



# AMERICANS *for* TAX REFORM

Members of Louisiana Legislature  
Louisiana State Capitol  
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

April 13, 2017

Dear members of the Louisiana legislature,

We write you today in support of the Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force's policy recommendations reflected in a bill package including **SB16, SB139, SB220, SB221, HB116, HB177, HB249, HB426, HB489, and HB519.**

If adopted, Louisiana's reform package will safely reduce the prison population by 13% and save the state \$305 million over the next decade. Since Texas embraced reform in 2007, the imprisonment rate has dropped 16% and crime has fallen 30%. Along the way, Texas has saved more \$2 billion and closed numerous prisons. South Carolina has a similar story. Since passing its reform package in 2010, the state has closed six prisons and saved half a billion dollars while experiencing a crime drop of 16%. These recommendations will focus prison beds on people who pose a serious public safety risk while strengthening community supervision and reducing barriers that prevent former offenders from finding work and housing upon release.

Now Louisiana is poised to join this group. For too long Louisiana has been the nation's incarceration leader, locking up residents at a rate nearly twice the national average. Louisiana's punitive sentences and parole policies are out of line with neighboring states – and they aren't working. One in three people leaving a Louisiana prison returns within three years, despite a corrections budget that tops \$600 million a year.

Reforms that lower excessive penalties for drug, property, and nonviolent crimes are especially necessary. Louisiana incarcerates such people at twice the rate of South Carolina and three times the rate of Florida, even though crime levels are nearly identical in these states. Louisiana also has made felonies out of behavior that other states treat as misdemeanors. Stealing an \$800 bike in Louisiana is a felony, but in Texas theft is not a felony unless the property is worth \$2,500. The bottom line? Louisiana locks up people for behaviors that would not lead to incarceration in other states, and it's not making Louisiana any safer.

Over the past 10 years, more than half the states have adopted bipartisan criminal justice reforms to control costs and provide taxpayers with a better return on their public safety dollar. Anchored in data and research about what works to change criminal behavior, these reforms are reducing incarceration *and* crime, allowing states to safely close prisons and invest the savings in victim services and other public needs. The Justice Reinvestment Task Force has produced a strong package of recommendations that can produce the positive results similar to states such as Texas, Georgia, South Carolina, and others.

These outcomes are not a fluke. They are the result of smart, evidence-based policies and practices adopted by legislators who grew weary of watching their correctional systems produce the same disappointing results year after year. **This is why I encourage you to support this package of bills.** Thank you for your leadership.

Regards,

Grover G. Norquist  
President  
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