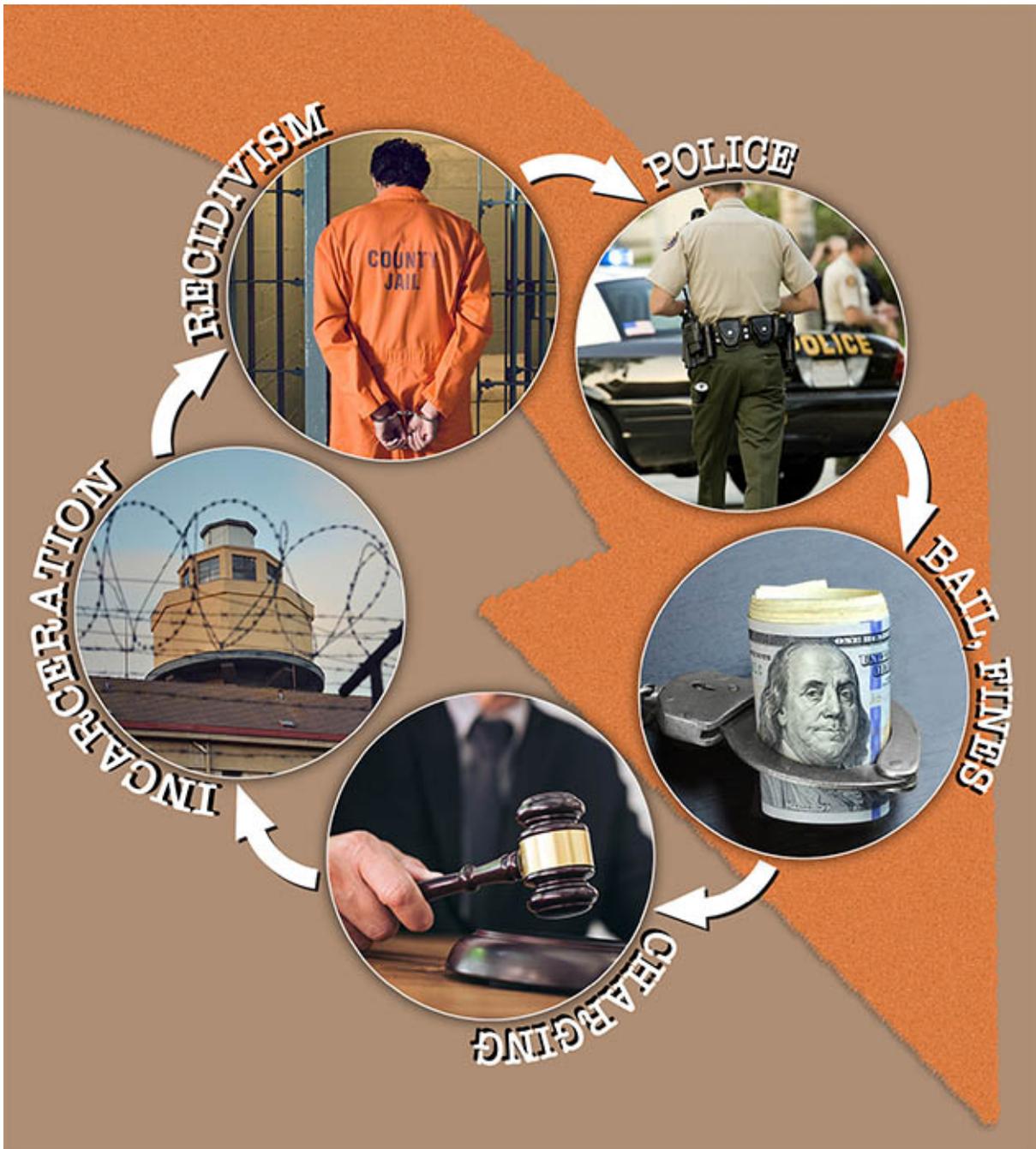


“Criminal Justice in Arizona”

West Valley Community Town Hall Report

Avondale, AZ – September 21, 2018



CRIMINAL JUSTICE IN ARIZONA

West Valley Community Town Hall Report

September 21, 2018 – Estrella Conference Center

Participants of the September 2018 West Valley Community Town Hall make the following findings and recommendations. This report reflects the consensus achieved through group discussions by Community Town Hall participants.

