



COMMUNITY DISCUSSION SUMMARY STATEMENTS

From Community Outreach Programs following the 111th Arizona Town Hall

In programs held around the state to follow up on the fall 2018 statewide Town Hall titled “Criminal Justice in Arizona,” audience members were asked to participate in a Town Hall-style discussion on priorities and action items. Statements prepared from the discussions at the outreach programs are set forth below.

TUCSON (March 19, 2019)

One of the most important recommendations that should receive the highest priority is addressing the substance abuse and mental health treatment needs of inmates. This should include encouraging the legislature to make funding available to expand substance abuse and mental health treatment for incarcerated individuals; expanding programs to certify inmates to provide substance abuse counseling to their peers and give them a certification to take with them when they leave prison; and publicizing the need for volunteers to conduct substance abuse counseling. We should also prioritize expanding the availability of educational and life skills programming for inmates and expand the ability of inmates to earn incentives and the ability to reduce their sentences. This encourages positive behavior and creates hope for inmates. We should also focus on efforts to reduce the number of non-violent inmates and reducing recidivism. This should include eliminating prison sentences for non-violent offenders, reducing sentence lengths, and expanding diversion options and alternatives and increasing post-prison treatment and support programs. We should also address charging and prosecutorial choices, including addressing the issue of stacking charges.

SIERRA VISTA (March 20, 2019)

We need to focus first on keeping people out of the prison system. Mental health and substance abuse issues, which can be closely connected, are key areas we should address more effectively with additional support services within the community. Alternatives to incarceration, including diversion and treatment programs, should be expanded. We should focus more effort on the symptoms instead of the crime.

Education is critical. Providing educational opportunities and community support to struggling children and adults will help prevent entry into the criminal justice system.

Once in prison, additional services to treat mental illness and substance abuse will have a significant impact in preparing inmates to effectively reenter society as will educational opportunities. Politically, this can be a challenge in Cochise County where many prisoners housed here return to other counties upon release. Preparing inmates for jobs upon release from prison will also help reduce recidivism, as will housing them close to family members so that they have family support during and after imprisonment.

Upon release from prison, the community should strive to work more effectively with returning citizens to provide opportunities that allow them to more effectively reenter into society, including opportunities to enter military service and jobs.

To reach our goals for improving the criminal justice system, we need to educate fellow citizens and lawmakers that these changes will help all Arizonans, including providing increased economic development for our communities and our state.

YUMA (March 26, 2019)

Yuma County feels strongly about Criminal Justice. There have been programs in the past that have helped individuals avoid the justice system that have ceased to exist. There should be consideration of bringing back programs that have demonstrated results in helping individuals make good decisions.

Recidivism can be avoided by providing gainful employment. It is necessary for employers to work with the probation department to provide entry level positions for those exiting the system. There should be incentives for employers to employ candidates leaving the prison system. True expungement of records can help those starting a new beginning.

Education can help younger individuals make better decisions. Early intervention is key to prevent crimes and bad decisions that can change people’s entire lives. Yuma County is known for its collaboration. Bringing

together the community to fundraise and create and expand programs is a method to help grow education resources to accomplish goals and objectives. Spiritual strength and family strength are also crucial towards helping individuals with strong foundations and new beginnings. These areas can be supported by faith-based organizations.

Modification of the statute on mandatory sentencing. Sentencing reform can allow judges more flexibility on decisions.

We should support recruitment and retention of employees in the correctional area.

Community awareness is important to recognize the trauma that affects not just the individual, but also the family, when someone is incarcerated. In many situations, there are health issues involved, and these should be taken into consideration when decisions are made regarding individuals. It is important that the community know about alternative courts, such as the mental health court, that assess particular issues individuals may be experiencing.

There are always obstacles. One predominant community response is “not in my neighborhood.” This attitude can affect where accessible services are offered in the community. Yuma County has issues with attracting sufficient mental health personnel to our region, leading to a gap in meeting the needs of community members. The ability and desire to change laws has proved to be an obstacle in the past. There are gaps in sufficient resources in the judicial system to address the needs of particular groups, such as veterans.

Individuals can volunteer in the system to help other individuals in the system with issues such as substance abuse, whose use affects individuals and crimes being committed. Every individual's action can make a difference.

PRESCOTT – EMBRY-RIDDLE AERONAUTICAL UNIVERSITY (April 9, 2019)

Criminal justice in Arizona must ensure and promote public safety and accountability while simultaneously playing a significant role in prevention.

To achieve this goal, the priorities should be:

- Give judges greater discretion based on the severity of offenses for both pre- and post-trial decisions.
- Apply uniform statewide data and evidenced based best practices to increase discretion in diversion and charging decisions by prosecutors. The Governor should appoint a statewide commission to address this issue.
- Promote public/private partnerships that facilitate effective re-entry programs such as the Yavapai County Re-Entry Program including pre-release intervention with families that create an environment which promotes rehabilitation and peer mentoring.
- We need to ensure that our dispatchers, police, and other first responders have mental health first aid and substance abuse training along with resources and financial support to increase pre-arrest diversion to organizations like West Yavapai Guidance Center, Spectrum and Terros to keep people out of the judicial system.
- Provide funding for in-patient mental health and substance abuse services.
- Special attention needs to be given to determine best practices for addressing sex offenders.
- Ensure that probation and parole are properly funded to assist in finding housing and jobs for people who are released from incarceration.
- Ensure that victims are heard and that offenders understand the impacts of their crimes.
- We should “ban the box” across the state to assist former offenders in finding employment and consider tax incentives to encourage businesses to hire former offenders.

DOWNTOWN PHOENIX (April 30, 2019)

Criminal justice in Arizona must ensure and promote public safety and accountability while simultaneously playing a significant role in prevention.

To achieve this goal, the priorities should be:

- Ensure that there are consequences for criminal behavior and that they are proportional to the crimes committed, as well as applied fairly and equitably regardless of race, ethnicity or economic status.
- Focus on the key areas of prevention, rehabilitation and reducing recidivism to ensure community safety.
- Invest in programs to prevent crime such as early childhood education and support for families, outreach programs for at-risk youth, substance abuse treatment and support and mental health services.
- Expand diversion programs, specialty courts and alternatives to incarceration such as medication-assisted treatment, drug court, veteran's court, homeless court, community service and electronic monitoring.
- Begin the re-entry process upon incarceration to enable the best possible rehabilitation and outcome for society.
- Provide resources and programs to enable achievement of goals such as literacy, completing a GED or post-secondary education and vocational and job training.
- Keep victims and their families informed and facilitate their inclusion in the re-entry process where appropriate.
- Provide safe half-way houses for transitioning from prison to free society.
- Give judges greater discretion to terminate sex offender registration.

*Statements from additional programs to be added.