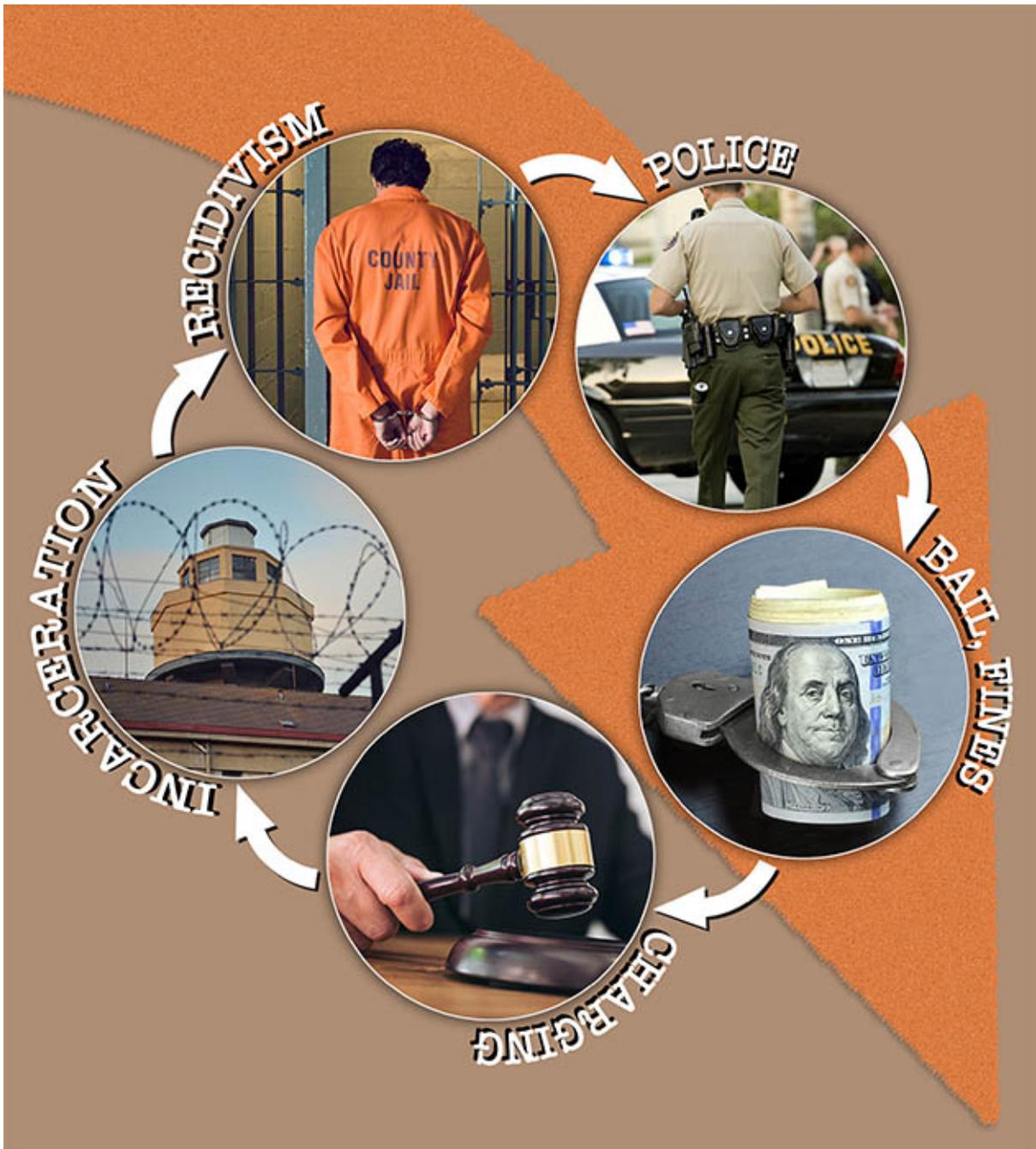


“Criminal Justice in Arizona”

Phoenix – Soroptimist Community Town Hall Report

Phoenix, AZ – October 25, 2018



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ARIZONA

Phoenix – Soroptimist Community Town Hall Report

October 25, 2018 – Hilton Garden Inn

Participants of the October 2018 Phoenix – Soroptimist Community Town Hall 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 most important goal of the criminal justice system is public safety and deterrence of undesirable behaviors. Other goals include holding people accountable for their conduct, rehabilitation, and dealing with offenders in ways that are designed to reduce the harm of incarceration and criminal conduct and reduce the risk of recidivism. We should use evidence-based best practices. For example, there is evidence that low-risk criminals should be diverted rather than incarcerated, as even three days in prison can cause lasting harm. There are more people on probation than in prison, and community supervision is an important resource that should be used to best advantage.

Although it may be natural to think of punishment as a principal goal of the criminal justice system, increasingly we are recognizing that interaction with the criminal justice system offers opportunities to correct circumstances that lead to criminal conduct. The operator of the prison system is called the Department of Corrections, not the Department of Punishment. It should be more focused on dealing with prisoners based on the totality of their individual circumstances rather than just their sentence, providing educational opportunities, preparing inmates to transition back to the community, dealing with substance abuse and helping prisoners learn social and problem solving skills.

SETTING PRIORITIES AND TAKING ACTION

When people talk about the criminal justice system they most often think of prison, but that is the last stop in the process and the least susceptible to cost-effective reform. Money spent on programs that divert people from prison (including preventative programs such as early education programs and drug treatment programs, and criminal justice programs such as probation and effective diversion programs) is a better investment than spending money on prisons.

By some estimates substance abuse has a direct role in approximately 75% of all crimes that result in incarceration. Addressing this problem could have a major impact on the criminal justice system. Children in foster care are dumped out of the system at age 18 with few resources and connections, and there are other populations of young people who lack resources and family support. There is a strong correlation between inability to read in third grade and future criminal conduct. Addressing these social conditions would make a difference.

It is important to recognize that prisoners will eventually be returned to the community. Our society needs to be educated about the challenges that prisoners face upon their release, including barriers that make it difficult to find jobs and housing. The Department of Corrections is taking steps to help prisoners apply for AHCCCS and other needed services. The business community and the Department of Corrections are collaborating to provide training and job opportunities for prisoners preparing for release that will improve the odds of successful transition.

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 Phoenix – Soroptimist Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Try to raise awareness on problems facing inmates being release from incarceration.
- Continue to share my thoughts with friends and neighbors as it pertains to substance abuse and how we can each spot early signs in our children, friends and families.
- Increase capacity to offer proven intervention strategies to probationers in order to change behavior.
- Continue educating community members about the criminal justice system.
- Communicate with someone incarcerated.
- Consider how I might impact drug abuse and drug training.
- Become more knowledgeable of the criminal justice system and small ways I can be involved.
- Share what I've learned with friends and neighbors to raise awareness.
- Because 90% of female inmates experience physical or sexual violence prior to prison—I will continue to work through Soroptimist to eradicate violence against women.
- Be open to discussion and/or support to inmates as they reenter society (i.e. supporting businesses who hire those with a record, being open to halfway houses, etc.).
- Look into why the D.A.R.E. program was discontinued and how it can be started again.
- Investigate the relationship between foster kids reaching maturity and percentage who get involved in the criminal justice system.
- Consider criminal justice issues in considering candidates for office.
- Identify opportunities to educate individuals within the community about challenges ex-cons face and how we can change our thinking about such. All should be given opportunities to reenter our communities without harsh obstacles.