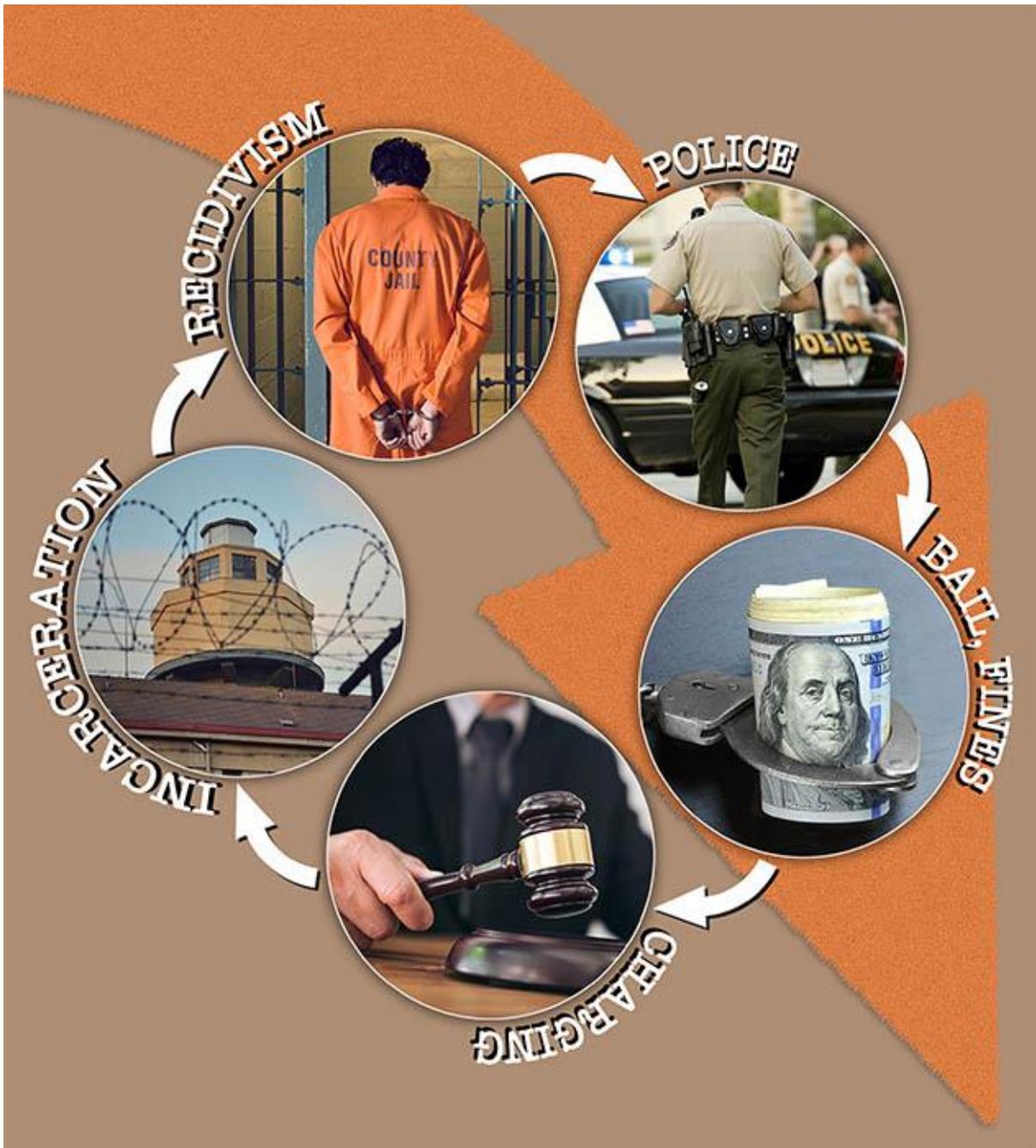


“Criminal Justice in Arizona”

Community Town Hall Report

Phoenix, AZ – April 19, 2018



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ARIZONA

Downtown Phoenix Community Town Hall Report

April 19, 2018 – Westward Ho

GOALS FOR ARIZONA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

Arizona's criminal justice system is one part of our larger society, and we should consider how interconnected public systems, from schools to foster care to mental health care, can work together to prevent criminal behavior and reduce its impacts. We should begin with prevention, and preventative efforts should include public education as well as education of children in public schools. If we provide mental health services and drug treatment programs and assist people to meet their basic needs, we can work to break the cycles that lead to incarceration. We should focus on factors such as racism and poverty that fuel the preschool-to-prison pipeline. We also should focus on the individual and make appropriate distinctions between violent and nonviolent crimes and offenders. To reduce the need for prisons we should look at programs such as those in Scandinavian countries, which have made significant progress in that realm.

We should not be soft on crime, but smart about crime. We should recognize that prison is not always the best solution. The criminal justice system should operate as a public service, not a for profit business. We should look at unduly harsh sentencing and consider more programs such as diversion and restorative justice programs that will address the underlying causes of crime rather than simply punishing the offender.

Although public safety is the principal goal of the criminal justice system, rehabilitation also is an important goal, and we should begin to focus on rehabilitation when a convicted person enters the system. Most incarcerated persons will eventually reenter society and we should be preparing them to succeed upon release, rather than to return to prison. We should put greater emphasis on reducing recidivism. We need to provide services to prepare inmates for productive work, to treat drug addiction problems.

SETTING PRIORITIES AND TAKING ACTION

Arizona must shift the paradigm from incarceration to prevention, and reduction of recidivism. To accomplish that Arizona needs elected officials who reflect Arizona's diversity and will more thoughtfully address criminal justice issues, for example, by reducing mandatory sentences. To make the best decisions we need to use independent data that helps us determine who is in the criminal justice system and why they are there, and we should listen to people who have been in the system.

When holding offenders accountable, we should consider the multiple viewpoints of the offender, the victim, law enforcement, and the public at large. The impacts of the criminal justice system upon children and families of incarcerated persons should be considered. We should reevaluate restitution requirements and how they operate. Fines and fees make it much more difficult for persons to exit the system and for ex-offenders to succeed upon release. We should put greater emphasis on diversion programs and alternatives to incarceration.

In addressing criminal justice issues, we should engage the assistance of multiple partners, including the business community, the public schools, and community colleges.

Arizona should eliminate private prisons, but we need to consider the impacts of doing so. Arizona should eliminate cash bail, truth in sentencing, and mandatory sentences. We should better fund community based policing, to enable police forces to recruit more qualified officers who are better equipped to deal with difficult social issues, and provide more on-the-job training. We should invest in smart policing instead of over-policing.

To reduce prison populations and recidivism we need to have more affordable housing, job training and placement services. We should make it easier for ex-felons to get jobs and to find decent housing. Reduction in recidivism should be an explicit goal of Arizona's criminal justice policy. There should be incentives and accountability for achievement of reductions in recidivism rates.

Arizona's sentencing laws and process could be improved and made fairer. Mandatory sentences often are unfair and too harsh, and sentencing practices may vary substantially from county to county. Arizona's sentencing structure needs to be evaluated statewide, and sentencing discretion should be restored to judges rather than being committed to prosecutors. This is an issue that may not be best addressed in the political realm, and sentencing should be evaluated in the light of data about what is effective and appropriate.

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

I WILL...

- Learn more and educate others on the preschool to prison pipeline.
- Continue to inform and engage community, and to work with legislators who will continue the Governor's Taskforce on Recidivism.
- Identify and support political leaders who support change in the criminal justice systems, and elect same.
- Find partners to test a program for families experiencing parental incarceration to PREVENT intergenerational transmission of incarceration.
- Talk about fines and their implications.
- Continue to network and educate the public on how to change laws and put politicians in office who are willing to listen to answers to prevent recidivism rates from going up.
- I will personally get more people with a background in law enforcement involved in the town hall process.
- Talk to as many individuals as possible about things learned here.
- Work to elect legislators who will change our laws; get rid of cash bail.
- De-stigmatize people who are imprisoned and get the general public to view prisoners as people first.
- Encourage awareness of issues and candidates promoting voting based on the above.
- Further promote knowledge of ELCA (faith based) social statements.
- Volunteer in a school in an at-risk neighborhood to discuss constitutional rights and crimes in order to educate youth in an effort to reduce the path toward prisons.
- Continue to have a comprehensive, holistic and open dialogue on the dynamics of the criminal justice system.
- Continue to be an advocate and supporter for people with mental illnesses through promotion of awareness.

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