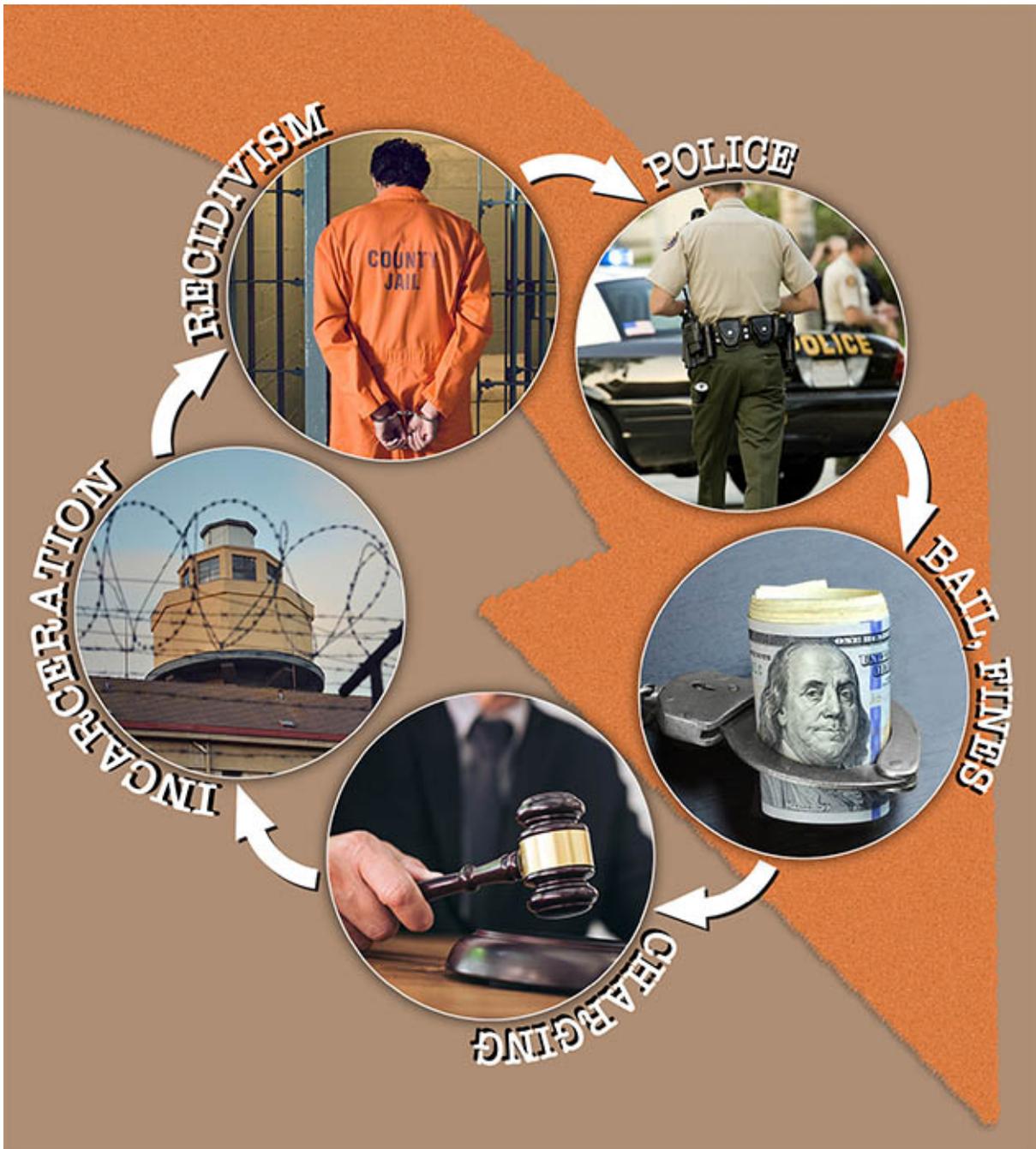


“Criminal Justice in Arizona”

Prescott Community Town Hall Report

Prescott, AZ – September 12, 2018



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ARIZONA

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September 12, 2018 – Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University

Participants of the September 2018 Prescott 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

Criminal justice in Arizona is a complex system which must satisfy many different needs. Paramount is the need to ensure and promote public safety and accountability while simultaneously playing a significant role in prevention—especially among youth. To achieve this goal, the system must provide punishment and deterrence balanced with providing rehabilitation and post-incarceration preparation in an environment that is also safe for inmates. The system must be fair and equitable to all and provide justice for victims of crime. The system is also called upon to play a preventative role in the community including diversion programs, school-based programs, early intervention in the lives of our youth, actively engaging with families, and leadership in drug and mental health treatment. Reducing recidivism is also a critical role—recognizing the importance of re-integration programs that include vocational training and requiring that the criminal justice system be an integral part of our communities.

PRIOR TO INCARCERATION

One of the most significant issues we face is the need for robust mental health and substance abuse treatment programs that reach people in need before they are arrested. Arizona's prisons and jails have become the largest facilities housing the mentally ill in the state. The movement away from state mental hospitals and similar facilities have made the criminal justice system their place of last resort.

