



Findings & Recommendations on Oklahoma Criminal Justice

2008 Town Hall

Oklahoma's Criminal Justice System:

Can We be Just as Tough
but Twice as Smart?

Oklahoma Academy Town Hall
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Introduction

Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

jus•tice

noun

1 a : the maintenance or administration of what is just especially by the impartial adjustment of conflicting claims or the assignment of merited rewards or punishments

At this Town Hall, we examined Oklahoma’s criminal justice system, the process by which justice is maintained and administered. Is this system, in a word, “just”? It is a fair question. Does Oklahoma’s system, which incarcerates women at the highest rate in the world, assign merited punishments? Do we impartially adjust the competing claims of education, healthcare, transportation, and so on, by locking up those whom we “are mad at”? Is the tendency to incarcerate versus treat the addicted or mentally ill the assignment of merited punishment? Is a system whereby a prison population can explode by 500% in just 30 years an impartial adjustment of conflicting claims?

2 b : the quality of being just, impartial, or fair

This Town Hall considered the proposition that our criminal justice system is just, impartial and fair. To that point: Is being “tough on crime” fair for children whose school systems are inadequately funded at the expense of corrections? Are we truly being tough on crime by incarcerating those whose issue is really drug addiction or mental illness? Is a system where political expedience demands imprisonment versus more appropriate sentencing just, impartial and fair?

3 : conformity to truth, fact, or reason

It is the aspiration of the Academy to conform to truth, fact and reason. At this Town Hall, we were confronted with the truth that Oklahomans have the highest rates of mental illness in the country, the truth that our rate of incarceration is fourth in the country and the truth that we must find real solutions other than building more prisons and incarcerating more of our citizens.

How we as participants in this Town Hall conform to reason, to these truths and to these facts, will determine the worthiness of our efforts. For if this Academy and this Town Hall cannot accomplish this aspect of justice, how can any of us expect otherwise from our leaders and our fellow citizens?

Douglas A. Branch and Marc Edwards,

Report Co-Chairs

Executive Summary

The overload on the Oklahoma Corrections systems is the direct result of conscious decisions made by Oklahoma elected officials. Without corrective action, Oklahoma is surely on a collision course with a federal court intervention and/or a major ‘crowd out’ of tax dollars for other state functions. There is a third way. That is to forthrightly recognize the root causes of this situation – and correct them. The Oklahoma Academy conducted a three-day Town Hall on this subject. The deliberations of the attendees revealed five major categories of public policy that require direct, deliberate and immediate attention. They are:

MAJOR SENTENCING REFORM

Primary Recommendation

The Academy should partner with the District Attorney’s Council to create a Legislature sanctioned Workgroup that will reconsider and redraft and reintroduce a contemporary version of HB 1213 of 1996 that will balance and standardize sentencing while updating and reconsidering the “85 percent rule”. Membership should include, but not be limited to, active and retired legislators and members of the judiciary.

Secondary Recommendation

The Academy also recommends the creation of three formal Workgroups to (1) analyze sentencing trends (2) examine decriminalization of certain drugs and (3) review the categories of felonies.

A decade ago, Oklahoma considered a modernizing sentencing reform package that included a definitive sentencing matrix articulated with an “85 percent rule” that assured sentencing discipline. At the last moment, the matrix was discarded but the “85 percent rule” remained. That rule, standing alone, has proven toxic. The recent DOC audit flatly declared that this rule will be the sole cause for the increase in our inmate population in the future.

The presence of the rule without the sentencing matrix is like nitro without glycerine; peanut butter without jelly, and ham without eggs. It just doesn’t work as well. Oklahoma policymakers know what to do. We chickened out 10 years ago. It is now time to stand up and do this right. Either introduce the matrix or eliminate the rule. There are additional recommendations to create formal workgroups to analyze and make specific recommendations concerning several key sentencing related issues.

BE “SMART ON CRIME”

Primary Recommendation

It is in the best interests of all Oklahomans that the volumes of incarceration be intelligently reduced. The Academy wholly supports full funding of the DMHSAS “Smart on Crime” proposal, and further recommends that the Legislature create or designate a well credentialed oversight and monitor process.

