
The RECORD

President Obama *on* Social Progress

ADVANCING SOCIAL PROGRESS AND EQUALITY

President Obama has led the fight to protect everyone — no matter who you are, where you're from, what you look like, or whom you love. From pushing through sweeping rights and protections for LGBT Americans, to making our immigration system fairer and safer, to tackling poverty and investing in communities, here's where the Administration's record stands.

Ensured Equality for LGBT Americans

- Advocated in favor of a Constitutional guarantee of marriage equality for same-sex couples—a position the Supreme Court vindicated in its historic decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges*
- Ended the government's defense of the Defense of Marriage Act, leading to the Supreme Court's landmark decisions holding the Act unconstitutional
- Required health plans to cover dependent children up to age 26
- Directed the Cabinet to review over 1,000 federal statutes and regulations to ensure the decision was implemented swiftly and smoothly by the federal government to recognize the rights of same-sex couples, following the Supreme Court decision in *Windsor*
- Repealed Don't Ask, Don't Tell, allowing gay, lesbian, and bisexual Americans to serve openly in the Armed Forces without fear of being dismissed from service because of who they are and whom they love

- Signed the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act, historic legislation extending coverage of federal hate-crime law to include attacks based on the victim's actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity
- Simplified health choices by requiring individual and small business plans to offer four standard categories at various costs, plus a catastrophic option for people under age 30 and people who cannot otherwise afford coverage
- Signed an Executive Order extending the prohibitions against discrimination that apply to federal contractors and subcontractors to bar discrimination in employment on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity
- Required hospitals receiving Medicare or Medicaid to ensure that the rights of LGBT patients are respected by allowing individuals to designate visitors, regardless of sexual orientation and gender identity
- Took unprecedented steps to protect and promote the rights of transgender and gender nonconforming Americans
- Supported legislative efforts to ban the use of so-called "conversion therapy" against minors and released a SAMHSA study condemning the practice
- Took a stand against bullying by honoring Spirit Day, hosting the first-ever White House Conference on Bullying Prevention, and recording the President's own "It Gets Better" video
- Developed and released the first comprehensive National HIV/AIDS Strategy for the United States in 2010, and updated it through 2020 to address disparities faced by certain populations
- Provided new home- and community-based options for elderly and disabled Americans who require long-term care services
- Announced the first ever national study of discrimination in housing against LGBT persons and, in January 2012 and in 2015, issued a final rule and subsequent guidance to ensure that the Department of Housing and Urban Development's core housing programs and services are open to all persons regardless of sexual orientation or gender identity
- Issued guidance stating that Federal prosecutors should enforce criminal provisions in the Violence Against Women Act in cases involving same-sex relationships
- Advanced the rights of LGBT persons around the world through action at the UN, a Presidential Memorandum that directs all federal agencies engaged abroad to ensure that U.S. diplomacy and foreign assistance promote and protect the human rights of LGBT persons, and the appointment of the U.S. State Department's first-ever Special Envoy for the Human Rights of LGBTI Persons

Reformed Our Immigration System

- Implemented the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) policy for young undocumented people who came to the U.S. as children in an effort to better focus enforcement resources
- Created a tax credit for small businesses that provide health coverage to their employees
- Took steps to reduce barriers for high-skilled immigrants by identifying and reducing undue immigration barriers faced by foreign-born entrepreneurs
- Provided work-authorization to spouses of high-skilled workers on their path to becoming lawful permanent residents—over 52,000 spouses have now received work authorization
- Created the White House Task Force for on New Americans, which launched the Building Welcoming Communities Campaign to help local communities strengthen integration efforts and the “Stand Stronger” Citizenship Awareness Campaign
- Reduced family separation for those waiting to obtain lawful permanent resident (LPR) status through a new United States Citizenship and Immigration Services provisional waiver process for immediate relatives of U.S. citizens. This process has recently been enhanced and expanded to include additional relatives of U.S. citizens and relatives of LPRs. USCIS also published policy guidance to provide more clarity on the standards for obtaining this waiver. Since 2013, more than 80,000 individuals have obtained this waiver.
- Provided better service to legal immigrants, employers and others through the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services’ E-Verify Program
- Launched an updated USCIS website that includes a new Spanish version and an online tool that allows individuals, for the first time ever, to get updates on their citizenship and other applications online or via text message
- Launched the “Stand Stronger” Citizenship Awareness Campaign to promote naturalization opportunities to the 8.8 million LPRs who may be eligible and provided new tools to prepare applicants for citizenship through the “Citizenship Resource Center”
- Established the Citizenship and Integration Grant Program that provides funding for high-quality citizenship preparation programs for lawful permanent residents across the country
- Worked with the Armed Forces to naturalize tens of thousands of military personnel. Between fiscal years 2010 and 2015, more than 21,000 individuals serving in the military have naturalized.
- Standardized the process for applying for waivers for fees associated with immigration applications and petitions, including full fee waivers of the naturalization fee