GOALS FOR ARIZONA'S CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM

The primary goal of Arizona's Criminal Justice System is the rehabilitation of offenders. Public safety, and safety within prisons also are important goals.

To meet these goals, we must understand the root causes of criminal conduct, including behavioral health issues and mental illness. Rehabilitation could be improved through better initial assessment of inmates, incorporating trauma informed care, and taking a more holistic approach to treatment while they are incarcerated. Prevention and cost effectiveness are also considerations. There is concern about the impact of private companies that profit from the criminal justice system.

PRIOR TO INCARCERATION

Because the majority of criminal cases are resolved through plea bargains, there is opportunity for improvement of the system by holding prosecutors accountable for certifying the evidentiary basis for a charge.

Another opportunity for improvement lies in sentencing reform. In Arizona the sentences are unduly harsh and lengthy. Prosecutors have too much power, which leads to overcharging, and that contributes to unfair sentencing. As a result, judges have too little discretion in sentencing, and judges may be less knowledgeable about the issues affecting sentencing and outcomes.

Instead of immediately taking recourse to the criminal justice system, police should be encouraged to use their discretion to de-escalate situations.

The greatest potential for improvement lies in programs that address the underlying causes of crime. Trauma affects children beginning at an early age. The lack of quality education and jobs also contributes to the conditions that may increase the incidence of crime in a community. As prison populations and funding of corrections has increased, funding has been reduced for programs that address the underlying conditions that cause or contribute to criminal conduct, such as education, early childhood development programs and family support programs. There is a great need for programs that address substance abuse and mental illness, both of which contribute to crime. The reduction in such programs disproportionately affects inner cities and people of color. Higher incarceration rates in those communities magnify those conditions, as families suffer when a parent is not in the home. We should use cost savings that will result from reducing prison populations to fund programs that address the conditions that lead to incarceration, and to fund efforts to rehabilitate incarcerated persons.

Our system of bail and fines also needs reform. Too often people who lack financial resources languish in jail.

If these reforms are to be achieved, it is necessary that members of the public become aware of and informed about the issues, and take responsibility for raising awareness in others and advocating for change.

AFTER INCARCERATION

People in prison learn how to live in prison, but they don't learn how to succeed in the outside world. The correctional system should fund and implement programs to address behavioral health and substance abuse issues and prepare inmates for their eventual release, including more and better services, counseling, education and medication.

Some prisoners suffer abuse and violence in prison, and the correctional system should take steps to prevent such conduct. Vulnerable inmates, including the many who are mentally ill, are particularly in need of protection. Prisoners should be separated based on the nature and severity of their conduct. Prisoners are subjected to extreme and damaging punishment such as isolation. This should stop.

As it is, people released from prison face many challenges. They need help preparing for release and adjusting to their new circumstances. Although they have served their time, their criminal record follows them throughout their lives, and as a result they face many barriers and burdens that make it even more difficult for them to return to productive lives in the community. It is a barrier to decent housing, particularly affordable housing. Released inmates often lack access to transportation, basic medical and dental care, behavioral health and substance abuse treatment, and education. They face probation and law enforcement officers who may impose inconsistent requirements.

To prepare prisoners for successful reentry the correctional system should provide better education and training opportunities, including trade schools. They should help prisoners maintain social and community connections, and strengthen family connections. There should be a more gradual, multi-phased transition process that prepares prisoners for return to the community.