The Town Hall demonstrated once again that the major contributing cause of incarceration is related to substance abuse and mental health issues. This is not arguable. The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse has crafted a “Smart on Crime” proposal that will cost \$30 million per year. Some are skeptical that the proposal can be effective. The Oklahoma Academy believes that the proposal is sound and is more than worthy of funding – and trying to do something different.

INCARCERATION ALTERNATIVES

Primary Recommendation

Drug Courts should be a front-end system. First-time non-violent offenders and non-violent offenders with one

previous felony conviction should be given an alternative to incarceration (specialty courts: drug, veteran's, mental health, etc.)

Secondary Recommendation

Due to disparity in population and resources between the state's rural and urban areas, regional alternative programs should be implemented. Providing access to drug and mental health courts for every county using a regional approach could help alleviate the lack of drug and mental health providers. Another possibility would be to mandate these alternative programs through existing judicial districts.

Oklahoma has been proactive in the creation of incarceration alternatives, particularly drug courts. One of the reasons that these alternatives are not more widely used is for fear that proponents will be tagged as "soft on crime". This must stop.

WOMEN & SPECIAL POPULATIONS

Primary Recommendation

Oklahoma's incarceration rate of women is an international embarrassment and indefensible. The Academy recommends that, in partnership with the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women, the state female incarceration rate be reduced to below the national average within 10 years and within five years the state is no longer the national leader in the number of incarcerated women.

Oklahoma's incarceration of women is the highest in the civilized world. This is not because Oklahoma women are more prone to crime – or because Oklahomans don't like women. It is the logical outcome of a government that centralizes programs and let's local programs wither because of a lack of funds. Other populations such as juveniles and the mentally ill suffer similarly.

CORRECTIONS FINANCING STRATEGY

Primary Recommendation

A cabinet level review of the state's financing strategy of corrections should occur focusing on the raising, spending and allocation of funds for corrections spending.

Oklahoma is one of the lowest states in total criminal justice system spending per capita and funds corrections at a lower rate than the average for the United States.

In closing...

We KNOW better. We simply have to DO better. And almost every Oklahoma policymaker WANTS to fix these problems – but they will need help and political encouragement. The principal Oklahoma Academy recommendations are prominently displayed on the following pages. Once understood, we believe the majority of Oklahomans will support common sense reforms that are still "tough of crime – but twice as smart".

Major Sentencing Reform

Primary Recommendation

The Academy should partner with the District Attorney's Council to create a Legislature sanctioned workgroup that will reconsider, redraft and reintroduce a contemporary version of HB 1213 of 1996 that will balance and standardize sentencing while updating and reconsidering the 85 percent rule. Membership should include, but not be limited to, active and retired legislators and members of the judiciary.

Secondary Recommendation

The Academy also recommends the creation of three formal workgroups to (1) analyze sentencing trends (2) examine decriminalization of certain drugs and (3) review the categories of felonies.

Discussion

A decade ago, Oklahoma considered a modernizing sentencing reform package that included a definitive sentencing matrix articulated with an "85 percent rule" that assured sentencing discipline. At the last moment, the Matrix was discarded but the "85 percent rule" remained. That rule, standing alone, has proven toxic. The recent DOC audit sponsored by the Legislature flatly declared that this rule will be the sole cause for the increase in our inmate population in the future. The presence of the rule without the sentencing matrix is like nitro without glycerine; peanut butter without jelly, and ham without eggs. It just doesn't work as well. Oklahoma policymakers know what to do. We chickened out 10 years ago. It is now time to stand up and do this right.

Matrix and Rule

The application of the 85 percent rule magnifies sentencing inequities, which is causing a significant increase in DOC population. We recommend that the Oklahoma Academy work with the District Attorney's Council to reconcile this incomplete system. We should either create an effective Truth in Sentencing strategy or repeal the 85 percent rule. Reform in standardized sentencing is essential. The narrowing of ranges allowed in standardized sentencing, as applied to the individual's culpability and criminal history, ensures the minimum sentencing level while applying more realistic maximum penalties.

