

2023 Delegation meeting – TOPIC: Over-Reliance on Incarceration – 3 minutes

Before 2020, our family (3 generations) believed in “prison and throw away the key”. Then my son was incarcerated, and we became non-naive.

Florida over-relies on imprisonment for punishment. This is a non-partisan problem. 41% of Floridians have been incarcerated or have a loved one who has been incarcerated. They are all ethnicities, poor and wealthy, old and young, mentally ill, suffering dementia.

Since the 1980’s, our prison population has increased 400 % while Florida’s population has grown only 228%.

What has this accomplished: Extreme poverty, homelessness, generational trauma, severed families. 2/3 of our children are on Medicaid. 1/3 of veterans have been incarcerated.

While the US culture is one of Second Chances, that is generally not consistent for those who are labeled as criminals/felons.

Paradoxically, we are most cruel to those least likely to re-offend. Murder and sex offenses carry a lower recidivism rate than any other offense. The rate is 5% or less over the last 20 years in the USA for committing another murder/sex offense.

To exemplify, if we now stop to help a child who is crying or hurt, anyone could interpret that kindness as an attempted sexual act. We go to prison, are on the registry for life, and endure cruel ostracization.

Thousands of offenses are now punished by incarceration in Florida. This year alone, 14 bills created new reasons to imprison people or lengthen their sentences. Our legislative and judicial systems are at fault for succumbing to skewed, non-evidence-based data and -- on occasion -- an emotional need to appear tough rather than effective at increasing public safety or reducing harm and trauma in society.

When your children or your dogs make terrible choices, do you put them in a cage with cruelty? What happens when you treat your employees or friends with harshness? What does cruelty solve?

The call to action for our legislators: Please stop accepting to sponsor or to vote for bills that put more Floridians in prison or sentencing them to longer terms. Please, recognize the causes and consequences of our willingness to destroy human lives. Vote NO for bills that create new reasons for imprisonment or increased sentencing. This action will need your strength. Thank you.

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Attachment: Over-Reliance on Incarceration Data Sheet