



How do the 2020 Top Democratic Presidential Candidates Promote Racial Equity to End Hunger?

Criminal Justice

As you consider the Democratic Presidential Primary candidates in the 2020 election, we urge you to consider the importance of promoting racial equity to end hunger in the United States. There are many factors that contribute to hunger, including criminal justice. People returning home from incarceration—also referred to as returning citizens—experience hunger at eight times the national rate (91 percent v. 11.1 percent).¹ Approximately seven in 10 people in jail are only there because they do not have the funds to bail themselves out. Being in jail awaiting trial leads to job loss—and a much higher risk of hunger—for millions of primarily low-income people.² In addition, returning citizens who have been convicted experience high rates of food insecurity once released due to the more than 46,000 local, state, and federal restrictions³ that make it hard for them to get jobs and meet their basic needs. For these reasons, Bread for the World believes that mass incarceration drives hunger.⁴

Following is an explanation of how the policies outlined by the top Democratic presidential primary candidates promote racial equity, as well as recommendations for strengthening their proposals.

Note: Review the “key terms” box to the right for these terms: racial equity lens, co-develop, equitable engagement, historical trauma, how/process, experts of color, and racial equity core principles.

KEY TERMS

Racial Equity Lens: A concept and practice that focuses on achieving equality for people of color. This lens helps people respond to structural racism and its consequences.

Co-develop: A practice that ensures that experts of color are invited at the beginning of a program planning process to help design, implement, and evaluate a project or policy. Co-developing means that experts of color are equitably engaged (see below).

Equitable Engagement: Equitable engagement is different from participation. It means involving experts of color from the beginning and empowering them to drive the conversation at each stage of the project or policy. They must have real decision-making power in shaping the narrative and determining who should be at the table—and they are given the appropriate credit and compensation for their ideas and time.

Historical Trauma: Multigenerational trauma experienced by a specific cultural, racial, or ethnic group, such as the colonization and attempted genocide of Indigenous people, enslavement of people of African descent (and racially targeted discrimination thereafter) and forced migration. Historical trauma impacts economic empowerment, mental health, and other factors that impact hunger.

How/Process: Racial equity is also a practice. So determining how a decision is made or a policy is designed matters. People of color should have equal power and representation in each process.

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Overall Recommendations for How Each Candidate Can Strengthen Racial Equity in Their Policy Proposals

Each of the proposed policy recommendations could be strengthened by:

- **Applying a racial equity lens to every facet of policies and plans, including the design, implementation, and evaluation stages of each proposal.** This is perhaps the most important recommendation. Generally, candidates have not applied this lens in a concerted way to each proposal throughout their policy recommendations. Doing so will ensure that every facet promotes racial equity. During this process, Bread encourages candidates to also outline how the processes within each policy will promote racial equity. This could include, for example, the process by which decisions are made or how compliance with policies is ensured. In addition, the design and implementation, the checks and balances process, and the evaluation of each proposal must be racially equitable.
- **Applying a racial equity lens to proposals to reduce the number of people incarcerated in this country.** Each candidate has proposals to reduce the number of people currently incarcerated in the United States. These proposals have the potential to promote racial equity. Some proposals specify reducing incarceration by half, while others are broader. All proposals, regardless of scope, should ensure that the process for reducing the population that is incarcerated is racially equitable. This would mean that people of color are released at the rate at which they were incarcerated. It would also mean that all prevention programs, crime reduction efforts, and other policies must apply a racial equity lens within the design, implementation, and evaluation stages. Finally, proposals must be developed in collaboration with experts of color.
- **Applying a racial equity lens to the process of diversifying local law enforcement departments.** All candidates, except for Mayor Pete Buttigieg, propose to racially diversify local law enforcement departments. In addition to recommending that Pete Buttigieg include a similar proposal in his criminal justice plan, Bread recommends that each candidate co-develop their proposals with local community experts of color. A racial equity lens should be applied to this process, to ensure that racial diversity is representative of the community being served. Local officers of color should not be concentrated in entry level positions; rather, they should be racially representative at all levels within the department. In addition, the proposal should outline how these goals will be achieved and what funding will be allocated to help reach them. For example, the plans should outline the resources that will be given to organizations of color in the community to equip them to serve in their local law enforcement department.
- **Applying a racial equity lens to any proposal to reform cash bail or reduce the number of people incarcerated before trial.** Each candidate has a proposal to reduce the number of people who are incarcerated while awaiting trial. Many of these proposals are to reform cash bail⁵—a practice that mandates that people who are arrested post bail in order to be released, regardless of other factors, including evidence of innocence or seriousness of offense. Proposals to reduce the number of people incarcerated before trial have the potential to reduce hunger and promote racial equity. Bread recommends that each proposal outline how the goal of ensuring that people of color no longer have higher rates of pre-trial incarceration will be achieved. Determinations of whether an individual is eligible to be released before trial should consider racial bias in the original charges against the person and/or police targeting related to their arrest. Both forms of bias can make it more difficult to achieve racial parity within pre-trial detention rates. These proposals should be co-developed by experts of color.

