

May 21, 2015

To the Honorable Members of the U.S. House of Representatives:

We are conservatives who are working to apply our principles of public safety, accountability, limited government, and fiscal discipline to the criminal justice system. We urge you to support the Safe, Accountable, Fair, and Effective (SAFE) Justice Act of 2015, sponsored by Reps. Jim Sensenbrenner and Bobby Scott. This legislation represents a long overdue, comprehensive overhaul of the federal criminal justice system. The reforms of the SAFE Justice Act will deliver increased public safety at lower cost to the taxpayers. It is based on solid research on the effectiveness of the reforms as well as the successful implementation in more than half of the states, which is how conservatives like to make changes.

There is no doubt that the status quo is failing us. Between 1980 and 2013, our federal prison population jumped by a nearly 800 percent, from roughly 24,000 to more than 215,000. Prison costs skyrocketed during the same period, and Americans now spend nearly as much on federal prisons—\$6.7 billion—as they spent on the entire Justice Department in 1980, after adjusting for inflation. Inevitably, this spending growth has shortchanged other important crime-fighting priorities, including counterterrorism initiatives, victim services and the FBI. The Department of Justice’s Inspector General has called these increasing expenditures for prisons “unsustainable”.

Prisons unquestionably play an essential role in punishing dangerous criminals and keeping neighborhoods safe. But about half of the inmates incarcerated in federal prisons are drug offenders with average sentences that are nearly twice as long today as they were in 1980. Many of them – along with other nonviolent offenders – can be held accountable with shorter sentences or with mandatory supervision in the community, both at far lower cost.

Conservative leaders in the states get this. Relying on hard facts, they have adopted cost-saving reforms that keep violent offenders locked up while holding the other offenders accountable through community sanctions and supervision.

And these policies have been proven effective at saving money while keeping the public safe. Texas swapped prison expansion plans for increased support for drug courts and treatment. The state has saved billions of dollars and seen violent crime rates drop lower than they’ve been in almost half a century.

As members of the conservative Right on Crime movement, we’ve supported similar reforms in states across the country. And we believe that what’s worked in the states would be good for our federal criminal justice system – and the taxpayers who support it.

The SAFE Justice Act of 2015 is a comprehensive overhaul. It tackles front-end problems by focusing long sentences on “major players”. It reserves costly prison space on our most serious criminals, strengthens the probation and post-release supervision system and expands the use of programs that have been proven to cut recidivism. It increases mental health services and drug treatment, encourages faith based and community groups to work with inmates to teach them such important items as job skills, family reconciliation, making moral decisions, and mentoring to help offenders think through the decisions that confront them when they leave prison.

We respectfully ask you to join us in supporting the SAFE Justice Act.



**Richard Vigueire**  
Chairman Conservative HQ



**David Keene**  
Former President of the National Rifle Association  
Former Chairman of the American Conservative Union



**Pat Nolan, Director**  
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