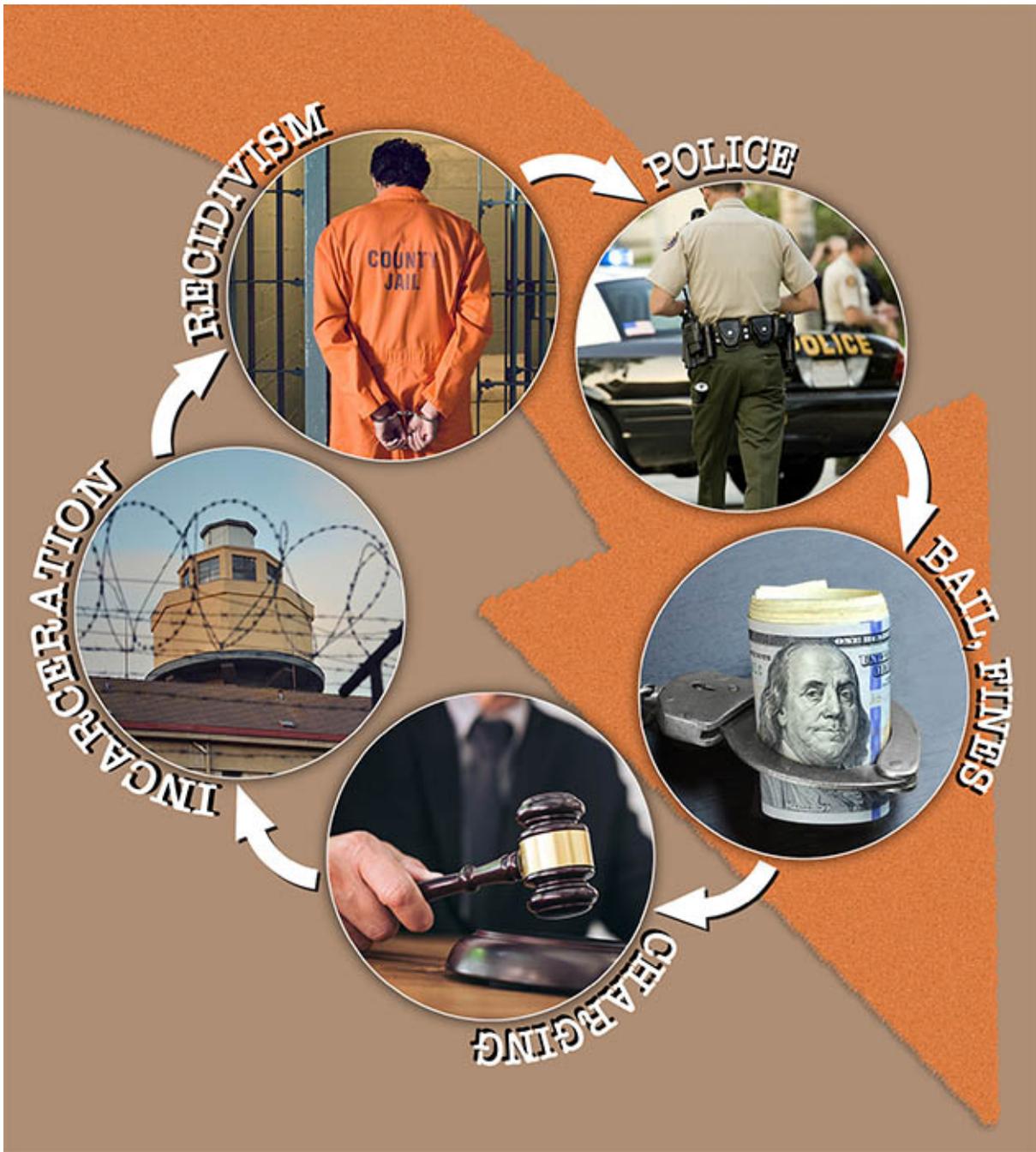


“Criminal Justice in Arizona”

Criminal Justice Town Hall for Affected Populations Report
Tucson, AZ – October 13, 2018



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ARIZONA

Criminal Justice Town Hall for Affected Populations Report

October 13, 2018 – Habitat for Humanity Tucson

Participants of the October 2018 Criminal Justice Town Hall for Affected Populations make the following findings and recommendations. This report reflects the consensus achieved through group discussions by Community Town Hall participants.

