



2021 Legislative Agenda

Summary

Mental Health and Substance Abuse

The lack of sufficient community-based mental health treatment options has resulted in drastic increases in the incarceration of people with mental illness. These people often suffer from co-occurring substance use disorders (SUD). We need to adequately fund and support mental health and SUD services for the incarcerated population, probationers/parolees, and the youth within our juvenile justice system. Of particular importance is how military veterans, especially those with service-connected mental health diagnoses, interact with the criminal justice system, and the extent to which veterans are diverted from the courts.

According to the National Center for Mental Health and Juvenile Justice, between 60-70% of arrested youth meet criteria for at least one mental disorder; 60% of those having at least one mental disorder experienced a co-occurring SUD; and at least 75% of youth in the juvenile justice system have experienced traumatic victimization. There is a severe shortage of juvenile mental health and SUD treatment options available in Minnesota.

Offender Reentry

Effectively transitioning justice-involved people back to the community is critical to enhancing public safety and stewarding public funds. Policies supportive of education, housing, employment, behavior change, and mental health are proven to reduce recidivism.

Residency restrictions, which have increased dramatically during the past several years, severely restrict where certain registered predatory offenders may live. These restrictions have no correlation to crime reduction. Research clearly demonstrates that housing instability harms public safety and complicates law enforcement and community supervision. In juvenile delinquency cases involving a predatory offense, the courts should be allowed to use legal criteria at any time during the juvenile's supervision to determine if predatory offender registration is required.

Restoring voting rights to those in the community is an important component of reintegration. While it is often overshadowed by the basic human needs of housing and employment, it is still a vital part of citizenship.

Smart Sentencing and Supervision

Minnesota's drug sentencing laws need additional revision to remove disparities and ineffective mandatory penalties. Lawmakers must understand the unintended consequences of sentencing decisions in these and other cases, which often make people ineligible for important programming and treatment opportunities.

Staffing Levels

Good corrections work requires hard work and time. Investments in staff and support services reflects a commitment to public safety, fewer victims, and better neighbors. COVID-19 has created significant budget challenges; however, funding for effective correctional programming is shown to return as much as \$6.50 for every dollar spent.

Life Sentences for Juveniles

In 2012, the U.S. Supreme Court held that Minnesota's life without the possibility of parole statute for juveniles is unconstitutional. This statute should be revised to life with the possibility of parole after serving a minimum of twenty years, and apply retroactively to the small number of juveniles currently sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.

Law Enforcement

The Minnesota Corrections Association stands firmly with law enforcement. Public safety demands strong partnerships within the criminal justice system and between the communities it serves. Law enforcement is fundamental to that effort.