



CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

I was a prosecutor for seven years, and I believe in the rule of law. Laws must be enforced, and that is especially true when it comes to those in charge of enforcing them. Our justice system is in need of a serious overhaul.

Critics of mass incarceration, excessive force by police, and violations of constitutional rights are of no

particular political ideology. They emerge when police shoot an unarmed person; when the federal government sends heavy-handed enforcers to settle land disputes; when civil asset forfeiture is used on ordinary citizens.



THE PRISON SYSTEM

One major issue is prison overcrowding. Prisons have become less about reforming and too much about punishment. Those leaving prison often feel not only just as inclined to commit crimes, but sometimes even more hardened in their paths. We must avoid putting people in prison who have not committed serious offenses, else we risk creating career criminals rather than deterring them.

We must take care that all persons in custody receive adequate treatment and fundamental human rights. This includes significant review of nutrition and

sanitation standards, as well as guarantees that indiscretions by superiors are addressed strictly and promptly. Additionally, the epidemic of sexual assault in our prisons cannot stand. We can no longer turn a blind eye to victims simply because of where they sleep at night.

We need to bring an end to mandatory minimum sentencing, which imposes a one-size-fits-all directive upon defendants. Moreover, the entire process of sentencing must be more closely scrutinized to insure that all persons are receiving equal treatment under

the law, no matter their race or gender, or indeed their financial status.

Rather than diverting resources toward non-violent crimes, we should concentrate on offenders who are

an actual danger to others. It is appalling that in some American cities, the unsolved murder rate is above 50 percent – even as hundreds or thousands of non-violent offenders are pushed through the system.



THE WAR ON DRUGS

Much of the reform of the criminal justice system centers around the War on Drugs. I have supported legalization of medical marijuana since 1992, and in 2016, I successfully campaigned, alongside many others, to legalize marijuana in Massachusetts for recreational purposes.

At the federal level, I favor immediate de-scheduling of cannabis as a Class One narcotic so we may research its benefits. In Israel, where this research is permitted, marijuana has been shown to alleviate cancer, multiple sclerosis, Parkinson's disease and childhood epilepsy, among many other diseases.

The War on Drugs goes well beyond marijuana. Drug addiction needs to be addressed as a public health

emergency rather than a status crime. While the “First Step” Act was a positive development, it is only a starting point for much larger needed changes. I support Senator Booker’s legislation to release 17,000 non-violent offenders convicted of minor possession of marijuana from prison.

Another pitfall of the War on Drugs is its racially disparate outcomes. Black Americans are four times as likely as White Americans to be arrested for possessory offenses, four times as likely to receive jail sentences, and receive jail sentences four times as long – a completely unacceptable sixty-four-to-one disparity.



POLICE TOOLS

While a state issue, I believe in encouraging bail reform. The amount of money someone has does not determine how dangerous they are to their communities. Right now, people of color and impoverished communities

are left to dwell in prisons while their wealthier counterparts go free. The judicial system should not punish people before they are convicted, and it should afford them a fair chance to defend themselves. The

existing systems of cash bail and bail bondsmen are outdated and unjust, and have to go.

Another police tool needing reexamination is civil asset forfeiture. This practice, involving police seizure of citizens' property without ever bringing criminal charges, can cross the line from aggressive to unconstitutional.

Police militarization has emerged in recent years, with tanks and other military-grade surplus equipment being sold to local police. This can make police feared by the people they are supposed to protect and on whom they rely for tips and evidence of real crimes. Put another way? If we need to call out the National Guard, we should call out the National Guard.



CIVIL RIGHTS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

We also must do a better job of enforcing federal civil rights laws. When law enforcement uses excessive force, coerces confessions, arrests people under false pretenses, or fails to protect those in custody from assault or denial of basic needs, they can be prosecuted or sued. This has been the law for quite some time, and under my administration, it would be rigorously enforced – as it was when I served for five years under President Reagan as the United States Attorney for Massachusetts.

It is in everyone's interest to ensure bad officers do not give the police a bad name. Police rely on good relationships with citizens, and that becomes nearly impossible with inadequate oversight. Communities should not have to feel that the police are their enemies, or that any officer can be judge and jury with little-to-

no accountability for their actions, good cops and good chiefs of course know this!

The Justice Department should encourage community policing. We need to collect data on police shootings, including the circumstances and prevalence of these incidents. I would also encourage all police to get more involved in their communities – again, as many police departments already do.

With more focus on ensuring that constitutional freedoms are protected, that the rule of law is upheld, that civilians and police are not in opposition, that our courts ensure due process, and that our prisons are not overcrowded, we will have a better justice system that reflects our constitutional values and protects our communities.

Learn more about Bill Weld and his 2020 run for President of the United States of America by visiting WELD2020.ORG