KEY TERMS, continued

Experts of Color: Experts of color are defined by experience, whether it is lived experience with a topic (being a low-wage worker or entrepreneur), experience practicing in the field (as an advocate or service provider), or experience conducting research and analysis in the field. Co-developing a proposal with experts of color means inviting people from all three categories of expertise.

Racial Equity Core Principles: These principles are: (1) the policy is co-developed with experts of color who have decision making power in the design, implementation, and evaluation stages; (2) the implementation of the policy is racially equitable in “who” is enforcing “what” and “how” it is being enforced or implemented; (3) the processes are racially equitable in each stage for “how” decisions are made; (4) policy plans are deeply rooted in and adequately respond to the historical trauma and racism that each community of color experiences; (5) the policy has adequate funding, checks and balances, and other resources to eliminate racial inequities.

To read more about these terms, review the glossary of the [Racial Equity and Nutrition Report](#).

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Candidate-Specific Plans on Criminal Justice

Note: Most of the proposed plans are broad-based and could strengthen racial equity by (1) applying this lens to each aspect of each policy proposal and (2) basing recommendations on analysis of how to address the deep origins of racial discrimination.

Former Vice President Joe Biden

Overall Rating: 2.5

While this plan is mainly broad-based, it promotes racial equity in these ways:

- Ending mandatory minimum sentences, which disproportionately target people of color, especially African Americans.
- Addressing systemic misconduct based in racism in police departments and prosecutors' offices by expanding the power of the U.S. Justice Department to use investigations and consent decrees.⁶
- Collecting sufficient data by race and ethnicity to develop evidence-based criminal justice policies and eliminate disparities.

In addition to the overall recommendations above, this plan could strengthen racial equity in these ways:

- Biden's proposal to establish an independent Task Force on Prosecutorial Discretion to determine when to arrest, when to charge, and what charges to bring has the potential to promote racial equity. Bread recommends that the design and recommendations of the Task Force apply racial equity core principles, including being co-developed with experts of color and reflecting the impact of historical trauma. The plan should also mandate that local law enforcement agencies and prosecutors practice racial equity, including in the implementation of the Task Force's recommendations.

To see the full plan, [click here](#).

Senator Bernie Sanders

Overall Rating: 2.5

While this plan is mainly broad-based, it promotes racial equity in these ways:

- Ending "three strikes" laws and mandatory minimum sentences, which target people of color, especially African Americans.
- Requiring and funding police officer training on implicit bias as well as race and cultural competency.
- Diversifying police forces and academies by race.

In addition to the overall recommendations above, this plan could strengthen racial equity in these ways:

- Sanders' proposal to eliminate federal incentives for schools to implement zero-tolerance policies has the potential to promote racial equity. Bread recommends co-developing a proposal with experts of color to require that states adopt equitable policies that do not incarcerate students of color. This should be based on guidance issued by the Department of Education and Department of Justice. Guidance should apply the racial equity core principles, including in the ways children are viewed and treated across racial and ethnic communities. In addition, the proposal should include providing adequate resources to enforce the policy changes and carry out mandatory implicit bias training for school officials and administrators. The training should include information on the historical trauma of zero-tolerance policies that have targeted children of color.

To see the full plan, [click here](#).

