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The dire conditions in Alabama prisons demand immediate action.

In April 2019, the U.S. Department of Justice warned the State of Alabama that the conditions in Alabama's male-designated prisons violate the Constitution. As violence, corruption, mismanagement, understaffing, and neglect persist, 29 people died from homicide, suicide, or drug overdoses in Alabama prisons last year. At the same time, the Bureau of Pardons and Paroles effectively shut down paroles, sending the prison population soaring. At this rate, the prison population will exceed levels not seen in the last five years.

The status quo is no longer acceptable to the people of Alabama. The Alabama Department of Corrections is funded by \$500 million of our tax dollars and houses more than 22,000 Alabamians. Gov. Ivey's bipartisan Study Group on Criminal Justice Policy has recommended a "sustained commitment to action" to address this crisis. The time has come to reform sentencing laws, invest in substance abuse and mental health treatment outside of prisons, expand re-entry services, and send fewer people to violent prisons.

WE URGE YOU TO SUPPORT THESE REFORMS NOW.

➤ **Fix the Habitual Felony Offender Act**

Alabama's "Three Strikes" law means 500 people will die in prison for non-homicide crimes, including 250 whose most serious crime was robbery. Thousands more are serving enhanced sentences for drug and property crimes. This law wastes valuable prison space on elderly people. Further, as people age medical costs increase.

➤ **Modify marijuana possession laws**

Nearly 1,000 Alabamians per year get felony convictions for marijuana possession. People lose their jobs, drivers licenses, and housing. Police waste time arresting people for a substance that's legal in states where half of Americans live, and the state spends \$22 million per year to enforce these laws. The Legislature should make possession of marijuana in small amounts a citation-only offense, never a felony.

➤ **Make sentencing guidelines retroactive**

The 2013 presumptive sentencing guidelines were a major contributor to prison population declines. Hundreds of people sentenced before then serve longer sentences than they would face now – and for nonviolent crimes. Out of basic fairness, people should have a chance at the same sentence they would receive now.

➤ **Overhaul prison diversion and community corrections programs**

Pretrial diversion, alternative courts, and community corrections could be meaningful tools to combat the prison crisis. But they lack statewide standards, are underfunded, and remain inaccessible to people who most need them. Alabama must adequately fund community alternative programs, eliminate "pay to play" access, and demand uniformity and data from governmental and non-profit agencies who run these programs.

➤ **More oversight of the Alabama Department of Corrections**

The Department of Corrections lost track of how many people were killed in prison, according to the U.S. Department of Justice. Prisons will not become safer until lawmakers and the public know what is happening behind the walls. Greater legislative oversight, transparency, and accountability for ADOC operations, and mandatory reporting of certain information must be implemented. Oversight should also include representation from family members of incarcerated people and/or formerly incarcerated people.

We support these additional reforms to Alabama's justice system

SENTENCING

- Increase the threshold of property value which trigger a felony offense for theft. Currently \$500 worth of property can result in a felony conviction.
- Modify drug possession laws so that possession of five or fewer pills does not send someone to prison.
- Properly define "violent" crimes to require physical harm or a serious threat for a felony to be classified as "violent." Burglary of an empty building and drug trafficking should not be considered "violent."

JAILS

- Eliminate secured money bail, which perpetuates a two-tiered, wealth-based justice system.
- Limit pretrial detention to cases in which the defendant poses an imminent risk to public safety.

MENTAL HEALTH AND SUBSTANCE USE

- Treat substance use and mental illness as public health issues and not criminal justice issues.
- Increase the use of treatment rather than incarceration through expansion of the Department of Mental Health's Stepping Up Initiative, which funds local governments to hire mental health case managers to connect people in jails with services.
- Expand and properly fund mental health courts.

RE-ENTRY

- Target substantial additional funding to education and vocational training programs and require data and monitoring to ensure funds are spent to grow these opportunities.
- Increase staff within ADOC who assist people with obtaining birth certificates, social security cards, and drivers licenses before they are released.
- End automatic suspension of drivers licenses for cases unrelated to public safety so that incarcerated people don't lose their licenses for inability to pay fines and fees.
- Give re-entering people 6 months before they have to begin repaying fines, fees, restitution, and parole costs.
- Provide re-entry supports for people with mental health needs, including bridge medications and an appointment with a community mental health provider.
- Make parole reporting possible for people with 9-5 employment by opening parole officers after hours and on weekends.
- Expand opportunities for expungement of felony convictions.
- Allow Alabamians to fully re-enter their communities by ending our state's complicated system of felony disenfranchisement.