Analyze Sentencing Trends

The state/local imbalance of DOC funding encourages localities to sentence high volumes of inmates without concurrent fiscal responsibility. We suggest a formal analysis of sentencing trends, by locality, be performed; and strategies suggested that would create a rational balance of the geographical source of the inmate population. These strategies should or could include both incentives and disincentives. (i.e. adoption of community sentencing programs where counties are reimbursed per diem to put offenders to work in the county.)

Study Decriminalizing Certain Drugs

Creation of a task force to study decriminalizing simple possession of certain drugs.

Review Felony Categories

A legislatively approved citizen task force should be commissioned to review our current criminal code to better align our laws with national trends and norms for felony categorization.

*Food for Thought: "One is absolutely sickened, not by the crimes that the wicked have committed, but by the punishments that the good have inflicted; and a community is infinitely more brutalized by the habitual employment of punishment than it is by the occasional occurrence of crime."
- Oscar Wilde*

Be “Smart on Crime”

Primary Recommendation

It is in the best interests of all Oklahomans that the volumes of the incarcerated be intelligently reduced. The Academy wholly supports full funding of the DMHSAS “Smart on Crime” proposal, and further recommends that the Legislature create or designate a well credentialed oversight and monitor process.

Addiction and mental illness are major causes of incarceration in Oklahoma and must be addressed in order to reduce incarceration rates in Oklahoma. Given this correlation, the Academy endorses the Smart on Crime program as a dynamic new approach to address this complex issue.

The Town Hall demonstrated once again that the major contributing cause of incarceration is related to substance abuse and mental health issues. This is not arguable. The Oklahoma Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse has crafted a “Smart on Crime” proposal that will cost \$30 million per year. Some are skeptical that the proposal can be effective.

The Oklahoma Academy believes that the proposal is sound and is more than worthy of funding – and trying to do something different. The Academy wholly supports full funding of the “Smart on Crime” proposal, and further recommends that the Legislature create or designate a high-powered oversight and implementation commission to monitor progress.

The Academy endorses the Smart on Crime proposal that the DMHSAS has advanced. Department of Mental Health and Substance Abuse Services has advanced the “Smart on Crime” proposal, which includes broad efforts toward early childhood intervention to identify problems as soon as possible. Although expensive (an estimated initial investment of \$30 million), requiring a consequential reallocation of resources, it is a new initiative approach that merits additional resources and expansion. Its principal features work at various diversion points in the judicial system:

1. Prevention and Pre-Booking (such as psychiatric and substance abuse emergency responders to assist attending officers; at risk intervention; residential treatment services for addiction)
2. Initial Detention/Booking (mental health and substance abuse screening in jails)
3. Post-Booking/Initial Hearing (treatment and counseling for those waiting case disposition)
4. At Disposition or Sentencing (expanded drug (including juvenile drug) and mental health courts; expanded drug and mental health treatment)
5. While Incarcerated (treatment for inmates)
6. Reintegration (post-incarceration treatment, forensic PACT teams to deal with the most severe cases, housing and employment assistance for at risk cases)

“Smart On Crime” was built around successful policies proven by volumes of empirical data. It works at all points of the judicial process; and, it will divert people away from incarceration decreasing the prison population. For all of its virtues, it comes with a heavy price tag: \$30 million to initiate and \$90 million/year to maintain. It will require a 30 percent increase to the DMHSAS budget.

Town Hall participants weighed the advantages and disadvantages, and determined that the cost and other potential obstacles could be overcome and the program could successfully accomplish what it was designed to do: keep people out of incarceration and do so early in the offender’s transition through the system, ultimately decreasing the prison population and reducing human suffering.

Concerns About “Smart On Crime”

- Can higher education produce the necessary qualified personnel by expanding programs and scholarships or tuition reductions? Can government help through student loan forgiveness?
- Can the program be phased-in with pilot programs to alleviate the large upfront cost and engender greater public support?
- Can collaborations be established with tribal governments to find solutions?
- Should savings from incarceration be identified and promoted? Can such a public campaign spur private investments or endowments to ensure its application?

Possible funding sources include:

- Federal and state research funds.
- The reintegration arm could possibly be funded through the Second Chances Act.
- The identification of a pool of investors for individual parts of the program.
- The creation/identification of a new revenue stream such as a “sin tax” on alcohol.