CRIMINAL JUSTICE



Joe Biden

2.5



Sen. Bernie Sanders

2.5



Sen. Elizabeth Warren

3.5



Mayor Pete Buttigieg

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Senator Elizabeth Warren

Overall Rating: 3.5

At least half of this plan targets communities of color in an equitable way. This plan promotes racial equity in these ways:

- Ending racial disparities in the criminal justice system by strengthening data collection and transparency on police conduct.
- Ending racially discriminatory local policing by ending “stop and frisk” and “broken windows” policing tactics that target people of color. In addition, it calls for working with Congress to end racial profiling at all levels of law enforcement.
- Addressing the legacy of the “war on drugs,” which targeted people of color, especially African Americans.
- Diversifying the police force by race.
- Mandating that police departments receive training on implicit bias, the scientific and psychological roots of discrimination, and cultural competency.
- Appointing a racially diverse judicial bench.

In addition to the overall recommendations above, this plan could strengthen racial equity in these ways:

- Warren’s proposal to establish an advisory board comprised of survivors of violence, along with formerly incarcerated individuals, has the potential to promote racial equity. Bread recommends that advisors be racially representative in proportion to rates of incarceration and representation among victims of violent crime. Experts of color should be invited to co-develop this advisory board, and the advisory board should also be equitably engaged.
- Warren’s proposal to address the legacy of the “war on drugs” has the potential to be racially equitable. Bread recommends that this proposal include further details on providing restorative justice for individual families as well as neighborhoods and communities that have been harmed under this federal policy. The plan should apply the racial equity core principles, including being co-developed by experts of color.

To see the full plan, [click here](#).

Pete Buttigieg

Overall Rating: 3

While this plan is mainly broad-based, it promotes racial equity in these ways:

- Eliminating mandatory minimums, which primarily hurt people of color, especially African Americans.
- Racially diversifying the judiciary in proportion to overall representation in our country (including Indigenous representation).
- Investing in rigorous training on implicit bias and appropriate engagement with marginalized groups, including people of color.
- Directing the Department of Justice’s Civil Rights Division to investigate law enforcement agencies that show patterns of racial profiling.
- Ending racially discriminatory local policing by ending practices such as “broken windows” and other tactics that target people of color.

In addition to the overall recommendations above, this plan could strengthen racial equity in these ways:

- Buttigieg’s proposal to promote independent civilian oversight of state and local law enforcement agencies has the potential to promote racial equity. Bread recommends co-developing this proposal with experts of color. In addition, the proposal should ensure that the design, implementation, and evaluation apply a racial equity lens to ensure that people of color are equitably engaged at all stages of oversight.
- Buttigieg should offer a proposal to diversify local law enforcement departments by race, which his platform currently lacks. See details on how to apply a racial equity lens to this process in the “Overall Recommendations” section.

To see the full plan, [click here](#) and [here](#).

¹ A Pilot Study Examining Food Insecurity and HIV Risk Behaviors Among Individuals Recently Released from Prison. National Institute of Health. April 2013. www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC3733343/pdf/nihms469405.pdf

² Minto, Todd and Zhen Zeng. “Jail Inmates at Midyear 2014.” U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs, Bureau of Justice Statistics. <https://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/jim14.pdf>

³ Malcolm, John and John-Michael Seibler. “LEGAL MEMORANDUM: Collateral Consequences: Protecting Public Safety or Encouraging Recidivism?” Heritage Foundation. March 2017. <http://www.heritage.org/sites/default/files/2017-03/LM-200.pdf>