- Increased the annual number of refugees admitted to the United States while ensuring robust security screening and addressed the unique challenges refugees face by increasing medical screening, providing new mental health resources, and conducting comprehensive on-going reviews grant programs
- Expanded initiatives to address the ongoing humanitarian challenges in Central America by establishing and expanding mechanisms for vulnerable individuals, including children of lawfully present parents in the United States, to enter the country as refugees or through other humanitarian mechanisms, and creating an option for immediate transfer to Costa Rica for those individuals in of need of immediate protection.
- Implemented critical reforms to immigration enforcement by establishing new priorities that focus limited resources on national security, public safety, and border security threats
- Developed the new Priority Enforcement Program to better collaborate with state and local law enforcement in order to detain and remove convicted criminals, while maintaining community trust
- Strengthened the immigration court system, which is housed in the Department of Justice, by increasing the number of immigration judges and staff, enhancing training and mentoring programs to ensure that those judges are ready to hear cases fairly and promptly, and improving access to legal information for immigrants.
- Expanded access to low-cost legal services through a variety of efforts to ensure better protections for those least able to represent themselves
- Fought the unauthorized practice of immigration law (“notario fraud”) by developing outreach materials, prosecuting unscrupulous scammers, and building local collaborations
- Established an Interagency Working Group to better coordinate cases where federal responsibilities to enforce labor, employment and immigration laws may overlap so that workers who cooperate with law enforcement can do so without fear of retaliation

Fought for a Fairer, More Equitable Criminal Justice System

- Toured a federal prison, marking the first such visit by a sitting President
- Signed the Fair Sentencing Act to ease the disparity in the amounts of powder cocaine and crack cocaine required to trigger certain penalties in the federal system, including the imposition of rigid mandatory minimum sentences, and supported legislative reforms to make sentencing laws smarter, fairer and more effective
- Reduced the federal prison population by more than 10,000 inmates

- Commuted the sentences of over 1,000 women and men incarcerated under outdated and unduly harsh sentencing laws, including over 340 individuals who were serving life sentences
- Announced that the Bureau of Prisons would no longer use a number of private correctional facilities and the intent of the Bureau of Prisons to end the use of private prisons
- Launched Second Chance Pell Pilot Program for Incarcerated Individuals to test new models to allow incarcerated Americans to receive Pell Grants and pursue the postsecondary education with the goal of helping them get jobs, support their families, and turn their lives around
- Created the President’s Task Force on 21st Century Policing, which brought together representatives of law enforcement, community, academics, and youth to develop a unified set of 59 concrete and practical recommendations that can be used by jurisdictions across the country to enhance trust between communities and law enforcement while improving public safety
- Increased the use of body-worn cameras through \$20 million in grants to state and local law enforcement
- Launched the White House Police Data Initiative, which uses data to increase transparency, build community trust, and strengthen accountability by bringing together law enforcement jurisdictions across the country with technologists, community organizations, and police associations to improve police-citizen interactions through better use of technology and data
- Directed the Office of Personnel Management to take action to “ban the box,” resulting in a final rule prohibiting federal agencies from inquiring into a competitive service applicant’s criminal or credit history until after a conditional job offer has been made. The President also called on Congress to follow a growing number of states, cities, and private companies that have decided to “ban the box” on job applications
- Established the Federal Interagency Reentry Council to bring together the domestic agencies to improve the opportunities for success for the formerly incarcerated
- Expanded new ways to recruit and place job applicants based on their actual skills and to create more fast track tech training opportunities, including for individuals with criminal records, as a part of the Administration’s TechHire initiative
- Established a National Clean Slate Clearinghouse where the Department of Labor and Department of Justice will partner to provide technical assistance to local legal aid programs, public defender offices, and reentry service providers to build capacity for legal services needed to help with record-cleaning, expungement, and related civil legal services

