



NEWT GINGRICH

March 31, 2016

RE: Support for SB 91

To the Honorable Members of the Alaska State Legislature:

Keeping the public safe is one of the primary responsibilities of government. We need prisons to separate dangerous offenders from our communities. However, as with all government programs, Alaska's prisons have expanded to include many low risk offenders, and prison costs have skyrocketed without a similar increase in public safety.

Like many other states, Alaska is at a crossroads. Saddled with an unprecedented budget shortfall, the state faces the daunting task of figuring out how to spend less on government services while getting a better return on investment.

Addressing state spending on prisons is a critical part of that challenge. Over the past decade, Alaska's prison population has increased by 27 percent, rising almost three times faster than the resident population. Costs have skyrocketed right along with that growth, and Alaska now spends more than \$300 million annually on corrections.

With all that spending, you'd think the state would get impressive results. Yet two out of three Alaskans released from prison are returned to custody within three years. That failure rate is simply unacceptable, and government must be held accountable to do a better job with tax dollars – especially in lean times.

This is why I am asking you to support SB 91, which will hold offenders accountable and protect public safety, and also produce cost savings in an area of government where spending has been increasing unchecked for decades.

These reforms have already been tried in several states, and have produced lower crime rates and saved billions of tax dollars. I am part of Right on Crime which is dedicated to helping government leaders apply conservative principles to the criminal justice system. Our movement is anchored by a Statement of Principles signed by some of the nation's most respected conservative leaders, including Rick Perry, Grover Norquist, David Keene, and more than 40 others.

We advocate proven ways to reduce recidivism and improve public safety, and draw on successful policies enacted in other states. We recognize that unless we create a system dedicated to changing criminal behavior, we will never stop the cycle of victimization that causes so much human suffering.

Alaska crime victims understand that such reforms are necessary if we are to have fewer victims in the future. Victims were actively engaged in shaping these reforms from the beginning. Many crime victims testified in favor of SB 91, which makes a priority of victim services and violence prevention programs.

Brenda Stanfill, a victims' advocate who also served on the Alaska Criminal Justice Commission, summed up her support in testimony before the Senate Judiciary Committee: "One less victim to me is worth a tremendous amount. This is why I truly stand behind what we are doing here and I think we are on the right track to making something different happen in a safe way."

By passing SB 91, Alaska will join many other conservative states in implementing criminal justice reform to improve safety while saving money. Texas, for instance, decided to stop spending its taxpayers' money building prisons and put it instead into programs proven to reduce recidivism. The state has now averted \$3 billion in prison costs and has its lowest crime rate since 1968. Georgia, South Carolina, Pennsylvania, Mississippi, Utah, and South Dakota are among the other states that have adopted research-based reforms and are proving it is possible to curb prison growth and keep crime rates low.

In fact, in the last five years, a majority of states in the U.S. have reduced both imprisonment and crime. As a conservative, I see that as a major achievement. States are successfully reining in a hugely expensive government program while making neighborhoods safer. And while prisons will always play an essential role in punishing dangerous criminals, we are finding better, more cost-effective ways to sanction lower level offenders.

For a conservative like me, the choice is obvious. SB 91 will give Alaskans more safety for their tax dollars. This is right on crime.

Sincerely,



Newt Gingrich

Former Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives