



October 26, 2018

Dear Senate Majority Leader McConnell:

Mississippi is proud to be a state leader in criminal justice reform, having passed comprehensive reform in 2014 and additional reforms since then. We know from a long history of being one of the nation's top incarcerators that the blunt instrument of a long sentence does little to improve the conditions of our state's communities. The research shows that locking up low-level offenders does not produce better public safety outcomes than effective probation tools and workforce partnerships. We also know that time in prison breaks family bonds and makes it next to impossible for a person to hold down a job. That's a bad outcome for all of us. Instead, we should be using what we know works to move people out of the system and toward productive, law-abiding lives.

For these reasons, we urge the Senate to pass the First Step Act (H.R. 5682). We believe this important legislation will help right size sentencing laws while keeping communities safe. We also believe the legislation will strengthen families by helping ex-offenders find meaningful work. It's time for the American criminal justice system to step into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The reforms implemented by the First Step Act will help propel this change by allowing for customized interventions and outcomes that will reduce recidivism and reduce risk and costs.

It is often said that the states are laboratories of democracy. When it comes to criminal justice reforms, we are seeing the fruits of these policy experiments. As the Pew Charitable Trusts has found regarding Mississippi's own reforms:

- In the three years since reform, Mississippi has defied predictions that our prison population would keep exploding. The prison population, in fact, has declined by more than 10 percent, driven by a reduction in prison use for non-violent offenses.
- Our state's prisons are more focused on violent offenders, who now occupy 63 percent of prison beds, as opposed to 56 percent prior to reform.
- The property crime rate has decreased by 5 percent, while violent crime has remained at a historic low.

Mississippi has demonstrated that criminal justice reform can lead to positive results. We urge the U.S. Senate to do its part now by passing the First Step Act.

Respectfully,

Jon L. Pritchett  
President/CEO