

The CENTER for PRISON REFORM for Nonviolent Offenders

The Bill

The Portman-Whitehouse Prison Reform Bill (S. 1675, Recidivism Reduction and Public Safety Act of 2014) was approved by the Judiciary Committee of the 113th Congress this March by a vote of 15-2. Bonuses of the bill are:

- No new spending initiatives, since recidivism reduction must be provided by existing faith-based groups and non-profits, or through fiscal savings generated by other aspects of the legislation.
- Preventing recidivism spending on low-risk offenders by rehabilitating, rather than re-incarcerating.
- Ensuring that high-risk criminals are properly assessed and prevented from receiving sentencing or shortened-term privileges.
- Offering the supports systems, tools, and skills to encourage former inmates to re-enter their communities and contribute to a healthy, productive economy.
- Building upon state and local best practices, such as Rhode Island's program, which significantly reduced the state's prison population and crime rate, and Texas's, which brought economic savings for taxpayers and the first prison closure in state history.

Why Reform?

- Portman-Whitehouse is fiscally responsible. It asks for no new taxes or funding, and proposes instead a reduction in overall prison spending through more effective use of existing reentry programs.
- It does not compromise public safety. It lays out a no-nonsense risk-assessment strategy, forbidding reduced sentencing or other privileges for violent, terroristic, or sexual offenders.
- The bill advocates rehabilitation with an emphasis on the controls, enhancing public safety and economic productivity while diminishing the expensive prison population, and making room in institutions for truly unsalvageable criminals.
- S. 1675 is both rational and morally commendable. Reform of this nature will save tens of thousands of promising American lives that would be otherwise lost to an infinite regress of crime in a dead-end prison system.

What's Next?

In July, the House counterpart of S. 1675 (H.R. 2656, Public Safety Enhancement Act of 2013) was referred to the Subcommittee on Crime, Terrorism, Homeland Security, and Investigations, sponsored by Rep. Jason Chaffetz (R-Utah). The House Judiciary now plans to adopt the Portman-Whitehouse language as this legislation moves forward.

More Senate Co-sponsorship will gain the Recidivism Reduction and Public Safety Act of 2014 the markup it needs to get a vote on the floor. Amendments to make certain that S. 1675 will be humane, tough on crime, and easy on the U.S. budget are enthusiastically welcomed.