



WASHINGTON BUREAU · NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE
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ACTION ALERT

DATE: June 10, 2010
TO: Concerned Parties
FROM: Hilary O. Shelton, Director, NAACP Washington Bureau

NAACP SUPPORTS LEGISLATION TO HELP STATES REDUCE PRISON POPULATIONS

H.R. 4080, THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REINVESTMENT ACT, WOULD HELP STATES DEVELOP INCARCERATION REDUCTION STRATEGIES AND REINVEST MONEY SAVED

THE ISSUE:

The United States is the world's leader in incarceration with 2.3 million people currently in the nation's prisons or jails -- a 500% increase over the past thirty years. These trends have resulted in prison overcrowding and state governments being overwhelmed by the burden of funding a rapidly expanding penal system, despite increasing evidence that large-scale incarceration is not the most effective means of achieving public safety. This over-reliance on incarceration has also had a disproportionately serious impact on communities of color: 57% of incarcerated inmates are racial or ethnic minorities and 88% of inmates are male. Specifically, as of mid-year 2009, whites represented 42.5% of all incarcerated inmates; African Americans, 39.2%; and Hispanics, 16.2%. These percents have remained nearly stable since midyear 2000. Furthermore, prisons aren't the only area within the criminal justice system that has seen a huge growth over the past three decades. Our society's increasing over-reliance on the criminal justice system is even more apparent when you add in the number of Americans on parole or probation: one in 31 adults in America is in prison or jail, or on probation or parole. Twenty-five years ago, the rate was 1 in 77.

In addition to the extreme human toll this is taking on our Nation, the financial costs are staggering: The National Association of State Budget Officers estimates that states spent a record \$51.7 billion on corrections in FY2008, or 1 in every 15 general fund dollars. Adding local, federal and other funding brings the national correctional spending total to \$68 billion. This is money that cannot be spent on education, health, transportation, or other projects that benefit society as a whole.

Clearly, we as a nation need to take some new approaches to effectively reduce the number of people we put into prison each year. We have found, however, is that incarceration reduction programs that are very successful in one state are sometimes much less so in another. The only true common factor in all 50 states right now is that they are all struggling under the weight of enormous burdens in terms of human as well as monetary resources as a result of a dysfunctional criminal justice system.

To help address the problem, Congressmen Adam Schiff (CA) and Dan Lungren (CA), along with Senators Sheldon Whitehouse (RI) and John Cornyn (TX) have introduced H.R. 4080 / S. 2772, the *Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act*. This legislation devotes grant funding for intensive analysis of criminal justice data, policies, and the cost-effectiveness of current spending on corrections, in order to develop data – driven policy options that can address this. The bill then provides resources for the implementation of solutions and for reinvesting averted prison costs to bolster such initiatives. **The NAACP strongly supports H.R. 4080 / S. 2772, and urges its immediate enactment.**

[More...](#)

THE ACTION WE NEED YOU TO TAKE:

Contact your Representative and both your Senators **and URGE THEM TO SUPPORT H.R. 4080 / S. 2772, THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE REINVESTMENT ACT.** To contact your Senators and Representative, you may:

✓ **Make a Phone Call:**

Call your Senators and your Representative in Washington by dialing the Capitol Switchboard and asking to be transferred to your Senators'/Congressman's offices. The switchboard phone number is **(202) 224-3121** (see message section, below).

✓ **Write a Letter**

To write letters to your Senators, send them to:
The Honorable (name of Senator)
U.S. Senate
Washington, D.C. 20510

To write a letter to your Representative, send it to:
The Honorable (name of Representative)
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

**A SAMPLE
LETTER IS
ATTACHED**

✓ **Send a Fax**

If you would like to send a fax, call your Senators' or Representative's offices (through the Capitol switchboard) and ask for their fax numbers (you can use either the attached sample letter or the message box, below).

✓ **Send an E-Mail**

To send an e-mail to your Senators, go to www.senate.gov; click on "*Find Your Senators*". Look up your Senators by state; go to their web sites for e-mail addresses. To send an e-mail to your Representative, go to www.house.gov, and click on "*Write Your Representative*" (on the left hand side, just under "find your Representative"). This will help you identify who your congressman is and how to contact him/her.

REMEMBER TO CONTACT BOTH YOUR SENATORS!!!!

THE MESSAGE

- The United States is the world's leader in incarceration with 2.3 million people currently in the nation's prisons or jails -- a 500% increase over the past 30 years.
- This over-reliance on incarceration has also had a disproportionately serious impact on communities of color: 57% of jail inmates are racial or ethnic minorities.
- Clearly, we as a nation need to take some new approaches to effectively reduce the number of people we put into prison each year.
- H.R. 4080 / S. 2772, the *Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act* devotes grant funding for intensive analysis, on a state-by-state basis, of criminal justice data, policies, and the cost-effectiveness of current spending on corrections, in order to develop data-driven policy options that can address these dramatic increases in corrections costs. The bill then provides resources for the implementation of solutions and for reinvesting averted prison costs to bolster such initiatives.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION TO THIS IMPORTANT MATTER!!!
If you have any questions, call Hilary Shelton at the Washington Bureau at (202) 463-2940.

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Sample Letter

(date)

The Honorable _____
United States Senate / House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510 / 20515

RE: NAACP SUPPORT FOR H.R. 4080 / S. 2772, THE *CRIMINAL JUSTICE REINVESTMENT ACT*

Dear Senator / Representative _____;

As your constituent, I strongly urge you to support and co-sponsor H.R. 4080 / S. 2772, the *Criminal Justice Reinvestment Act*. This important legislation, which enjoys strong bipartisan, bicameral support, not only looks at the roots of our currently dysfunctional criminal justice system, but it also offers some real relief to states which are spending too much money, and seeing too much of their human capital wasted on incarceration.

Specifically, H.R. 4080 / A. 2772 is designed to assist state and local governments in reducing prison populations and implementing effective justice reinvestment strategies. Researchers and lawmakers all agree that the reasons for increased incarcerations vary from state to state, and reduction strategies that work well in one state may have little or no impact in another. H.R. 4080 / S.2772 would provide funding for states to conduct intensive analysis of criminal justice data, policies, and the cost-effectiveness of current spending on corrections, with a goal of developing data-driven policy options that fit each state's unique characteristics and attempt to drive down crime and incarcerations. H.R. 4080 / S. 2772 also provides resources for the implementation of the solutions that are identified and developed – and finally calls for reinvesting averted prison costs to further bolster successful initiatives.

Thank you in advance for your work to reduce the human and monetary waste that our current criminal justice system produces. I look forward to working with you to pass H.R. 4080 / S. 2772 and to develop other initiatives to reduce the number of Americans who find themselves in prison. Please contact me to let me know specifically what you are doing and what I can do to help you.

Sincerely,

(sign and print your name and
remember to include your address)

*Remember to contact your
Representative and BOTH
your Senators.*