

Criminal Justice Reform in Louisiana

FACT VS FICTION

Fiction: Prison reforms are too complicated, will lead to unintended consequences, and should have been studied longer before being passed and implemented.

FACT: After nearly a year of study, in March 2017, the Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force released a report with recommendations for comprehensive criminal justice reforms. With strong, bipartisan majorities, the Louisiana legislature passed [ten bills](#) to overhaul Louisiana's criminal justice system.

These reforms have broad support from the Louisiana business community and well-established conservative organizations, are data-driven, crafted in partnership with law enforcement, and more importantly, have already worked in other conservative southern states like Texas, Georgia, and South Carolina.

These smart justice reforms have helped states reduce crime and recidivism rates, increase public safety, lower prison populations, and save billions of tax dollars.

Fiction: The reforms do nothing but release a bunch of dangerous prisoners who will commit new crimes and make our streets even less safe.

FACT: These reforms are directly aimed at creating a criminal justice system that reduces crime rates and reinvests significant fiscal savings in re-entry programs that have proven to reduce instances of recidivism. Dramatic success has been achieved in other conservative southern states after the passage of similar reforms. In Georgia crime rates have dropped 10%, in Texas, crime rates have dropped 30% while prison populations have declined by 16%, and South Carolina has seen both crime rates and imprisonment rates drop 16% (even without any upfront reinvestment dollars).

Louisiana's traditional sentencing and corrections system has been ineffective in changing criminal behavior. These reforms give judges and the parole board more discretion to determine who goes to prison and for how long, based on the best research in the field.

Fiction: Most of the people serving long prison sentences in Louisiana are violent criminals.

FACT: More than two-thirds of Louisiana's prison admissions were those convicted of nonviolent crimes and with no violent prior convictions on record with the Department of

Corrections. Louisiana sends nonviolent offenders to prison at twice the rate of South Carolina and three times the rate of Florida, despite nearly identical crime rates.

Fiction: Louisiana's incarceration rate isn't that badly out of line with our peer states.

FACT: Prior to these reforms, Louisiana had the highest incarceration rate in the world! Louisiana has similar crime rates to other states in the South, but sends people to prison for nonviolent offenses at a far higher rate, and with nothing to show for it in terms of increased public safety.

Fiction: The reforms were not implemented safely since there's little or no upfront investment in prison alternatives.

FACT: All of the reforms – even without new investments – are based on the best proven successes in other states and the best available research in the field on what works to reduce crime and recidivism. South Carolina, for example, adopted reforms without investing any money into programming, but still saw declines in both crime and incarceration.

Louisiana's reforms have been demonstrated to work elsewhere.

Fiction: Keeping offenders in prison for longer reduces recidivism.

FACT: Lengthy prison terms are a primary driver of Louisiana's highest-in-the-nation imprisonment rate as well as skyrocketing costs. Roughly 7,000 prisoners in Louisiana have already spent more than 10 years behind bars, an increase of more than 50% in the last decade.

By the end of 2015, nearly 20 percent of those in Louisiana's prisons had been there longer than 10 years and prison sentences for common nonviolent offenses had gotten longer. Most prison admissions that same year were people who failed on probation and parole.

These reforms reserve long prison sentences for the most serious offenders who post the greatest risk to the public.

Fiction: These reforms are really just the work of out of state liberal groups who are more concerned about the welfare of the criminals than the safety of the people.

FACT: The Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force is a bipartisan group comprised of law enforcement, court practitioners, community members, and legislators. Bill sponsors for the justice reinvestment reform package included six Republicans, two Democrats, and an

Independent. The Louisiana District Attorneys Association, faith leaders, business leaders, and a coalition of advocates and community members endorsed the package.

These reforms have broad support from the Louisiana business and well-established business and free-market organizations and coalitions including Smart on Crime, C100 Louisiana, Pelican Institute for Public Policy, Louisiana Sheriff's Association, One Acadiana, Baton Rouge Area Chamber, Greater New Orleans, Inc, Crowley Chamber of Commerce, Right on Crime and many more.

Fiction: These reforms really don't have a significant impact on the state's budget and really don't save Louisiana's taxpayers much money at all.

Fact: Louisiana's highest-in-the-nation imprisonment rate costs taxpayers nearly \$700 million per year. The criminal justice reforms would safely reduce Louisiana's prison population by 10% and save \$262 million over the next 10 years. Seventy percent of these savings – an estimated \$184 million – will be reinvested into programs that reduce repeat offenders and support victims of crime.