GOALS FOR ARIZONA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The criminal justice system should focus on safety, prevention and rehabilitation (which includes reducing recidivism) instead of punishment. It should be fair and it should be just. It should focus on facts and research rather than political and emotional responses to different types of crime. We should reconsider the use of private prisons motivated by profit.

We should tailor responsibility for crimes committed to the crime itself while accounting for the needs of the victim. To meet these goals, we need to consider an overhaul of the system that includes looking at the role of discretion across the system and our current sentencing structure.

Incarceration should be looked at as a last resort—especially as it relates to drug abuse or mental illness. Sustainable funding for rehabilitation and diversion programs will result in healthy individuals, families and communities. It is a better return on investment of funds than money spent on punishment.

Rehabilitation, which will help reduce recidivism, should involve programs that start immediately and should have as a goal how to make people successful outside of the system. This may include greater assistance for mental illness and substance abuse, life skills training, educational opportunities and providing job skills that can be used upon release. There should be a case manager assigned from the beginning who can help guide inmates through these programs.

The programs that would have the greatest impact for those being released from the criminal justice system are those that provide transitional housing, transportation and jobs. We should also look at returning rights so that former inmates can more effectively transition back into society.

PRIOR TO INCARCERATION

Better education, including early education, is critical for preventing actions that may cause someone to enter the criminal justice system. The more we invest in education, the less we will need to spend on the criminal justice system.

We simply need to invest more money in education, including social workers and extracurricular activities that help prevent criminal activity. Literacy is a significant issue for many who are in the system. If we can improve literacy and educational opportunities, we will reduce the number of those who enter the system and those who recidivate.

We need to try to break the cycle with prevention programs, social service programs and programs that consider all victims, including family members of those incarcerated.

Families are critical for preventing incarceration. We need to provide more support for families in need and look for ways that we can constructively intervene before a problem happens. We also should look for ways to support families who have members who are incarcerated.

We should provide more training for police officers on mental illness, substance abuse, mindfulness and how to build better communication with the communities they serve.

We should look into more deflection and diversion programs that can help people stay out of jail and that address the issues underlying any activity that may be criminalized. This includes programs for mental illness and substance abuse, programs that are community based and “last chance” programs.

Court fees and fines and the bail system create challenges for those with low income which creates inequities in the system that disproportionality affect those who don't have the funds to pay the fines. We need to consider changes to this aspect of the system.

We should look at all aspects of the system that involve discretion on the part of police, prosecutors, judges and others. We need to also look at sentencing guidelines, especially mandatory minimums.

We can prevent people from reentering the system if we better address repeat offenders who commit nonviolent crimes and restore rights to those who have served their time so that they can become more integrated into their communities. We need to stop identifying people for the rest of the life by the worst thing they've ever done.

Finally, to improve the criminal justice system, we as citizens need to be involved with public policy through informing and talking to legislators. Tax dollars pay for a lobbyist for prosecutors. This should be balanced with a lobbyist that supports other perspectives. We also need to vote.

AFTER INCARCERATION

As soon as someone is incarcerated, we should assign a case manager who will work with people to set goals and design programs that allow them to succeed. These programs should be provided to all inmates, including those who have been convicted for crimes that currently prevent them from having access to such programs. They should include programs that address substance abuse, health needs (including mental health), job training and life skills. The goal should be to provide the best foundation for successfully reintegrating into society once they get out and to avoid technical violations that may cause them to return.

Essentially, we need to have a comprehensive support system that provides assessments of needs, available programs and resources to help inmates address issues both within the prison system and upon release. This should include better mental health and addiction management, necessary medications, positive daily routines that help with transition to the outside, and job training that is mapped to opportunities and jobs that are actually available on the outside.

Once released, we should provide identification cards, necessary medications and resources that can help with housing, transportation and jobs. We also need a process that addresses reintegration with families and communities.

