



THE
AMERICAN
CONSERVATIVE
UNION
FOUNDATION



MEMORANDUM

To: Chris Benge; Rep. Terry O'Donnell; Sen. Wayne Shaw; Sen. Greg Treat

Cc: Barrett Brown; Oklahoma State House of Representatives; Oklahoma State Senate

From: American Conservative Union Foundation
Americans for Tax Reform
Families Against Mandatory Minimums
Oklahoma Council for Public Affairs
Prison Fellowship
Right on Crime

Date: March 21, 2017

Re: **Proposed Changes to Oklahoma Criminal Justice Policy**

Oklahoma is facing a prison funding crisis. The state has the second highest incarceration rate in the nation, and is on track to pass Louisiana and become number one. This fact has significant budgetary implications, requiring either increased taxes or drastic spending cuts to fund more prisons. We believe implementing policies to reform the criminal justice system offer a better alternative for taxpayers, communities and Oklahoma families

Last year, Governor Fallin formed the Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force to address unsustainably increasing prison populations. This task force was composed of prosecutors, corrections officials, and other policy experts. These members examined evidenced based research, data, and best practices in the field of criminal justice to determine how Oklahoma's system could be improved and produced a robust set of policy reform recommendations. Those same policy recommendations have been incorporated into the 12

bills pending in the legislature. They are: **HB 2281; HB 2284; HB 2286; HB 2290; SB 603; SB 604; SB 609; SB 649; SB 650; SB 689; SB 786; and SB 793.**

At the core of the task force's recommendations is the issue of incarcerating non-violent offenders for long periods of time, even when they do not pose a threat to public safety. A majority of those incarcerated in Oklahoma are these types of offenders. **Because so many non-violent offenders face long sentences in Oklahoma, unless significant changes are made, the state's prison population is expected to grow by 25% by 2026.** In particular, the female prison population is expected to grow by 60%, with the vast majority being non-violent offenders. To house these inmates, at least three new prisons will be required. All this comes with an estimated cost of \$1.2 billion in capital expenditures and an additional \$700 million in operating costs over ten years. **The package being considered would save Oklahomans a total of \$1.9 billion in wasted taxpayer dollars** and upholds the conservative values of protecting public safety, achieving fiscal discipline, and restoring faith and family.

As we have seen in states that have pursued similar reforms, such as Texas, Mississippi, and South Dakota, it is possible to improve public safety outcomes by spending *less* money on its prison system warehousing low level offenders and investing savings in evidence backed best practices in corrections. These states are locking up fewer people and their crime rates are declining.

By adopting the recommendations of the Oklahoma Justice Reform Task Force, the Legislature can responsibly reduce the growth of the prison population. We believe doing so is in the long-term best interests of the taxpayers of Oklahoma.

Sincerely,



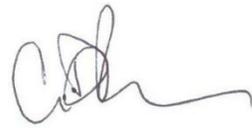
Pat Nolan
Director, Center for Criminal Justice Reform
American Conservative Union Foundation



Grover Norquist
President
Americans for Tax Reform



Kevin Ring
President
Families Against Mandatory Minimums



Craig DeRoche
Senior Vice President, Advocacy
and Public Policy
Prison Fellowship Ministries



Estela Hernandez
Vice President of Engagement
Oklahoma Council for Public Affairs



Marc Levin
Policy Director
Right on Crime &
Texas Public Policy Foundation