Incarceration Alternatives

Primary Recommendation

Drug Courts should be a front-end system. First-time non-violent offenders and non-violent offenders with one previous felony conviction should be given an alternative to incarceration (specialty courts: drug, veteran’s, mental health, etc.)

Secondary Recommendation

Due to disparity in population and resources between the state’s rural and urban areas, regional alternative programs should be implemented. Providing access to drug and mental health courts for every county using a regional approach could help alleviate the lack of drug and mental health providers. Another possibility would be to mandate these alternative programs through existing judicial districts.

Alternatives to prison include drug and mental health court programs and community sentencing programs. Statistics shows that these alternatives help reduce incarceration rates. Additionally, both the community and the participant benefit from the programs, because participants acquire the necessary skills to become productive members of society. Currently some of these options are available in some Oklahoma counties, but many counties in Oklahoma have no true alternatives to prison.

Oklahoma has been proactive in the creation of incarceration alternatives, particularly drug courts. One of the reasons that these alternatives are not more widely used is the fear that proponents will be tagged as “soft on crime”. This must stop. We must recognize that supporters need alliances to affect change. The Oklahoma Academy recommends ...

- Successful and effective alternative programs like mental health and substance abuse treatment and community-based sentencing should be expanded. Drug Courts should be availed as a front-end system.
- First-time non-violent offenders should be given an alternative to incarceration, and the eligibility of non-violent offenders should be expanded so that they may be given the option of drug court rather than incarceration. Also, in determining alternative program eligibility, we must conduct early assessments of the offender under the presumption that most people are eligible for drug court and/or mental health assessment. Violent and other serious offenders do not benefit from the presumption.
- Due to disparity in population and resources between the state’s rural and urban areas, regional

alternative programs should be implemented. Providing access to drug and mental health courts for every county using a regional approach could help alleviate the lack of drug and mental health providers. Another possibility would be to mandate these alternative programs through existing judicial districts.

- Many, if not most, Oklahoma counties do not have the necessary community-based resources to effectively implement alternative programs; as such, programs must ultimately depend upon state appropriations. Due to existing demands on governmental budgets, we should look for other ways to provide alternative programs within our current system.
- Increased use of telemedicine and telepsychiatry.
- Alternative work force developed through diverting those with a proclivity to commit lesser offenses and using low level security prison populations.
- Community based organizations could work with work force investment boards, career tech and employers to employ identified individuals.
- Incentives should be offered to encourage private investment in rural diversionary programs.
- Any alternative approach must have a quality control and evaluation procedures in place. To ensure this quality control, cooperative/collective approaches should be examined including collaborations, with state incentives, involving state, tribal, county, municipal, and private interests.
- Implement technical violation caps on drug courts.

Mental Health Courts

In 2002, the Oklahoma legislature passed legislation allowing for the development of mental health courts. Mental health courts integrate mental health care with the criminal justice system for the promotion of public safety, individual responsibility, citizenship, reduction of the recidivism rate and restoration of human dignity for those diagnosed with mental disorders and fills the gap between persons with mental illness and mental illness services.

- Mental health courts should be one of the many diversion strategies implemented. Exclusionary criteria currently in the state statute prohibit expansion of participation in mental health court. The criteria should be reviewed and specifically incidents of violence in one's past should not be grounds for exclusion from the program.
- Expansion of mental health courts is desirable, but should be incremental and should take place through establishing courts both in counties that already have them and those that do not.

Women & Special Populations

Primary Recommendation

Oklahoma's incarceration rates for women are an international embarrassment and indefensible. The Academy recommends that, in partnership with the Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women, the state female incarceration rate be reduced to below the national average within 10 years and within five years the state is no longer the national leader in the number of incarcerated women.

Oklahoma's incarceration of women is the highest in the civilized world. This is not because Oklahoma women are more prone to crime – or because Oklahomans don't like women. It is the logical outcome of a government that centralizes programs and let's local programs wither because of a lack of funds. Other populations such as juveniles and the mentally ill suffer similarly.

We know better. We simply have to DO better. And we can. The Oklahoma Academy recommends that ...