Once a prisoner is released, help and support is needed from a variety of sources, including families, social service agencies and the criminal justice system. Supportive services, including counseling, should be made available. Funding for such services is greatly needed.

INDIVIDUAL ACTIONS

Recognizing that the power to change the future begins with each individual, participants committed to take personal actions based on their experience and discussions at the West Valley Community Town Hall. Below are individual actions that were shared.

I WILL...

- Write a report on this meeting and the important topics about the criminal justice system to the public and citizens of the West Valley so they are aware of these issues.
- Get more involved.
- Share the information that I have learned with others, and use my information to improve my schoolwork.
- Share this with others and continue to fight for change.
- Vote – Early and Often!
- Continue to learn more.
- Be an advocate and a voice for those who are incarcerated/released, as well as implement new ways to educate and support our youth.
- Share on Facebook, vote knowledgably, and find a house for reentry.

- Work with organizations to approach the legislative body to reform the criminal justice system to reduce recidivism and incarceration as a whole.
- Create awareness through all of my platforms of certain concerns as well as come to more town hall meetings and do my best to make change.
- Take these ideas to the state legislature.
- Spread the word on various Arizona Town Hall meetings and discussion groups through personal contacts and social media. Be more active in my community, school system and political areas.
- Always treat every human being—despite their criminal history—with respect. Every individual is worth more than the worst thing they've done.
- Become active in the community to make necessary corrections. I will also participate in voting.
- Try to integrate consensus building into my daily life. Vote.
- Share my ideas with people who are in need, such as young adults. Share with the world my words on crime trends. Try to get involved with criminal justice police officers. Have them engage with community.
- Educate myself more on the justice system to share the ideas I got today and I will learn more in the future to share with either classmates or members of my community.
- Continue with St. John's prison ministry.
- Continue to support individuals in the correctional system, I will continue to educate others on the correctional system and substance abuse. I will continue to break down negative stigma associated to corrections and substance abuse.
- Share what I have learned with others and take action where possible.
- Share what I have learned today, make a difference in the criminal justice system and vote. Seek more services for our clients who are released from prison.
- Get law enforcement to attend November conference.
- Share what I have learned with my work peers and community and educate myself more on other aspects of the criminal justice system.
- Speak at community forums, council meetings, and the state legislature to plea for basic reforms, better use of dollars spent "in the system." More money spent on social services.
- Share information and work to impact community awareness.
- Share what I have learned about this issue with family and friends.
- Get more involved with Middle Ground Prison Reform. The abused are sent to the hole far too often for far too long periods. Once released they need support systems.
- Become better informed on laws impacting this community and vote informed.
- Speak up to educate others on the re-entry population needs.
- Communicate these ideas/thoughts to co-workers, which include judges and prosecutors.
- Share what I know with elected officials, community leaders, and business about what is needed to improve the criminal justice system.
- Educate myself before I vote to ensure I am giving my honest and educated input.

- Continue to attend town hall meetings to learn more about the criminal justice system and contribute to the discussion about the system in Arizona.
- Educate myself more on the criminal justice system to share ideas I learned today and in my future to classmates, friends, and my community.
- Promote fairness, understanding and discretion for those who enter the criminal justice system and implement policies and actions for my organization.
- Dedicate my efforts to education for incarcerated students.
- Utilize the consensus learning model with my criminal justice class to learn and teach the state of Arizona's criminal justice system. I will share what I've learned this morning with my family and friends.
- Become active in the community to make necessary corrections. I will participate in voting.
- Continue to learn more about issues and see how our programs can be developed to meet needs.
- I will vote more knowledgeably, early and often.
- I will stand diligently with all agencies and myself at the Legislature to support needed reforms.

HOSTED IN COLLABORATION WITH

FWD.us



**ESTRELLA MOUNTAIN
COMMUNITY COLLEGE**

A MARICOPA COMMUNITY COLLEGE



MARYVALE
REVITALIZATION
CORPORATION