



AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY®

MISSISSIPPI

SUPPORT SB 2123 CONFERENCE REPORT

6/30/2020

Dear Members of the House and Senate:

On behalf of Americans for Prosperity activists across Mississippi, **I urge you to support the conference report on SB 2123, “Mississippi Correctional Safety and Rehabilitation Act of 2020.” This vote may be recorded in our legislative scorecard.**

Four Mississippi prisons are under investigation by the Department of Justice due to the conditions of confinement. Mississippi now has the second-highest incarceration rate of all states. Those two facts are related, because our laws require incarceration for many non-violent crimes and for longer periods than necessary to ensure public safety.

Furthermore, the majority (12,000 of 19,000) of those who are incarcerated are not eligible for parole, which limits their incentive for good behavior in prison and participation in programs that would give them a better chance at living a productive, crime-free life after they are released.

Other states that have enacted similar provisions to those in SB 2123 have experienced budget savings *and* a lower crime rate. Texas has averted billions in spending since 2007 by safely reducing their prison populations, has closed 10 facilities, and their crime rates are the lowest they have been since the ‘60s.

SB 2123 allows, *but does not mandate*, parole eligibility for people convicted of certain crimes – *only if* the sentencing judge authorizes eligibility for parole *and* if the Parole Board approves parole. No one who is sentenced to life without parole will be eligible, nor will anyone convicted of a sex crime or any offense that specifically prohibits parole. Four of the five parole board members must vote to grant parole for a person convicted of a violent offense, and that can only occur after at least 50% of the sentence has been served, or 30 years, whichever is less (20 years for those sentenced before 2014). For nonviolent crimes, parole eligibility will only be possible after 25% of the sentence has been served.

Victims will also have a voice in the parole board hearing that is required before parole may be granted. The bill requires victims and/or their families to be notified 30 days in advance of a parole hearing, and it requires the parole board to hear their comments.

Not only will improvements to and investments in facilities be necessary to solve the problems in our prisons, we must make changes to who we place behind bars, for how long, and what type of incentives we provide. SB 2123 will do just that.

Sincerely,

Forest Thigpen
Senior Advisor
Americans for Prosperity-Mississippi