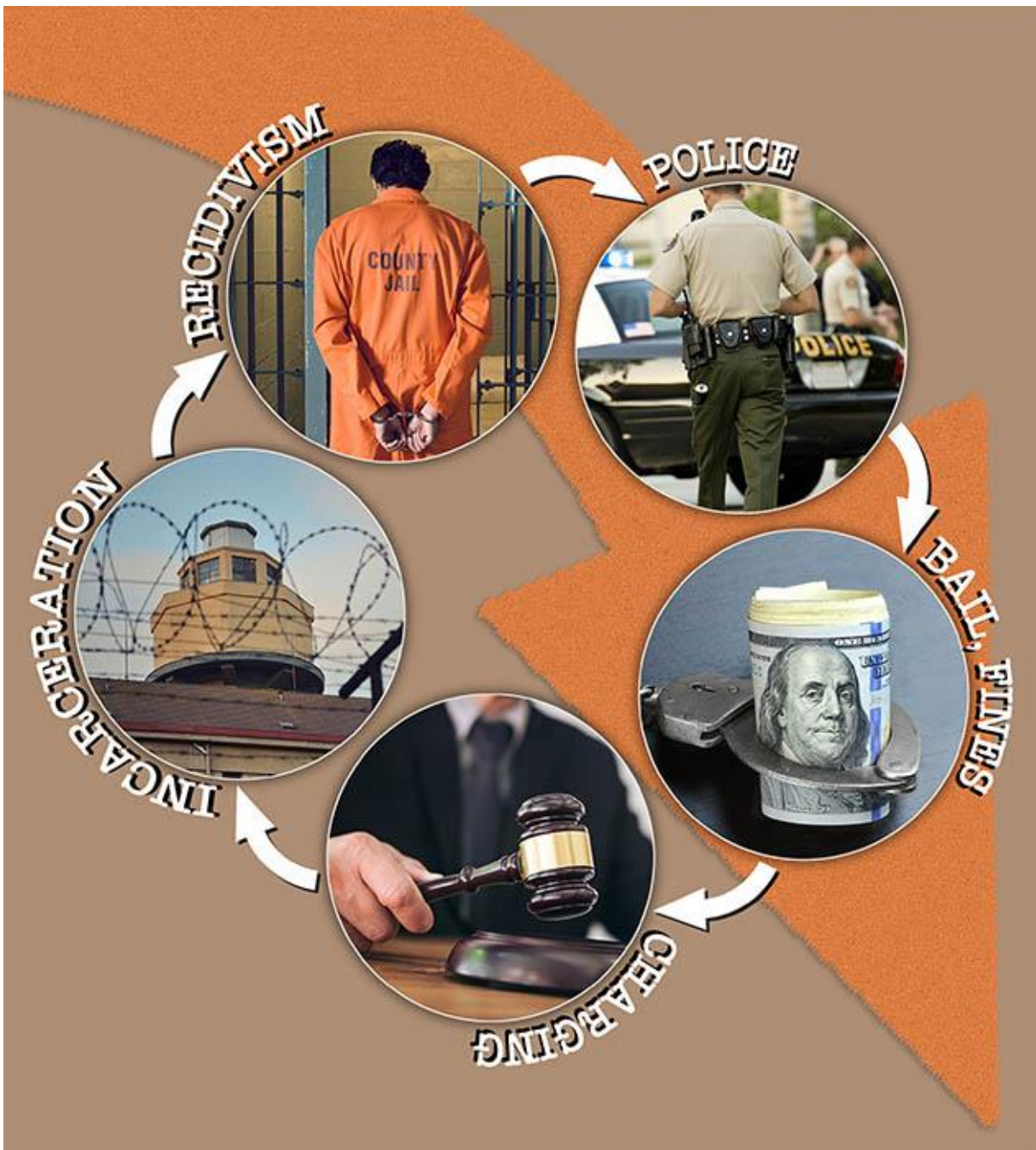


# “Criminal Justice in Arizona”

White Mountains Community Town Hall Report

Lakeside, AZ – July 28, 2018



# **CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ARIZONA**

## **White Mountains Community Town Hall Report**

**July 28, 2018 – White Mountain Nature Center**

Participants of the July 2018 White Mountains 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**

Before considering goals, we should consider Arizona's responsibilities. First, we have the responsibility to define what a crime is. Mental health and substance abuse, for example, may need to be taken out of the current criminal justice system entirely, or addressed differently. There should be early identification of mental health issues, and we must avoid counterproductive consequences, such as when incarcerated individuals with mental health issues lose their health coverage. We also owe our youth opportunities and programs that will help keep them from becoming part of the criminal justice system in the first instance.

