



THE
AMERICAN
CONSERVATIVE
UNION
FOUNDATION

CENTER FOR CRIMINAL
JUSTICE REFORM

February 2, 2017

The Honorable John B. Coghill, Jr.
Alaska State Senate
State Capitol Building, Room 119
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Coghill:

Less than seven months ago, Gov. Walker signed legislation (Senate Bill 91) that made important reforms to Alaska's criminal justice system. With the passage of SB91, Alaska joined other conservative states such as Texas, Georgia, Ohio, and South Carolina that have made common sense improvements to their criminal justice systems. Despite the success of similar reforms in other states, some in Alaska are already trying to undo SB91, less than seven months after the legislation was enacted. We urge you to allow reforms contained in SB91 to be fully implemented so that the impact of the legislation on Alaska's criminal justice system can be understood.

Background

SB91 focuses prison resources on serious and violent offenders – those who pose the greatest threat to public safety. The legislation also strengthens assistance for victims who are often ignored in the system. **The SB91 reforms are projected to save state taxpayers as much as \$380 million and cut incarceration 13% by 2024, all while improving public safety.**

The policies embodied in SB91 were carefully considered by the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission and debated in numerous public hearings. Stakeholders across the political, geographic, and economic spectrums provided significant input. The Commission also received commentary from prosecutors, defense attorneys, and behavioral health experts. The policies were then vetted by five legislative committees in more than 50 additional hearings. As a result of the open and inclusive process by which the legislation was developed, SB91 passed by wide majorities (28-10 in the House; 14-5 in the Senate), and was signed into law by Governor Walker on July 11, 2016.

Despite this thorough vetting of the proposals in SB91 at numerous public hearings and forums, some are now trying to reverse the reforms less than a year after they were enacted. This makes little sense when we have no data to show whether the reforms are working – and we have solid evidence that the same type of reforms have been very effective in other states. In Texas for instance, the prison population was carefully reduced by reserving costly prison beds for violent and habitual criminals. Focusing prison resources on those who are the greatest threat to public safety allowed Texas to save billions of taxpayer dollars, while the crime rate dropped to levels not seen since 1968.

We urge you and your colleagues to allow the SB91 reforms to be fully implemented and understand the actual impact of the reforms to Alaska's criminal justice system. Anything less would be a

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disservice to the taxpayers of Alaska, who have a right to expect the government to use their tax dollars in a responsible, results-oriented, and data-supported manner.

About ACUF

The American Conservative Union Foundation (“ACUF”) is one of the nation’s oldest organizations representing grass roots conservatives throughout the United States. Founded more than four decades ago by William F. Buckley, ACUF works to advance our core values of liberty, personal responsibility, and fiscal responsibility – all of which are impacted by criminal justice reform.

As part of its educational mission, ACUF also compiles ratings of every federal and state legislator in the United States. These ratings help the public understand the positions of policy makers, based objectively on their individual voting records rather than their rhetoric. Criminal justice reform votes have been included in the ratings in recent years. All ACUF ratings can be found at: <http://acuratings.conservative.org>.

Finally, I would like to personally invite you and your colleagues to the Conservative Political Action Conference (“CPAC”) in Washington, D.C. from Feb. 22-25. This conference draws thousands of grass roots conservative activists from across the country. Over the past several years, criminal justice reform has had a prominent profile at CPAC, where policies similar to those in SB91 have been enthusiastically embraced. This year, CPAC will have two significant panels on reform, along with opportunities to hear from leaders in the Conservative Movement and members of the President’s Cabinet. (If you are unable to attend, we will be live streaming our panels. For more information, please go to justice.acu.foundation.)

Conclusion

The first duty of government is to keep our citizens safe. In order to do so, conservatives must hold those making criminal justice policy accountable, not just for the spending of taxpayer dollars, but for the results (or lack thereof) that they generate. Allowing the reforms of SB91 to actually take root is one key to such accountability.

Thank you for your service to the people of Alaska. We look forward to working with you on criminal justice reform and other issues in the future. Should you have any questions, or need additional information, please feel free to contact me at 202.347.9388.

Sincerely,



Pat Nolan
Director