- Issued reports on the impact of fines, fees, bail, and licensing on incarceration, poverty and reentry
- Established Smart on Juvenile Justice grant program to expand the use of effective community-based alternatives to youth detention
- Launched the Smart on Crime initiative through which the Department of Justice modified its charging policies certain federal low-level drug-related offenses, improved diversion and re-entry policies, and strengthened protections for the most vulnerable
- Issued guidance to improve correctional education in Juvenile Justice Facilities
- Released an online clearinghouse of resources at the Department of Justice to help law enforcement professionals and the communities they serve plan and implement body-worn camera programs
- Completed an extensive review of federal programs that support the acquisition of equipment by state, local and tribal law enforcement agencies, through a federal interagency working group. On the basis of that review, the working group developed a series of concrete steps to address the apparent militarization of law enforcement agencies and enhance accountability, increase transparency, and better serve the needs of law enforcement and local communities.
- Launched the Violence Reduction Network to deliver strategic, intensive training and technical assistance to reduce violent crime
- Funded the addition of nearly 10,000 community policing officers across the country through the Department of Justice's Office of Community Oriented Policing Services
- Launched the National Initiative as a multi-faceted approach to help strengthen the relationship between law enforcement and the communities they serve by promoting procedural justice, reducing implicit bias and supporting racial reconciliation
- Launched the Collaborative Reform Initiative for Technical Assistance to improve trust between police agencies and the communities they serve by providing a means to organizational transformation around specific issues
- Established the National Forum on Youth Violence Prevention to help communities build local capacity to prevent and reduce youth violence
- The Department of Justice conducted investigations of and entered into agreements with numerous law enforcement agencies around the country to address serious concerns, rebuild trust and maintain the highest standards of professionalism and integrity

- Launched the Access to Justice Initiative, at the Department of Justice, to engage with a wide variety of new partners — including state, local, tribal, and federal officials, nonprofit organizations, researchers, and experts from across the private sector — to expand research and funding support for the delivery of indigent defense services and to protect the Sixth Amendment guarantee of effective assistance of counsel
- Issued updated profiling guidance that, among other things, expanded the prohibition to religion, national origin, sexual orientation, and gender identity and was applicable to state and local law enforcement agencies working on federal task forces
- Issued guidance on identifying and preventing gender bias in law enforcement response to sexual assault and domestic violence
- Revised the Byrne Memorial Justice Assistance Grant Accountability (Byrne-JAG)
- Launched the White House Data-Driven Justice Initiative to reduce unnecessary incarceration
- Created the National Officer Safety and Wellness Group within the Department of Justice to examine difficult issues within police departments
- Directed the federal government to limit the use of restrictive housing in federal detention centers, divert individuals to alternative housing, limit direct community placement from restrictive housing, increase out of cell placement time, and eliminate the use of restrictive housing for juveniles
- Supported improvements to the forensic sciences to ensure that individuals are not wrongfully brought into the criminal justice system or convicted
- Recommended that states and localities review their licensing requirements to ensure that it is not unnecessarily making it more difficult for formerly incarcerated people, among others, to find a job
- Developed the Fair Chance Hiring Pledge and the Fair Chance Education Pledge to encourage businesses to give a fair chance to all applicants and to encourage universities to move “Beyond the Box” when making admissions decisions
- Signed the Rafael Ramos and Wenjian Liu Blue Alert Act to create a nationwide alert system that will warn officers if there is an active threat against law enforcement
- Created a reentry toolkit that is provided to all individuals leaving federal prison

Expanded Opportunities for People with Disabilities

- Signed an Executive Order to increase federal employment of individuals with disabilities, and committed the Executive Branch to increasing the number of individuals with disabilities in the federal workforce, which at 12 percent of federal government employees, is at its highest level in three decades

