

Tennessee General Assembly
425 5th Ave. N.
Nashville, TN 37243

March 1, 2021

Dear members of the Tennessee General Assembly,

As pastors and leaders of faith-based organizations in Tennessee, we are compelled to encourage you not to neglect the work begun in 2020 addressing critical criminal justice reforms. In light of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) spreading through our state prisons and jails,¹ it is now more important than ever for the Legislature to ensure that punishment for crime is proportional and remove barriers to reentry.

Because the good news of Jesus Christ calls the Church to advocate for biblical truth and care for the vulnerable, we, His followers, call for a criminal justice system that is fair and redemptive for our fellow neighbors who are incarcerated and restores people who are reentering society. As Christians, we believe we all have received a second chance in life and are called to provide second chance to those who have served their time under the law.

When a person commits a criminal act, it damages our communities and requires accountability. However, it is equally important that when we punish, we also provide opportunities to make amends, and offer people who commit crime the avenues to build personal character and gain back the trust of the community. When punishment is completed, we should offer a safe second chance to make amends and to restore themselves to their neighbors as productive and peaceful members of society.

We commend Governor Lee for his leadership on issues of criminal justice reform and are thankful for the work of the Tennessee Criminal Justice Investment Task Force. As our churches and organizations work to reach Tennessee communities with a message of hope and redemption, we ask you to consider the following guiding biblical principles as you work to reform the criminal justice system:

- Each human being, including those who commit crime and the victims of crime, is a person made in God's own image, with a life worthy of respect, protection and care;
- Accountability for crime should be community-based and local where possible, recognizing that cultivation of the seedbeds of virtue like families and churches pays dividends in reducing crime;
- Appropriate avenues should be provided for personal transformation and a second chance;
- Punishment should be proportional to the act committed, advancing public safety, fostering accountability, and giving opportunities to make amends;
- Rehabilitation of those formerly incarcerated should include, where not prohibited by public safety concerns, restoration of the rights and privileges previously lost in order to foster their ability to become productive citizens and taxpayers in society.

As we work to preach the good news of the gospel, that redemption through Christ is available to everyone and that His sacrifice covers our sin, we ask that you take hold of these important values and usher in a new season of criminal justice in Tennessee. We thank you for your service to the people of the State of Tennessee, especially during these challenging times for the men and women who work at the state's correctional facilities and for those who are currently imprisoned.

¹ COVID-19 Impact On Prisons By State, Prison Fellowship. <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/covid19-map>.



REMEMBER THOSE IN PRISON

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

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