

# MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



## Smart on Crime

### What's the problem?

Governor Hogan should be congratulated for [offering State support](#) to Baltimore City efforts to make our communities stronger and safer. Most of the Governor's proposals are right on target and include: organizing law enforcement for gangs and other offenders who cross City and county lines, directing state police to offer needed back-up for City police; and adding more intensive parole and probation support.

But two parts of the Governor's proposal, mandatory increased sentences, and denial of parole, seek to revert to "Tough-on-Crime" policies that might aggravate the problem, not solve it. Such punishments, according to a 2015 [Pew Institute study](#) of Maryland's criminal justice system, do not make a significant contribution to the reduction of recidivism, but they do cost taxpayers more for prisons. In the words of [Ronnie Earle](#), a retired prosecutor in Texas, "When you arrest people and send them 200 miles away and think they'll come back fixed, all you're really doing is punishing the public. They'll come out meaner, madder, and more dangerous than when they went in."

Governor Hogan and the State of Maryland have the responsibility not only to keep our streets safe in the short run by getting the worst offenders off our streets. But they also should ensure those offenders learn from their mistakes and return to our communities in the long run with the ability and enthusiasm to live better, more productive lives and to build safer communities. Currently, a large part of the crime problem is that violent offenders return to our communities without the skills, knowledge, training to make their lives better.

Governor Hogan has taken a major step to revamp the Criminal Justice System in Maryland with his support for the passage of the 2016 [Justice Reinvestment Act](#) and ongoing efforts to implement it. Let's pursue that initiative and develop a more comprehensive approach to Maryland's problems of violent criminal behavior.

### What's the Proposal

As noted by the [Baltimore Sun](#), "Mayor Catherine Pugh believes we must combat Baltimore's "out of control" crime by addressing the systemic problems of poor education, limited economic opportunities and disparities in the physical environment that underlie Baltimore's violence." As history has shown these are big-ticket, complex tasks that are not resolved by a one-time quick fix.

So, where do we start? What do we do? How do we move forward? [Kamala Harris](#) and others, on a national level, have suggested a three-pronged approach. Yes, continue to maintain a relentless and intense focus on violence and prosecution of violent offenders. But also identify key points in the lives of young offenders and stop them from continuing and escalating their criminal behavior. Third, when they return to the community, make sure they, and the community, are prepared to make a better, safer world.

In addition to crime control and the punishment of criminals, Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) urges a comprehensive program including prevention of crime, programs to guide our youth, education and training to refocus the lives of offenders, and development of economic opportunities for our returning citizens. The reality is, while the aggressive enforcement of criminal statutes remains necessary, we cannot incarcerate our way to becoming safer. To succeed, our efforts must also focus on prevention and reentry.

The [Governor's Office on Crime Control and Prevention](#) (GOCCP), with assistance from Maryland's newly-created [Justice Reinvestment Oversight Board](#), is particularly well-suited to spearhead such initiatives. GOCCP acts as a coordinating office that advises the Governor on criminal justice strategies. It also plans, promotes, and

funds efforts with government entities, private organizations, and the community to advance public safety, reduce crime and juvenile delinquency, and serve victims.

### **Will this work?**

By comparison, over a seven year period, [Georgia's legislature](#) has implemented over a dozen critical pieces of legislation directed at making their State both fairer and safer. Like Maryland's comprehensive Justice Reinvestment Act of 2016, Georgia based its initiatives on creating a special council on Criminal Justice Reform for Georgians. As Georgia's Republican governor put it a few years ago: "For violent and repeat offenders, we will make you pay for your crimes. For other offenders who want to change their lives, we will provide the opportunity to do so with Day Reporting Centers, Drug, DUI and Mental Health Courts and expanded probation and treatment options." Changes in Georgia's laws are expected to avert the projected 8 percent increase in the prison population and the associated cumulative cost of \$264 million.

Across the nation, no fewer than 17 states have shifted resources away from prison construction in favor of treatment and supervision as a better means of reducing recidivism. For example in Kentucky, new legislation has reserved prison beds for the most serious offenders and re-focused resources on community supervision and evidence-based programs. As a result, the state is projected to reduce its prison population by more than 3,000 over the next 10 years—saving more than \$400 million.

And finally we want to point at Baltimore's own success story. [Safe Streets](#) is an evidence-based violence prevention and interruption program that works to reduce shootings and homicides in high violence areas. Safe Streets is based on the premise that violence is a disease that can be prevented using disease-control methods. Safe Streets helps to provide young people with alternatives to a life of crime and violence, and has significantly reduced shootings and homicides in the targeted areas where it has been implemented. A recent report authored by Daniel Webster, [Johns Hopkins Center for Gun Policy and Research](#) (May 2016), found the largest effects on nonfatal shootings were attributed to Safe Streets.

Clearly, incarceration is not the answer in every criminal case. Maryland can and should stay the course with Justice Reinvestment policies of reducing incarceration, increasing rehabilitation, and using taxpayer savings to treat drug addicts and create more opportunities for honest employment in our communities! With the Governor's participation, the GOCCP can organize a broad comprehensive strategy to implement a multifaceted program of smart solutions. We can do this.

### **Learn More!**

Kamala Harris, [Smart on Crime](#), Chronicle Books; First edition (October 7, 2009)

Department of Justice, [Smart on Crime, Reforming the Criminal Justice System for the 21st Century](#)

Democracy Journal, [Smart on Crime](#), Spring, 2013

Garrick L. Percival, [Smart on Crime: The Struggle to Build a Better American Penal System](#), July 28, 2015

Freedom Works, [Peach State Justice: Successes of Smart on Crime Policies in Georgia, 12/2017](#)

Abell Foundation, [Safe Streets Baltimore, 2017](#)

Pew Charitable Trusts, [2012 Georgia Public Safety Reform](#), 7/2012

Pew Charitable Trusts, [Public Safety in Maryland](#), 7/2015

Pew Charitable Trusts, [Maryland's 2016 Criminal Justice Reform](#), 11/2017

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*The Maryland Alliance for Justice Reform (MAJR) is a nonpartisan association of over forty community organizations and churches with members in every part of the state, formed to support justice reinvestment. Individual supporters include judges, attorneys, corrections professionals, as well as returning citizens, victims, and service providers.*

Links in this document can be activated by going to <http://www.ma4jr.org/smart-on-crime-2/>