of 15 consecutive days; to be used in extreme cases and should be the very last of options prison officials use when it comes to disciplinary actions; prohibited in the case of prisoners with mental or physical disabilities, and in cases involving women and children."

Split Sentencing - an arrangement where a defendant is ordered to a specified term of incarceration and then a period of post-release mandatory supervision by the probation department.

Stop-and-Frisk - a police department practice of temporarily detaining, questioning, and at times searching civilians on the street for weapons and other contraband. It sometimes raises the question of 4th Amendment violation.