We need to reach our youth while they are still in school. Programs that incorporate ex-offenders with lived experience can be extremely effective. More counseling resources in our schools could identify at-risk youth early and get them the help and guidance they need. Schools should also promote civic responsibility and incorporate community service.

Police need to be approachable—many in need of mental health and substance abuse care are fearful of police and authorities so we need to find new approaches to outreach. We need to ensure that our police and other first responders have mental first aid training combined with resources such as mobile crisis intervention teams. We need to work closely with police to train and provide consistent policies that help them make the best decision about how to address and possibly divert people with mental illness and substance abuse issues. Advocates could be leveraged to work with the families of first offenders to help create a supportive environment. We should implement a universal phone number to provide access to mental health and substance abuse resources.

We invest significant resources in probation and post-conviction treatment programs but we should be making those investments early to prevent criminal activity. There is also a major equity issue in rural versus urban funding. Diversion and treatment programs are not adequately funded in rural Arizona.

We need to continue to expand collaborative, cross-functional approaches that involve law enforcement, healthcare, all three branches of government, non-profits and other professionals. A very successful example in Yavapai County has been MATFORCE. Another important program is the Crisis Stabilization Unit at West Yavapai Guidance Center. We need to create and expand public awareness of the importance of treatment and prevention programs to support legislative action and public funding.

AFTER INCARCERATION

We need to ensure that convictions do not become a life sentence. Effective re-entry programs are critical to reducing recidivism. They need to include job readiness, and assistance in finding jobs, transportation and housing. Community-based re-entry coalitions including government, faith-based organizations, non-profits, and parole/probation are extremely successful. Parole and probation in Yavapai County work successfully with many community organizations to create a continuum of care. Programs that include peer supports and counselors are also very important.

Education during incarceration—especially vocational training for living wage, sustainable jobs—is very important to rehabilitation and re-entry. Cognitive behavioral programs in addition to substance abuse and mental health assistance are also important. Pre-release counseling is needed to help people develop plans that include transportation, housing, and available community resources. Availability of these resources is critical and can be very challenging in rural Arizona.

While we need to be respectful of victims of crime and address their trauma, we also need to recognize the burden that criminal fines place on people who are convicted and consider alternatives such as community service.

Substance abuse training during incarceration must be continued during re-entry and may include monitoring halfway houses and promoting access and attendance in 12-step programs.

Tax incentives could be used to encourage hiring people who have been convicted. Volunteer coordinators who can assist and coach people in re-entry should also be encouraged.

The Yavapai County Re-Entry Program that engages a mentor to help community re-entry and includes families has been very effective. Family support including pre-release intervention with the family creates an environment which promotes rehabilitation. Yavapai County mental health and veterans court diversion programs have also been very effective. Expanding community involvement in re-entry will keep recidivism down.

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 Prescott Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Be a mentor for someone in need and encourage others to do the same.
- Become a prisoner advocate.
- Be a voice for victims.
- Get involved.
- Be better informed and provide support where appropriate.
- Speak to high school students.
- Maintain collaboration with local judges, attorneys, law enforcement, and counseling agencies.
- Initiate discussions on this topic.
- Discuss re-entry planning.
- Promote the Yavapai Re-entry Program.
- Monitor and educate myself on criminal justice reform.

- Educate youth by hosting a Future Leaders Town Hall at Yavapai College.
- Volunteer for a rehabilitation program – I was previously unaware of this issue.
- Engage with children transitioning from the juvenile justice system.
- Work to bring robust improvements to the criminal justice system.
- Continue to promote the Navajo County Inmate Re-Entry Coordinator Position.
- Finish school and prepare for a career in criminal justice.
- Spread communication and knowledge to other young people and those who may not be aware of the criminal justice system, like me.
- Continue to promote Prescott Opinion.com, a blog I created to enable local citizen impact.
- Make time to listen to those who need someone to talk to and to keep giving it my all as the Yavapai County Re-Entry Program assistant.
- Continue to promote and facilitate the creation of a community re-entry coalition.
- Continue to use influence, passion, commitment and position to bring about robust changes to improve the criminal justice system in Yavapai County.
- Begin this discussion with citizens through social media.
- Invite students and citizens to the Town Hall at the Lewis Facility.
- Send Town Hall information to city government.
- Utilize the report from this Town Hall to support strategies and goals of the Yavapai justice and mental health coalition.
- Learn more about and advocate for reentry work and planning.
- Contact my local representatives to discuss transportation issues and resolutions for providing transport to rural areas such as Ash Fork and Seligman.
- Volunteer to assist those newly released from DOC.
- Talk to my legislators to encourage them to be courageous to do the right thing.
- Work toward being a mentor for someone in need. Encourage others to do the same.
- Investigate what resources and programs exist in my area (Sedona Verde Valley) and see what is needed. Look at how the school/community college can help. Create more school/community partnerships to make resources available to families.
- Finish school in order to prepare myself for a career within the criminal justice system.

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