- Updated affirmative action regulations to assist Federal contractors in hiring—and improve job opportunities for—individuals with disabilities and established a new 7% utilization goal for individuals with disabilities
- Ensured that Americans with disabilities have improved access to health care and protection against being refused coverage because of a pre-existing condition, through the Affordable Care Act
- Signed into law the Achieving a Better Life Experience Act, which allows individuals with disabilities receiving benefits to earn assets without risk of losing needed health benefits and income assistance
- Signed into law the Christopher Reeve Paralysis Act and Autism Collaboration, Accountability, Research, Education, and Support Act, both of which provide additional funding for Autism and spinal cord injury research
- Signed into law Rosa’s Law, which updates language in Federal policy to use the term intellectual disability
- Updated regulations through the Department of Education to ensure children with disabilities receive a high-quality early education
- Signed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2015 that ensured that the Social Security Disability Insurance program is able to provide beneficiaries the full benefits they have earned; without this legislation, the program would have run short of funds in December 2016, resulting in deep cuts
- Established the HHS Administration on Community Living, the FEMA Office of Disability Integration and Coordination, and the State Department Office on International Disability Rights
- Launched the “Year of Community Living” to identify ways to improve access to housing, community supports, and independent living arrangements
- Worked with the Department of Justice to pursue an aggressive effort to enforce the Supreme Court’s decision in *Olmstead v. L.C.*, to create opportunities for Americans who are institutionalized to live and work in their communities and prevent thousands of Americans from becoming institutionalized
- Launched a new Mental Health Early Intervention demonstration project in the Social Security Administration aimed at testing innovative strategies for helping people with disabilities remain in the workforce

Improved Veteran Services

- Made historic investments to end veteran homelessness by working with local communities, cutting homelessness among veterans nearly in half

- Worked with local partners to, through the Mayors Challenge to End Veteran Homelessness, begin the drumbeat to end veteran homelessness - a goal that has been achieved in more than 30 communities including in New Orleans, Houston, Las Vegas, and Philadelphia, as well as the entire states of Virginia, Delaware, and Connecticut
- Improved access to VA health care, including completing nearly 58 million appointments within the VA in the past 12 months,, completing 97 percent of appointments within 30 days of the clinically indicated or veteran's preferred date, and authorizing over 3 million episodes of care with community partners.
- Substantially reduced the disability claims backlog, decreasing it by nearly 90 percent since its peak, paying the largest number of claims in history, and dramatically reducing the average times to complete a claim
- Provided over \$65 billion in benefit payments under the Post-9/11 GI Bill to more than 1.6 million individuals and their educational institutions
- Worked with Congress and states to ensure that all 50 states and 5 territories now offer in-state tuition rates for veterans and their dependents at public institutions of higher learning
- Helped bring the overall veteran unemployment rate down to 3.6 percent, an eight-year low. In addition, the unemployment rate for Post-9/11 veterans has improved from a peak of 12.1 percent to 4.2 percent today
- Issued an Executive Order to increase the capacity of VA mental-health programs by hiring 1,600 more mental-health professionals and expanding the capacity of the Veterans Crisis Line
- Relaxed the evidence requirements for veterans seeking disability pay for post-traumatic stress disorder with the Department of Veterans Affairs
- Proposed boosting funding for veterans by over 85 percent, ensuring that the Department of Veterans Affairs has the funding needed to serve veterans
- Issued new regulations to include disability rating criteria that ensure veterans with service-connected Traumatic Brain Injuries are properly compensated for their disabilities
- Issued an Executive Order establishing quality guidelines for educational institutions serving service members, veterans and their families
- Issued a Presidential Memorandum to strengthen efforts to ensure fair practices in education and training programs for service members, veterans, eligible spouse, and family members
- Improved the Post-9/11 GI Bill Comparison Tool that now provides a more user-friendly experience, mobile device compatibility, and Veteran-specific outcome measures on graduation and retention rates

- The First Lady and Dr. Biden launched Joining Forces in 2011, a nationwide initiative calling all Americans to rally around service members, veterans and their families, and to support them through wellness, education and employment opportunities

