



AMERICANS for TAX REFORM

The Honorable Doug Collins
1504 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

May 21, 2018

Dear Congressman Collins,

I am writing to express my support of the First Step Act, H.R. 5682. This proposal is an important part of reforming America's justice system. It builds on the lessons learned from years of success in red states like Texas, Georgia, and North Carolina.

Spending on state and federal prisons has ballooned by 400% in the last 20 years from about \$12 billion to \$60 billion. While everyone wants to stop crime, simply throwing money at the problem is not the best way to do so. Like the rest of government spending, lawmakers must look at the most cost effective way to achieve public safety.

The First Step Act is a big step in the right direction.

Rather than simply warehousing offenders, this bill requires the Bureau of Prisons to create risk assessment tools to examine the risk each inmate poses to society. Based on their risk, they are then given the option of undergoing evidence-based programming to help them break out of a cycle of criminality. Inmates earn time credits which allows them to spend some time of their sentence in prerelease custody, a cheaper alternative for low risk offenders that also helps them reintegrate into society under supervision.

This is the same approach used by Texas in 2007 to lower their crime rates to historic lows, shut down three prison facilities, and save over \$3 billion in corrections spending.

Prisons are expensive real estate. It costs an average of \$32,000 to incarcerate an individual in federal prison. Some offenders do need to stay behind bars for a very long time, but the government should be able to determine who needs to stay and for how long in the interest of public safety.

There is much left to do. Federal and state governments should require mens rea standards, which insist that Americans are only punished for knowingly breaking the law. Civil Asset forfeiture should be reformed or repealed. No one should have his or her property taken by the police unless they have been convicted of a crime. Sentencing reform will also need to be looked at to ensure that punishments fit the crime. The First Step Act starts an important conversation that must be ongoing.

The rapid growth of prison spending puts legislators and law enforcement officials in a difficult position. They will have to decide between increasing overall spending, using higher taxes to or higher debt to finance the expansion, or cut actual enforcement. These options are unacceptable.

It is time for the federal government to join the growing movement of state capitols modernizing the justice system. I encourage your colleagues to support this legislation. For more information, please contact Jorge Marin in my office at jmarin@atr.org.

Regards,

Grover G. Norquist
President, Americans for Tax Reform

CC: Members of the U.S. Senate

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