

MARYLAND ALLIANCE FOR JUSTICE REFORM

Working to end unnecessary incarceration and build strong, safe communities



Evidence-based "risk/needs" Screening for Offenders

What's the Problem?

National studies confirm that offenders can be rehabilitated more effectively if low risk offenders are not mixed with high risk offenders, and if high risk offenders receive services targeted to their specific problems.

Low risk offenders, housed with high risk offenders, take on their characteristics and may become twice as likely to commit new offenses.

High risk offenders screened and treated intensively for their specific needs can have their risk to reoffend cut in half.

Maryland, however, does not systematically screen for low risk offenders before they are sentenced to prison. As estimated by prison administrators, Maryland may house nearly 5,000 low risk inmates together with higher risk inmates at present.

Nor does Maryland systematically screen for high risk offenders' needs in order to direct prison-based services towards those particular needs. The need for such evidence-based treatment has been officially recognized in the [Final Report of the Maryland Taskforce Prisoner Reentry](#).

What's the Proposal?

MAJR's proposed bill calls for use in Maryland of "risk and needs assessment" screening tools, as well as evidence-based treatment to reduce new offenses by higher risk offenders.

The conservative [American Legislative Exchange Council](#) has endorsed similar legislation which would not only reduce crime but also reduce taxpayer costs.

Will this Work?

The effectiveness of risk-screening and evidence-based treatment may be provided by other states which have begun to use these. By these methods, the State of Oregon, for example, has reduced its recidivism rate (inmates that commit new offenses and return to prison within three years) to 22.8% – roughly half the national average.

See the "[State of Recidivism](#)" report by the PEW Center on the States. That report notes that Virginia has reduced the recidivism rate for inmates leaving its prisons to below 29%, yet Maryland's rate remains over 40%.

Judith Sachwald, Former Director, Maryland Division of Parole and Probation, gave an important address to the Colorado General Assembly on [reinventing community supervision](#).

The Legislation

This legislation would use "Justice Reinvestment" funding to apply screening at the beginning of incarceration to every inmate sentenced to more than six months so that, both during incarceration and preparing for reentry, the most effective services could be offered to each inmate to help him/her avoid future offenses. Existing staff would be retrained to employ methods proven effective.

[Read the proposed legislation here.](#)

Learn More!

Federal policy-makers, conservative organizers and progressive foundations all agree: incarceration is overused and, with evidence-based screening, better services could bring lower-crime:

- Read the Federal Department of Justice “[Smart on Crime](#)” recommendations.
- Read the [American Legislative Exchange Council's](#) comprehensive discussion of corrections policy and the overuse of incarceration at taxpayer expense.
- Read the conservative [Right-On-Crime](#) website as to reducing incarceration and improving reentry of ex-offenders.
- Read a [comprehensive guide](#) to how Courts may use risk assessment to impose better sentences for public safety.
- Read [proposals](#) for how to implement reduction of prison size and improvement of offender rehabilitation.
- Read the Sentencing Project report on “[The Science of Downsizing Prisons.](#)”

Does the length of pretrial detention negatively effect low-risk offenders? [A study](#) of 150,000 inmates provides a warning.

Contact your Legislators

Voice your opinion about this initiative to your legislators. Here is a list of the members of the Maryland General Assembly with links to their web pages. To find who represents you in the Assembly, click [here](#).

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.

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