Is Criminal Sentencing Reform Right for Arizona?

- Are we incarcerating the right people in Arizona?
- What can Arizona learn from criminal justice policies being enacted elsewhere?
- What, if any, are the next steps for Arizona?

As states deal with increased incarceration rates and corresponding costly corrections budgets, Arizona represents an important case study. Arizona has a large and expensive prison population—approximately 40,000 inmates at an annual cost of about $1 billion. Arizona also faces a constricting state budget, with substantial cuts being made to education and social programs while more tax dollars go toward paying for prison operations.

Many states are looking to criminal sentencing reform as a way to reverse this trend. The first question for Arizona is whether our jails and prisons are filled with offenders for whom alternative measures would be equally or more effective. If not, what can Arizona learn from other states and national bipartisan reform efforts? These questions and others related to sentencing, incarceration and reform measures will be examined by Morrison Institute for Public Policy.

Another question often asked: Are private prisons part of the solution or part of the problem? Arizona presently has six private prison facilities operated by three different companies, with lawmakers allocating $50 million to increase private-prison capacity to accommodate 2,000 new medium-security inmates. Do private prisons save money since there are no up-front construction costs for the state? Or are they too costly due to contracts favoring the industry over taxpayers?

Founded in 1982, Morrison Institute is Arizona’s premier think tank. The Arizona State University resource has a long history of nonpartisan independent research and analysis, as well as public outreach via panel discussions and community forums, digital platforms and extensive coverage by local, state and national news media.

Keying off of national bipartisan efforts to revisit criminal sentencing policies, Morrison Institute seeks to elevate Arizona’s public dialogue with experts and elected officials on all sides of the issue discussing incarceration policies and choices.

**Products and Events**
Research products will include a series of white papers, a set of questions on the statewide Morrison-Cronkite Quarterly Poll, and featured sessions and a keynote address at Morrison Institute’s annual signature event. The State of Our State Conference attracts an audience of more than 250 policy
makers, elected officials, business executives, and community and nonprofit leaders. The conference will be held Nov. 20, 2015 at the Phoenix Airport Marriott.

**White Paper Topics:**

- A national overview of criminal sentencing trends
- Pro and Con: Are the right people in prison in Arizona?
- Arizona’s general fund appropriations and the impact of spending on corrections
- Pro and Con: Are private prisons good for Arizona?
- Case Study: Maricopa County Criminal Justice System

*Following the event Morrison Institute will release additional white papers on topics including the impact of incarceration on families, victims’ perspectives, and myths and realities of the relationship between immigration and Arizona’s prison population.*

**Proposed State of Our State Conference Sessions**

Conference sessions will showcase local, state and national experts representing diverse viewpoints and the event will allow ample time for direct audience engagement with speakers and panelists.

- Arizona General Fund Budget Analysis and the Impact of Corrections Spending
- Poll Findings: What do Arizonans think about high incarceration rates and their impact?
- Short background presentation on corrections (framing the issue with a pragmatic, solutions-oriented approach)
- Panel discussion: “Who’s incarcerated and why?” Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery and Caroline Isaacs, head of the American Friends Service Committee in Arizona
- National Panel: “Bipartisan Solutions” Jenna Moll, Coalition for Public Safety, Marc Levin, Right on Crime, and Alison Holcomb, ACLU. Panel will be moderated by ASU Law Professor Erik Luna.
- Video: 5-minute video of conversations with individuals and families impacted by incarceration
- Keynote address: “Criminal justice reform: A national perspective.” George Gascón, District Attorney of San Francisco and former police chief of Mesa

**Contact**

Associate Director David Daugherty, Ph.D. at (602) 496-0215 or david.b.daugherty@asu.edu

Morrison Institute for Public Policy is a leader in examining critical Arizona and regional issues, and is a catalyst for public dialogue. As part of the Arizona State University College of Public Service and Community Solutions, Morrison Institute uses nonpartisan research and communication outreach to help improve the state’s quality of life. [MorrisonInstitute.asu.edu](http://MorrisonInstitute.asu.edu)