

March 1, 2021
via electronic mail

Governor Tate Reeves
Lt. Governor Delbert Hosemann
Speaker Philip Gunn
Honorable Members of the Mississippi House
Honorable Members of the Mississippi Senate

Re: Protecting Public Safety and Providing Second Chances

Governor Reeves, Lt. Governor Hosemann, Speaker Gunn, and Honorable Members of the Mississippi Legislature:

It is time for conservative reforms to Mississippi's justice system that ensure the public is protected, taxpayer resources are not wasted, and rehabilitated individuals can *earn* a second chance.

Mississippi has the second highest rate of incarceration in the nation. It comes at a steep cost to taxpayers, with over **\$3 billion** poured into our corrections system over the last decade. Even with the hefty investment, our prison system has been plagued by controversy that now includes a ***Department of Justice investigation that could easily cost the state \$1 billion***, or more.

Our neighbors in Alabama are busy finding out what happens when you ignore the Department of Justice, with a recent lawsuit filed against the state with an estimated cost of as much as \$3 billion to comply. Mississippi simply cannot afford inaction.

Fortunately, there is a roadmap for prison reform that both protects the public and safely reduces the burden on the state. Texas, for example, has:

- Significantly **reduced its prison population**, and yet has
- seen its **crime rate fall** significantly, with
- **prison costs that have measurably declined**. Other states have had a similar experience.

How did they do that?

- Made more people eligible for parole, creating incentives for good behavior and providing a powerful gatekeeping tool for the parole board.
- Re-evaluated sentencing laws to ensure that the punishment fits the crime and that minor offenses did not result in long sentences.
- Made changes to help people who are released from prison become less likely to commit another crime after they are released.

We support implementing reforms of this kind based on best available data and evidence, including:

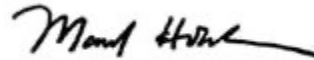
- Efforts to provide parole eligibility for more people, such as **SB 2795**, which does not automatically grant parole, but provides a path for rehabilitated offenders to earn release. Similar to last year's SB 2123, we believe the Legislature should focus on maximizing impact and cost savings.
- **HB 796**, which would reform Mississippi's habitual sentencing laws so that a non-violent third offense, such as a minor drug possession, cannot result in someone going to prison for life without the possibility of parole.
- **HB 551 and SB 2561**, which would allow those who are released from prison to obtain a driver's license to drive to work. There are others, but these are examples of the right way to think about criminal justice.

We can make our communities safer *and* spend less on prisons. Don't wait for Washington to demand draconian changes. Let's act now to take these sensible, and yes, conservative, actions for Mississippi.

Sincerely,



Grover G. Norquist,
President at Americans for Tax Reform



Mark Holden,
Chairman of the Board, Americans for Prosperity
Senior Vice President, Stand Together



David Safavian,
General Counsel, American Conservative Union




Russ Latino,
President, Empower Mississippi



Steven Utroska,
State Director, Americans for Prosperity



Brett Tolman,
Former U.S. Attorney, Utah
Senior Fellow, American Conservative Union



Emily Mooney,
Criminal Justice Fellow, R Street