

April 6, 2017

To: Governor Phil Bryant

From: Americans for Tax Reform

Re: Mississippi HB 1033

Dear Governor Bryant,

Last week, nearly three years to the day they embarked on landmark criminal justice reform, Mississippi took a significant step in building on the foundations of their commitment to improving public safety by passing HB 1033. **HB 1033 further builds on the foundation of the reforms contained in HB 585 and provides technical fixes that carry out the intent of the earlier legislation, garnering further taxpayer savings.**

With this action, Mississippi moves away from jailing traffic violators and focuses the state's overcrowded prisons on dangerous offenders and prioritizes taxpayer dollars simultaneously improving state public safety and fiscal health.

In 2014, the state faced spending \$264 million on additional prison space to accommodate a growing prison population. Instead, leaders passed a package of policies in HB 585 designed to safely lower incarceration. These are evidence-based policies, backed by the best available research, proven to work in the areas of sentencing, parole, and reentry. Reform works and HB 1033 continues those successful lessons.

As we know, fines can often be incurred by small civil infractions. They include municipal violations like speeding and littering. Most Americans commit these infractions on a regular basis. Though some people find tickets annoying there are many who lack the money to pay their fines. Those individual's lives can be seriously harmed by the state as they enter a cycle of incurring ever greater costs which in turn can lead to job loss, imprisonment, and further recidivism.

The U.S. Supreme Court ruled more than 30 years ago that locking people up merely because they cannot afford to pay court fines is contrary to American values of fairness and equality embedded in the 14th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. This legislation would insure that people are not being locked up due to their inability to pay traffic fines and fees.

In addition, HB 1033 will make sure the state's most expensive public safety resources, prison beds, are used on offenders that pose a public safety threat. Many of the new requirements, which are specifically designed to reduce recidivism, address planning for and implementation of evidence based practices in transitioning inmates from institutions back to the communities. Judges are given greater discretion to develop a payment plan or assign community service in lieu of payment.

The State of Mississippi has already demonstrated a desire to improve public safety through smarter crime policies, and this bill represents another step in the right direction. **We commend continued pursuit of achieving the best possible results through smart, fiscally responsible decisions that help break the cycle of recidivism, improve oversight and accountability, and further carry the intent of HB 585.**

Sincerely,



Grover G. Norquist
President
Americans for Tax Reform