



AMERICANS for TAX REFORM

Members of Arkansas Legislature
Arkansas State Capitol
Little Rock, Arkansas

March 28, 2017

Dear Members of the Arkansas Senate,

On behalf of Americans for Tax Reform and our supporters across Arkansas, I write today in strong opposition of SB 177. If passed, SB 177 would undo Arkansas' progress in establishing a more effective criminal justice system. More taxpayer dollars would be spent on low level offenders instead of serious violent criminals.

Thanks to Act 423, enacted earlier this month, Arkansas took needed steps to stabilize its prison population and averted an increase in its prison population of 1,650 people by 2023. This will relieve pressure on the already at-capacity prisons from the added strain, and allow the state to avoid building more prisons. Act 423's passage look to projected savings of over \$288 million. Rolling back these reforms would be a mistake.

Increasing sentences arbitrarily and limiting parole options can result in severe sentencing outcomes that neither fit the crime nor the individual's unique circumstances. This is why over 30 states have reassessed prison sentences and corrections spending in the last 15 years.

An impact estimate done by Arkansas' Sentencing commission found **that enacting SB 177 would have costly consequences for the state's budget. After passage, the prison population would increase by 5,500 mostly non-violent people at a cost of \$692 million over ten years.**

SB 177 would take sentencing discretion away from the judges who know the specifics of a case and can properly determine what an appropriate sentence is. This encourages excessive incarceration and risks breaking families apart unnecessarily. Children and spouses would be deprived of breadwinners, risking negative effects on their own lives.

Act 423 uses the money saved from reductions in prison spending on recidivism reduction initiatives such as mental health services and addiction treatment. Rather than warehousing low risk offenders, this approach can reduce crime rates at a faster rate without breaking the budget.

Given the undeniable costs and dubious benefits of mass, long-term incarceration of nonviolent offenders, the Arkansas Legislature should turn away from sentencing practices that have been shown not to work. The Natural State has already passed legislation to improve public safety through smarter crime policies, this bill represents a significant step in the wrong direction.

I encourage you to extend your opposition for this important legislation. For more information, please contact Jorge Marin in my office at jmarin@atr.org

Regards,

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