



Texas State Conference of NAACP Units

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PRESS RELEASE FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The Time is Now to Improve Texas' Criminal Justice System

Austin, TX – Studies have shown education to be a deterrent to incarceration, our country invests more money in building prisons instead of programs that help prevent individuals from going to jail. It is our belief that by investing in education there will be a decrease in the level of criminal activity in our communities, particularly those of color, and consequently create financially stronger communities.

Each year the United States spends nearly \$70 billion to incarcerate people in prisons and jails, to imprison young people in detention centers and “youth prisons,” and to keep 7.3 million people under watch on parole and probation in our communities. Of the 7.3 million currently within the penal system, people of color make up roughly 60 percent of the U.S. prison population. Mass incarceration is an epidemic that has plagued our country for too long, especially African Americans. Currently African Americans make up 13 percent of the U.S. population but make up over 37 percent of those in prisons and jails. With so much money going towards incarceration, funding for education has taken a dramatic decrease. As spending for incarceration has increased, over the last 20 years, education has been a key casualty in budget battles. This is particularly visible in cities where taxpayers continue to pay millions every year to imprison people from just a few neighborhoods while schools are forced to close, teachers are fired, classrooms are overcrowded, after-school programs are cut, and college and university costs rise. If we could take those dollars spent on prisons and direct it towards mental health and employment services, early-childhood education, community corrections, having quality teachers, maintaining sensible classroom sizes, and lowering the cost higher education, then there would be less need for prisons. When we make meaningful investments to educate rather than incarcerate, communities realize the benefits associated with learning, including increased earnings, reduced unemployment, increased tax revenues, reduced reliance on public assistance, increased civic engagement, and improved public safety. The NAACP released a *Misplaced Priorities* report that outlines policies that should be adopted that are proven to save money and reduce incarceration. I have listed some of the recommendations from the report below.

- Support Youth Violence Reduction Program
- Reform Sentencing and Drug Policies: Use Diversion for Drug-Involved Individuals
- Create Reinvestment Commissions
- Eliminate Disparities in Drug Laws
- Increase Earned Time
- Shorten Prison Terms -Send young offenders who would otherwise receive mandatory sentences to structured programs to help them earn their GED and reduce their prison sentences.
- Increase Parole Release Rates - Improve parole boards' ability to use evidence-based strategies when making decisions to parole prisoners, thus improving parolees' chances for success and increasing parole approval rates.

- Reduce Revocations of People under Community Supervision - Develop alternatives to incarceration programs that will reduce the number of people sent to prison for technical violations.
- Support Reentry and the Sealing of Records: Support legislation that will close criminal records of certain offenders after they have not committed another crime within a certain number of years.