



Wednesday, April 6, 2021

Dear Members of the House Public Safety and Criminal Justice Reform Committee,

On behalf of Americans for Prosperity activists across Minnesota, I am writing today to call your attention to three important provisions we have supported throughout the session that are included in HF1078, the committee's omnibus bill.

At Americans for Prosperity, we believe an effective criminal justice system protects people and preserves public safety, respects human dignity, and removes barriers to opportunity for people seeking a second chance. A core function of our justice system is imposing accountability, but it should be done in a manner that ensures those being held accountable achieve restoration and never return to our justice system. To do this we must seek to incentivize – rather than inhibit – the success of those who have been held accountable through incarceration.

Our state has one of the lowest recidivism rates in the country, but [almost 40%](#) of those exiting our state prisons will be convicted of another felony in just three years. This rate has stayed [relatively consistent](#) over the past decade and it is time we do more to ensure increased public safety across Minnesota. We cannot keep doing the same thing and expect a different result.

Our goal should be to ensure individuals exiting our justice system do so with the skills, character, and practical knowledge necessary for them to be successful upon reintegration into their community. This bill includes three different sets of reforms that will help achieve that goal.

Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act

In Article 4, the Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (HF2349) will improve second chances for those currently in our state's justice system. It will help foster a constructive culture in our state prison and community supervision programs by expanding on evidenced-based programming in treatment and training, creating a needs assessment tool to help individualize programming, allowing participants to earn release credits, incentivizing compliance within community supervision, ensuring victim notification and input, and reinvesting 75% of the savings back into further improving Department of Corrections programming.

These innovations are based upon the success of similar programs in other states that have received bipartisan support, and that have been found to reduce recidivism, correctional spending, and prison populations. Compliance credit policies for those on community supervision adopted in a number of states have enabled individuals to reduce their supervision term by an average of 14 months without any impact on recidivism or public safety.

Through broad-based grassroots outreach, *Americans for Prosperity (AFP)* is driving long-term solutions to the country's biggest problems. AFP activists engage friends and neighbors on key issues and encourage them to take an active role in building a culture of mutual benefit, where people succeed by helping one another. AFP recruits and unites activists in 35 states behind a common goal of advancing policies that will help people improve their lives.

Clean Slate Act

Following on the heels of the First Step Act, monumental federal justice reform enacted with bipartisan support in 2018, passage of the Clean Slate Act (originally HF1152, now Article 6, Sections 25-34) will put Minnesota on the right track towards lasting criminal justice reforms that promote human dignity, reduce costs, and enhance public safety. We cannot allow individuals who seek out and work for a second chance to be defined and held back by their worst mistakes in life. With an in-erasable criminal record, they are, in effect, locked out of the American Dream.

All criminals should be held accountable for their actions, but punishments should be proportional to the crime committed. Then, after being held accountable, an individual should be allowed to put his or her life back together. In our state, dated and irrelevant criminal records prevent people from obtaining jobs and productively re-entering a community once they have served their sentence.

Nationwide, the scale of arrest and incarceration is massive. As of 2015, more than 70 million people in the United States have a criminal record of some kind, roughly equal to the number of Americans with bachelor's degrees. Even when they reflect low-level crimes or charges that did not result in conviction, these records impose serious barriers to opportunity in the workplace and everyday life. Allowing Minnesotans who have paid their debt to society, or who never posed a threat to public safety to begin with, to move on from their pasts and rejoin the workforce and their communities would be a step in the right direction towards eliminating the collateral consequences of the criminal justice system.

Re-Entry Identification and Homelessness Mitigation Plan

The provisions in Article 3, Section 2, 22, and 23 originally heard in HF553 would assist those released from a state facility in obtaining their social security card, birth certificate, necessary medication, and a driver's license or other identification cards, all vital elements in securing housing and employment upon release. The bill would also establish a homelessness mitigation plan and increase state reporting on homelessness. With more than 10 percent of those coming in and out of prisons and jail are homeless in the months before their incarceration, a comprehensive mitigation plan is needed to ensure proper housing. Taken together, these elements will assist individuals with re-establishing themselves back into the community and have better opportunities to secure employment and housing.

By enacting these policy changes, Minnesota can move one step closer to respecting the dignity of all humans, reducing the recidivism rate, improving public safety, and removing the barriers that prevent individuals who are released from prison from earning a true second chance.

Thank you for your time and attention on these important issues. Please don't hesitate to reach out if you have any questions or would like to discuss these issues further.

Sincerely,



Jason Flohrs
State Director
Americans for Prosperity - Minnesota