Turning to the principal goals of Arizona's criminal justice system, we must, first and foremost, ensure that our communities are protected, which includes preventing criminal offenses before they occur and supporting rehabilitation after incarceration. Examples of programs that support rehabilitation and reduce recidivism include mentorships and other support systems, like those created through Arizona's current veterans' courts. The costs of the criminal justice system, both intended and unintended, must be considered.

Punishment, on the other hand, is not a goal. Consequences should be proportional to the crimes committed—fair and productive.

### **PRIOR TO INCARCERATION**

More programs should be available to help steer individuals away from incarceration when appropriate. For example, Medicated-Assisted Treatment (MAT) is a program for people struggling with mental illness that helps promote alternatives to incarceration. Specialized courts, such as the Navajo County drug court, or mental health courts, could similarly help match specific types of offenders to the type of help that best suits their needs and reduces recidivism. For these programs to be effective, they must be funded. Civil forfeiture can be one source of funding, but a dedicated source would be more reliable.

In addition to such specific programs, judges—who should be highly qualified and not politically elected—should have more discretion to impose non-incarceration options. If, for example, someone is not a public safety threat, incarceration is probably not the most effective option.

In addition to court-oriented programs, we should have more public and community outreach programs to help youth and repeat offenders. Ohio, for example, has programs where police officers connect with youth in low-income communities. Similar programs can come from churches, community organizations, schools and families.

Finally, we should improve police training and agency coordination, and work to reduce bureaucratic red tape. Police should be trained to better identify mental health, substance abuse and domestic abuse situations. This will improve responses, trust and consistency.

## **AFTER INCARCERATION**

Most of those who are released from prison come back into the community without the skills and resources necessary to find housing, employment and transportation. A few former inmates are connected with programs that supply those services, but that's a small portion of the population.

For some crimes, incarceration could be transformed into a more progressive learning process where classes are mandatory and eventually a participating inmate could "graduate" from prison with the skills necessary to reintegrate into society. This system could also incentivize good behavior during and after incarceration, and would give the Arizona Department of Corrections (ADOC) more input into whether and when particular inmates are ready to return to society.

Furthermore, prisons themselves could help inmates locate housing and employment prior to release. This could include contacting potential employers who may need inmates with particular skill sets. This would help ease former inmates' transition into society. Once in society, the transition should remain gradual. Former inmates should have opportunities at halfway houses to be accountable and receive additional classes or counseling. We also need enough parole officers to form relationships with former inmates and mentorship programs to ease the transition and help reduce recidivism.

Social institutions and programs could also do more to help the families of those who are incarcerated, such as spouses and children, who may need financial and emotional aid. Finally, we need specialized systems in place to deal with mental health and substance abuse or addiction recovery needs.

## **THE WHITE MOUNTAINS COMMUNITY**

In the White Mountains, prevalent crimes include substance-abuse-related crimes, such as opioid abuse and shoplifting alcohol. Domestic violence and sexual assault against minors are also unfortunately prevalent in this area. Furthermore, housing, treatment, jobs and transportation are not as available here as in urban communities, which makes it more difficult to implement prevention and re-entry programs.

The White Mountains community has a mobile population—many of the people who are here in the summer leave during the winter—which creates opportunity for property crimes against vacant properties. The Native American reservations in the area—predominately the White Mountain Apache Tribe reservation—create jurisdictional issues in the criminal justice system.

Solutions for this region, in addition to those that apply to all of Arizona, include increasing communication between tribal and non-tribal jurisdictions, requesting additional federal funding as needed, working to increase awareness of the types of crimes that occur here and collaborating with tribal governments to help reduce on-reservation crime.

The veterans' and mental health courts in this county have been productive, but there is no drug court, which is needed. Most of these issues, however, are statewide and there should be state funding to help resolve these statewide issues that is not allocated based on population alone.

## **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 White Mountains Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

### ***I WILL...***

- Continue to try to create a mental health court in Navajo County.
- Volunteer in community service.

- Share what I learned today and continue the conversation with others.
- Encourage discussion of these problems.
- Vote for those who are open to looking for solutions to criminal justice problems.
- Contact my legislature regarding criminal justice reforms.
- Push for a change in the law to impose higher standards for judges.
- Report back to the town council on results of the town hall.
- Be open to volunteering with retraining and re-entry programs for inmates and former inmates.
- Commit to reducing recidivism in Arizona.
- Continue to give presentations on the criminal justice system.
- Look into a center or school to mentor children with issues at home—whether drug or abuse related.
- Contact Arizona legislators to increase the number of parole officers.
- Attend suicide awareness/training.
- Continue to participate in drug education in the community.
- Work with the League of Women Voters on these issues.
- Attend additional Arizona Town Halls.
- Become a more informed citizen in order to contribute factual information to these conversations.
- Encourage more discussion about the criminal justice system.

## HOSTED IN COLLABORATION WITH



**Navajo County Bar Association, John and Diana Burton, and Public Service and Public Safety organizations in the White Mountains.**