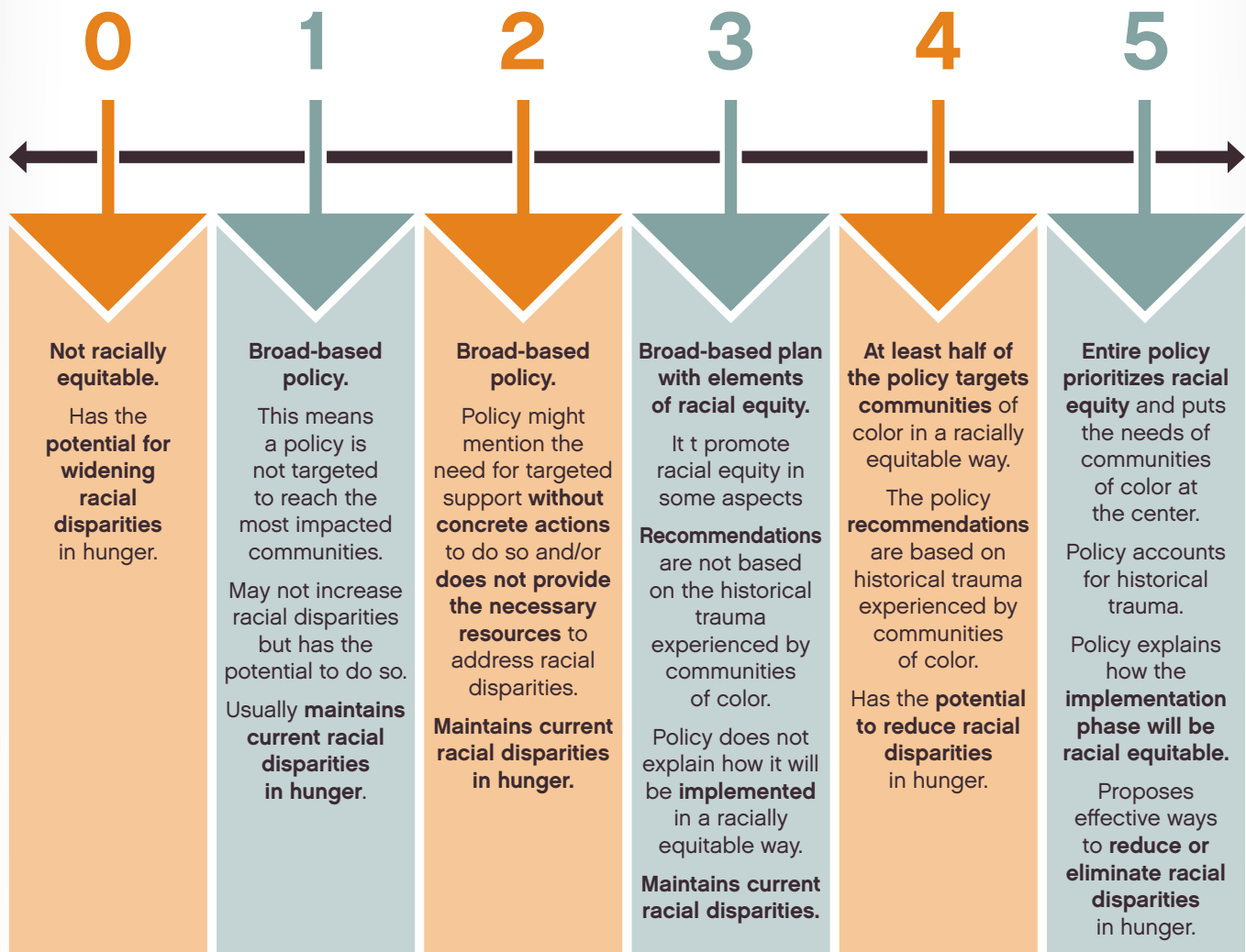
⁴ Gamblin, Marlysa. Mass Incarceration: A Major Cause of Hunger. Bread for the World Institute. February 2018. <https://www.bread.org/sites/default/files/downloads/briefing-paper-mass-incarceration-february-2018.pdf>

⁵ Cash bail is a system that requires people who have been arrested to pay cash to be “bailed out” or released until trial. Many people are forced to take out private loans or simply remain in jail because they cannot afford bail. For people in low-income households, this often results in job loss and/or home loss. The cash bail system increases hunger. Read more about cash bail here: “How Cash Bail Works.” The Brennan Center. December 2019. <https://www.brennancenter.org/our-work/research-reports/how-cash-bail-works>

⁶ A consent decree is an agreement between the Justice Department and a local jurisdiction, enforced by a federal judge, to overhaul a law enforcement agency that has been accused of a pattern of abuses and civil rights violations. For the consent decree issued for Ferguson, MO, in 2015, see “Consent Decree,” United States District Court Eastern District of Missouri, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/file/833431/download>



Racial Equity Rating Tool*



For more analysis on how the presidential candidates promote racial equity, go to votingrecord.us.

*This analysis was based on Bread's work to promote racial equity in anti-hunger policies. To learn how to apply a racial equity lens, please see Bread's [Racial Equity Methodology Tool](#), which outlines a step-by-step process to assess whether a policy or program promotes racial equity. To see how Bread applied this methodology to the national nutrition programs, including the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) and Child Nutrition Programs, read our [Racial Equity and Nutrition Report](#).