Women

Oklahoma incarcerates more women per capita than any other state in the nation, with a majority incarcerated for non-violent offenses. An Oklahoma Commission on the Status of Women study supported these findings, indicating that the predominant reasons for the high rate of female incarceration included domestic violence, child abuse, the nature of drug crimes in Oklahoma and a lack of alternative diversion/treatment available in rural counties.

- Oklahoma can begin to address these issues by engaging in a statewide dialogue regarding how we view women and children in this state. Such a dialogue should involve government leaders, women's advocates and other essential stakeholders. The dialogue should include the following topics:
 - Domestic and sexual abuse, trauma and the resulting issues
 - Substance abuse and mental illness, treatment and prevention
 - Poverty
 - Single parent homes
 - Sex education, teen pregnancy and high-school drop-out rates
 - Prevention, intervention and education are essential to breaking the cycle; treatment, education, training, employment, and housing are essential to re-integration
- Resources and tools need to be made readily available to women who need to escape a cycle of domestic abuse and co-dependency. The legislature and policy makers should also examine how more protection can be provided to women and children needing to escape a situation involving abuse and/or co-dependency.
- Public, private and faith-based initiatives should develop early intervention efforts aimed at: teenage pregnancy, domestic violence, community outreach, academic alternatives, family inclusion and workforce development. One suggestion is for community and faith-based organizations to work with schools in providing successful women to speak to young women. Mother-to-mother programs should also be developed and utilized to help teach parenting skills and provide additional positive role models, especially for teen mothers. Men play a vital role, and information programs should be expanded to inform men of the effects of domestic and substance abuse on women and children. Residential treatment programs allow families to recover together and learn the necessary skills for advancement in society.
- Oklahoma should also continue exploring and utilizing alternative courts and sentencing for women who are non-violent drug offenders. However, once women enter the criminal justice system, they should be given opportunities to reunite with their children and families and to participate in treatment and training programs for the duration of their sentence and once paroled.
- A "risk assessment" of women offenders is necessary to understand and identify violent versus non-violent crimes, and reduce non-violent felonies to misdemeanors.

Incarcerated Mentally Ill

We need to re-shape the way the system works with regard to mentally ill individuals from punishment to rehabilitation. Services need to be provided not only for those with lengthy sentences but also to those in county jails.

- Expand interagency efforts between DOC and DMHSAS and current programs (RSAT, gender specific) to prepare the already incarcerated mentally ill for reintegration into society. These efforts should be directed toward both violent offenders and non-violent offenders. Because they may pose an increased risk, efforts to enhance recovery treatment while still in prison should be made or violent offenders.
- Methods of dealing with non-violent mentally ill patients who are now imprisoned include:
 - Transfer qualifying inmates to a mental health hospital, which provides more extensive treatment.

- Increase efforts to provide additional facilities that serve solely inmates in need of mental health and substance abuse treatment.
- Provide appropriate behavioral health services in the community based upon the offenders level of acuity (severity of symptoms)
- Utilization of programs such as the Day Reporting program in Oklahoma County
- Creation of a three-year pilot program for non-violent offenders with special housing, surveillance, daily reporting, day center and out-patient treatment. This program would also be used for those individuals who age/time out of the forensic center but still need additional treatment
- Creation of a mental health unit within the existing system.
- A strategic realignment of DOC and DMHSAS responsibilities is recommended. All mental health and substance abuse services within DOC should be transferred to DMHSAS. Associated resources should be included. An initial approach will be to explore the building or conversion of DOC facilities that are specifically designed, equipped and staffed to house qualifying inmates.
- Utilize the public guardian model. Public guardians would help monitor medication.
- Once inmates are released, oversight and care are still required.

Children

Mental illness and addiction often take hold during the teenage years, and if left untreated can result in criminal activity.