We should consider standards, benchmarks and other incentives that encourage stakeholders running the system to be more accountable for the success of inmates once released. We should tailor laws and our systems for reentry to allow for success after release rather than failures.

Probation and parole need to be more of a support system than a continued system of punishment. A system that uses care workers instead of probation officers would be more effective. Intensive probation and other overly restrictive requirements should be reimaged so that ex-offenders have greater opportunities for employment. For example, there should be an opportunity to petition to get off of lifetime probation. We also should consider restoring rights in a way that allows all offenders to better integrate and take responsibility for the success of their own life. This may include restoring access to the internet for sex offenders as appropriate and specifically includes the right to vote. We should also consider a pathway for a more clearly defined and expanded opportunities for expungement or restoration of rights.

Reeducating the public is crucial. Public perception often leads to the inability of ex-offender to get housing and employment. Ex-offenders and others need to get their stories out so that the public can better understand what actually works to create a safer community and allow ex-offenders to become

productive members of their communities. The media should provide a more balance portrayal and employers should be encouraged and incentivized to hire ex-offenders.

Education and community support is critical to end the cycle of incarceration. The entire community needs to shift to common sense notions around the system. For example, this might include restitution to the community through more community work which would help the ex-offenders reintegrate and allow them to give back instead of being saddled with the burden of fines.

It's also important to consider the rights of victims. We should have a centralized database that makes it easier for post-conviction notification by text or other electronic means.

In the end, it all comes down to us. We need to have productive conversations with neighbors and friends to make these changes happen.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions at the Criminal Justice Town Hall for Affected Populations. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Educate the staff at the next meeting about this organization and topics discussed. I will educate the residents (former and current inmates) about the same information.
- Support Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws. I am convinced we need more evidence-based laws and fewer fear-based laws.
- Engage in conversations about the importance of criminal justice system reforms.
- Spread the word and further the cause. I will participate and contribute my time and resources to Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws. I will stand up for the rights and dignity of sex offenders.
- Do what I can to get legislators elected who are concerned with improving our criminal justice system. Also, push for cutting out national defense spending by one-third so we have more money available for these programs.
- Continue to increase my community activism to help move forward the much needed criminal "justice" system in Arizona.
- Contact Boy Scouts to see if they have a troop like Girl Scouts with incarcerated parents.
- Vote! – Continue to share and speak up/out about how to help those incarcerated. I will continue to help support and encourage those in and getting out.
- Be part and support Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws. I will contact legislators and attend additional Town Hall meetings.
- Communicate what I have learned with others.
- Advocate for Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws.
- Continue to further the conversation to educate others.
- Talk with my colleagues and friends re this Town Hall and use the information I learned in my work.
- Put together a list of resources for ex-offenders in Pima County.
- Continue to stay sober and make a difference in others' lives!
- Meet with our legislators to encourage them to enact rational legislation to reduce crime and protect the public with a focus with relief for youthful offenders.

- Personally send Arizona Town Hall reports on Criminal Justice in Arizona to government and legislative representatives for my community. I will include a personalized note or have a conversation.
- Do my part and speak up!
- Continue to educate my community on the impact of the criminal justice system and the need for reform.
- Work with Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws to educate the public and our legislature to change the sex offender registry to be less onerous!
- Continue to participate in the discussion of these issues by educating myself and staying aware of legislation that could impact it.
- Work with Families Against Mandatory Minimums and American Friends Service Committee to become a legislative advocate for sentencing and incarceration reform.
- Continue working directly with incarcerated individuals and providing them with info on successful transition to the outside.
- Support Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws. Meet with legislators. Find a legislator to support bills that will allow those convicted as a youth a way to get off the sex offender registry.
- Continue to increase my knowledge on the legal system of Arizona, including listening to perspectives different than my own, do volunteer work with organizations such as Arizonans for Rational Sex Offense Laws and American Friends Service Committee, and share what I know with friends, neighbors and peers.

HOSTED IN COLLABORATION WITH

FWD.us



Southern Arizona Leadership Council