

Smart Justice Reform: Fixing Arizona's Incarceration Crisis with Compassion, Accountability, and Biblical Wisdom

In the People's House, justice isn't about vengeance—it's about restoration, accountability, and upholding the sacred trust of our Constitution, inspired by biblical principles like mercy and redemption. "He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8). As a constitutionalist, I see Smart Justice Reform as reclaiming this trust: *We the People* as grantors and beneficiaries, demanding trustees who protect communities without wasting lives or dollars on failed systems. Arizona's prisons are overcrowded with non-violent offenders, especially drug addicts who need help, not handcuffs. Under my focused conservative leadership, we'll deliver reforms straight to your door in Legislative District 1—safer streets, lower costs, and second chances that build stronger families in Yavapai and Coconino Counties. Our current system locks up too many for too long, driving up taxes while ignoring root causes like addiction. We'll fix this with smart, evidence-based changes that prioritize treatment over incarceration for non-violent cases, cut waste, and ensure real justice for victims and offenders alike.

The Crisis: Overcrowded Prisons Filled with Non-Violent Offenders and Addicts

Arizona's prison population stands at around 35,500 inmates as of May 2025, with violent offenders making up 71.8% (25,481 people)—leaving about 28.2% (roughly 10,000) incarcerated for non-violent crimes. Many of these are drug-related: Nationally, drug offenses account for 13% of state prison sentences, but in Arizona, outdated policies trap addicts in cycles of incarceration rather than recovery. Our state's incarceration rate remains high, with prison numbers up 60% from 2000 to 2018 despite a 44% drop in property crime and 28% in violent crime over that period. This isn't tough on crime—it's tough on taxpayers and families, as non-violent drug users fill cells that could focus on real threats.

Drug addiction fuels much of this: Addicts often commit petty crimes to feed habits, landing in jail without addressing the underlying issue. Studies show treatment cuts crime far more effectively— an Arizona report from decades ago (still relevant today) found probation with drug treatment reduced reoffending by 31% compared to prison. Yet, we warehouse them, ignoring biblical calls for compassion: "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" (Hosea 6:6). In LD1's rural communities, this hits hard—breaking families, straining local resources, and perpetuating poverty.

The Waste: Billions Squandered on Inefficiency and Failed Privatization

As we discussed under Prosperity, Arizona's Department of Corrections devours \$1.5 billion annually, with waste exceeding \$50 million from private prison overruns, software glitches keeping people locked up beyond release dates, and defunded oversight. Costs per inmate hover around \$42,000 yearly, much of it on non-violent cases that could be handled cheaper through community programs. Private contracts under past administrations ballooned expenses without savings, and recent closures of facilities like Florence West aim to trim \$15 million but highlight systemic failures. This betrays the trust indenture—trustees mismanaging funds while addicts languish without help, driving recidivism rates up to 50% for drug offenders. Conservative principles demand efficiency: Redirect these dollars to real public safety, like veteran services or clean water, not endless incarceration that doesn't rehabilitate.

Smart Solutions: Treatment Over Incarceration, Reforms That Work

We'll deliver Smart Justice Reform by shifting focus to help for addicts and accountability for all:

- **Expand Alternatives for Non-Violent Drug Offenders:** Build on Arizona's Prop 200, which mandates probation and treatment for first- and second-time non-violent drug possession—proven to save lives and money. I'll push for broader diversion programs, like drug courts and community-based treatment, where addicts get counseling, job training, and faith-based support instead of bars. Recent bipartisan legislation in June 2025 incentivizes rehabilitation, helping Arizonans get back on their feet and reducing prison populations.
- **Incentivize Rehabilitation and Earned Release:** Support reforms like increased earned time credits for completing education or treatment, as advocated by groups like FAMM. For non-violent addicts, prioritize sober-living homes (with strict oversight to prevent fraud) and mental health integration, aligning with MAHA principles for holistic health.
- **Hold Trustees Accountable:** Enforce audits to end waste, phase out ineffective private prisons, and ensure software fixes prevent unlawful detentions. Tie this to Principled Leadership—firing trustees who fail the people through treasonous mismanagement.

These changes aren't soft on crime; they're smart. States with similar reforms saw violent crime drop twice as fast as Arizona's. We'll protect victims, reduce recidivism, and foster prosperity by reintegrating reformed individuals as productive citizens. Together, Smart Justice Reform will rebuild the People's House as a beacon of mercy and justice.

As Matt in the HOUSE, I'm committed to delivering this focused conservative leadership. Join the movement: Sign up for updates, volunteer to spread the word, or donate to fuel our fight. Let's build a system that heals, not harms—where help knocks on every door!