Took Action to Reduce Gun Violence

- Clarified that it doesn't matter where you conduct your business—from a store, at gun shows, or over the Internet: If you're in the business of selling firearms, you must get a license and conduct background checks
- Required background checks for people trying to buy some of the most dangerous weapons and other items through a trust or corporation
- Ensured States are providing records to the background check system, and work cooperatively with jurisdictions to improve reporting
- Directed an overhaul of the background check system to make it more efficient and effective
- Ensured smart and effective enforcement of our gun laws
- Ensured that dealers notify law enforcement about the theft or loss of their guns
- Issued a memo directing every U.S. Attorney's Office to renew domestic violence outreach efforts
- Called for significant new resources to increase access to mental health care
- Took steps to include appropriate information from the Social Security Administration in the background check system about beneficiaries who are prohibited from possessing a firearm for reasons related to mental health
- Removed unnecessary legal barriers preventing States from reporting relevant information to the background check system
- Issued a Presidential Memorandum directing the Department of Defense, Department of Justice, and Department of Homeland Security to take two important steps to promote smart gun technology
- Continued to build on the 23 executive actions to reduce gun violence announced in January 2013

Tackled Poverty by Expanding Economic Opportunity and Investing in Neighborhoods and Communities

- Real median household income grew 5.2 percent from 2014 to 2015, the fastest annual growth on record. Income grew for households across the income distribution, with the fastest growth among lower- and middle-income households

- The number of people in poverty fell by 3.5 million, leading the poverty rate to fall from 14.8 percent in 2014 to 13.5 percent in 2015. This represents the largest one-year drop since 1968, with even larger improvements for African Americans, Hispanic Americans, and children. Oversaw the biggest three-year drop in child poverty in the last 50 years.
- Enacted significant expansions of three refundable tax credits — the Earned Income Tax Credit, the Child Tax Credit, and the American Opportunity Tax Credit — and successfully fought to make them permanent, lifting millions out of or closer to the poverty line while helping others pay for college
- Took aggressive action during the Great Recession, keeping between 3.9 and 5.7 million people a year out of poverty from 2009 to 2012 during the worst recession since the Great Depression
- Extended health insurance to millions of poor and near-poor individuals through the Affordable Care Act, providing access to health care and reducing medical bills for those already stretched
- Launched the “My Brother’s Keeper” (MBK) initiative in 2014 to address persistent opportunity gaps faced by boys and young men of color and ensure that all young people can reach their full potential. Through the My Brother’s Keeper Community Challenge, more than 230 city, county, and tribal leaders are joining with diverse stakeholders to implement their own cradle-to-college-and-career strategies to help ensure all youth in their communities can achieve their full potential.
- Implemented recommendations from the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) Task Force May 2014 report, which has led to new programs and tools to do what works to address persistent opportunity gaps
- Designated 22 Promise Zones across the country to revitalize communities by attracting private investment, creating jobs, improving access to affordable housing, expanding educational opportunities, and partnering with local leaders to navigate federal programs
- Established Promise Neighborhoods supporting local leaders as they implement evidence-based cradle-to-career supports for educational success, including both family and community supports. Some high-poverty communities pursuing these strategies are already seeing marked improvement in kindergarten readiness, school attendance, high school graduation rates, and college preparedness.
- Incentivized innovative work in state and local governments through Performance Partnership Pilots for Disconnected Youth to give state, local, and tribal governments an opportunity to test innovative new strategies to improve outcomes for low-income disconnected youth
- Prompted more than 1,000 communities in all 50 states to prioritize smart-growth, livability, and sustainability when developing plans for housing, transportation, and economic development

