

State-by-State Justice Reform

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Prison Fellowship has been a leader in legislative reform for many years. Through its justice reform arm, Justice Fellowship[®], the organization has fought for and celebrated many legislative successes, such as the Second Chance Act and the Prison Rape Elimination Act. Many are unaware, however, that Justice Fellowship has also been active on the state level, helping officials around the country cut crime while also decreasing spending on corrections.

South Carolina Saves \$400 Million

In 2010, with the help of a broad coalition including the Pew Center on the States, Justice Fellowship (JF) was able to help pass the Omnibus Crime Reduction and Sentencing Reform Act of 2010 in South Carolina. This significant piece of legislation will cut the state's corrections costs by \$400 million over five years, while also improving safety through the implementation of various proven strategies.

Specifically, this law reserves prison space for offenders who pose a real danger to the community, while also enforcing the use of alternative punishments proven to hold low-risk offenders accountable and help them avoid future criminal behavior.

HOPE for Successful Reentry

States are also beginning to take a look at the success of Judge Steven Alm's HOPE Probation program in Hawaii. (The acronym stands for Hawaii's Opportunity Probation with Enforcement.) The program was started in 2004 when Judge Alm realized that the same offenders came back to his courtroom time after time. He concluded that he should take the same skills that he learned from parenting to his courtroom, and provide swift and certain sanctions for those who violate the terms of their probation.

The success of this program has been remarkable. **The National Institute of Justice has completed a study** that showed that after one year, HOPE probationers were:

- 55 percent less likely to be arrested for a new crime;
- 72 percent less likely to use drugs;
- 61 percent less likely to skip appointments with their supervisory officer; and
- 52 percent less likely to have their probation revoked.

One of the ways the HOPE Probation program is different from many others is that it allows probation violators to serve time on the weekends. This gives them the opportunity to focus on their jobs during the work week, which is critical for successful reentry. By serving these immediate sanctions and holding offenders accountable while also allowing them to provide for their families, this common sense approach has understandably been quite successful.

State-by-State Success

The news about these critical reforms has spread to many other states, and currently Justice Fellowship is working on legislative efforts in Indiana, Arkansas, Louisiana, and Alabama to ensure that similar commonsense measures are implemented across the nation.

Studies have shown that rising corrections costs are not due to a crime wave that has hit our nation. Instead, these high costs are primarily due to the rising number of non-violent offenders who are being sent to prison. Additionally, costs rise from the prolonged delays of parole transfers and from longer terms handed to offenders.

Along with many federal reforms, these state reforms are also important to Prison Fellowship. Just as the organization seeks to repair the broken lives of offenders, Prison Fellowship also works to repair this nation's broken criminal justice system at all levels of government.