- Transformed distressed housing in high-poverty areas, developing nearly 10,000 units of mixed income housing
- Expanded the Neighborhood Stabilization Program which provided \$7 billion in funding to communities to manage the vacant and foreclosed properties
- Brought clean drinking water and better waste management to 14.5 million rural residents through finance of infrastructure investments in rural communities
- Developed a more effective and collaborative approach to how the Federal government engages with local communities
- Advanced local efforts to affirmatively further fair housing by equipping communities with open data and engaging community members in developing local plans to close gaps in access to opportunity
- Launched the Strong Cities Strong Communities initiative, a partnership between the federal government and mayors of chronically distressed cities that have faced significant long-term challenges in developing and implementing their economic strategies
- Expanded access to high-quality preschool through its Preschool Development Grants competition, which has provided grants to 18 states to support high-quality early childhood education programs for children from low-income families
- Raised the bar on quality in Head Start by requiring programs that don't meet certain standards to compete for continued funding and securing funding to increase the number of programs providing a full school day and year program
- Enacted a bipartisan child care law that requires child care programs to meet higher quality standards
- Secured education reform efforts that focus on ensuring that all K-12 schools have college and career ready standards, high quality teachers and leaders, and that low performing schools are turned around. Nearly every state (49 states and the District of Columbia) has adopted higher academic state-driven expectations for their K-12 students, so that what students learn is aligned with college and career expectations and with the work of their peers in other countries.
- Signed the Every Student Succeeds Act to fix No Child Left Behind, ensuring that our education system will prepare every child to graduate from high school ready for college and careers, reduce the burden of standardized tests, and provide more children access to high-quality state preschool programs
- Made college more affordable by increasing Pell grants, keeping interest rates on student loans low, and helping students manageably repay their loans
- Made historic investments in improved child nutrition and health for the 31 million children who rely on school meals through passage of the Healthy, Hunger Free Kids Act

- Re-oriented and improved Federal job training programs to ensure that they are training workers to fill high growth, ready-to-fill jobs, building on evidence-based approaches
- Tackled child poverty in rural America with innovations that ensure rural families have access to the support they need despite vast geographies and distance to services
- Launched “Rural Impact,” a cross-agency effort led by the White House Rural Council to combat poverty and improve upward mobility in rural and tribal places by innovating program delivery in key programs, including designating ten rural communities for a demonstration that will provide targeted technical assistance to help communities adopt a two-generation approach to programs, policies, and systems to better meet the needs of low-income kids and parents
- Made targeted investments in rural areas of persistent poverty through the Department of Agriculture’s StrikeForce for Rural Growth and Opportunity initiative
- Used evidence to grow efforts with a proven record of success, such as housing initiatives to reduce veteran homelessness by nearly half.
- Catalyzed the development of Pay for Success as a new, national strategy to scale data-driven, cross-silo and evidence-based interventions
- Created the Social Innovation Fund, which has funded over 300 high-impact community organizations to address poverty while building evidence about what works to increase economic opportunity, promote healthy futures, and improve outcomes for youth
- Launched permanent supportive housing for the reentry population through Pay for Success
- Supported public housing residents through Juvenile Reentry Assistance Program awards
- Promoted equitable development with a Housing Development Toolkit that highlights the actions states and local jurisdictions can take to promote healthy and affordable housing markets
- Made it easier for families with HUD rental housing vouchers to move to more affluent neighborhoods by establishing a new method for calculating rental values
- Promoted the health of public housing residents and staff by implementing a smoke-free policy that improves in-home air quality, reduces risk of fires and lowers overall maintenance costs
- Created the White House Rural Council to address challenges in Rural America and build on the Administration’s rural economic strategy
- Expanded local and county support to tackle rural child poverty through the Department of Health and Human Services’ Rural IMPACT County Challenge, which includes over 100 counties across 30 states

- Formed new partnerships in diverse rural communities, resulting in a 12 percent increase in the number of black farmers and a 21 percent increase in Hispanic farmers between 2007 and 2012
- Advanced a tiered-evidence approach to grantmaking—such as the Corporation for National and Community Service’s Social Innovation Fund and the Department of Education’s Investing in Innovation Fund (i3)—to develop and scale innovative programs
- Launched the Generation Indigenous (Gen-I) initiative to improve the lives of Native youth
- Established the White House Council on Native American Affairs to strengthen government-to-government relations and coordinate policies that promote and sustain prosperous and resilient tribal communities
- Restored 1.7 million acres in Native American Tribal Homelands through the Land Buy-Back Program and placed 500,000 acres of land into Tribal trust status
- Expanded partnerships between the federal government and nonprofit organizations, both secular and faith-based, to better serve those in need both at home and abroad
- Established the first-ever Advisory Council for Faith-based and Neighborhood Partnerships