- Early intervention programs should be adequately financed to alleviate the burdens on the criminal justice system. These early intervention programs must include financing and integrate community-based mental health systems and the public school and juvenile justice systems.
- Oklahoma communities should utilize the higher education system to assist in screening for, treating and preventing mental illness and substance abuse. The higher education system of Oklahoma should implement the university assisted community schools (UACS) model, which has demonstrated over 20 years of significant evidence based research. The program effectively coordinates nonprofit community resources focused on identifying and addressing conditions impacting the health and education of the child, strengthening families and improving academic engagement and achievement.
- Schools should be more informed about mental health conditions in students. Personal safety classes, including education on substance abuse and mental illness, should be part of the core curriculum. Funding should be increased to student organizations that have direct face-to-face interactions with students (e.g., Students for Prevention of Drug Abuse (the only anti-drug organization at OU), Peer Education).
- Schools should be provided with additional resources, tied to accountability standards, to keep children in school. Drop-out prevention initiatives and high school/junior high counseling (including resources/ counseling for students/ students with family members) with substance abuse and/or mental illness issues) should be fully funded.
- Efforts need to be made to instill responsibility in parents, and resources on parenting and dealing with children with mental illness or substance abuse issues should be made available. Poor parenting choices, such as providing alcohol and/or tobacco to children, must be actively resisted by the community.
- Efforts should be made by state agencies, community and faith based organizations, and members of the community to provide proper role models, thoughtful guidance and positive influence for children who have parents incarcerated or who do not have one or both parents (e.g., Boys and Girls clubs, Big Brothers/Big Sisters, mentoring).

Parolees

Parolees face a difficult road for successful re-integration into society and the work place. A variety of proposals addressing the level of recidivism and improving the probabilities of successful societal re-integration were considered at the Town Hall.

- Effective coordination between participating agencies dealing with offenders matriculating out of the judicial system is integral to the successful continuation and growth of these programs, including the Re-entry Coordination Council. Oklahoma needs to improve collaboration between parole/probation and mental health/substance abuse providers.
- Career tech, community college boards and faith-based organizations are encouraged to expand their mission to include occupational training and workforce development for inmates and released offenders to enhance re-integration into a productive citizenry.
- Programs that allow inmates to work in private industry behind the prison walls help promote a successful re-integration. Create a pool of employers willing to hire released inmates, offering incentives such as tax credits for these employers may be appropriate/necessary.
- Eliminate fines following incarceration or reduce sentences and fines through incentives such as obtaining employment. Implement approaches that defer fines and fees for newly released prisoners, and offer to eliminate them for those who have demonstrated long-term progress toward rehabilitation.
- Develop discharge plans (coordinated with non-profit, faith-based and private community entities). Assist in meeting parolees' needs upon release (i.e. driver's license, housing, employment, counseling and other resources). Implement a policy prohibiting prisoner release on Fridays to ensure that parolees have the necessary resources available upon release.
- Removal of the requirement that incarcerated parents repay Medicaid payments received by their children during their incarceration.

Juvenile Offenders

A comprehensive review of Oklahoma's Youthful Offender Act and the incarceration process for juveniles was proposed. Oklahoma should consider adopting a juvenile justice system similar to the Missouri system. This new Oklahoma model should take into account such components as an increased emphasis on therapy and culturally competent services involving family members and quality mentoring.

Oklahoma's juvenile system needs to place more attention on treatment programs for juveniles regarding physical and substance abuse and mental illness, including community - based and intervention programs. Oklahoma should look beyond just the successes of the Missouri model and borrow from the successful juvenile systems of other states thus combining the best of all for an Oklahoma model.

Oklahoma is one of the lowest states in total criminal justice system spending per capita and funds corrections at a lower rate than the average for the United States.

Corrections Financing Strategy

Primary Recommendation

A cabinet level review of the state's financing strategy of corrections should occur focusing on the raising, spending and allocation of funds for corrections spending.

A cabinet level review of the funding process should occur focusing on the elimination of duplicative programs and requiring more cooperative efforts in developing responses to this underfunding problem.

Additional Recommendations

Punishment of Non-Violent Offenders

Non-violent offenders should be housed by the circumstances of the crime. Separation of offenders could help to focus on rehabilitation and treatment rather than protecting inmates. Separation could also help ensure that DOC workers have sufficient training to deal with the offenders they are assigned to guard.

The Legislature should implement the means for an offender denied an alternative to incarceration by the district attorney to seek judicial review of that denial. Mandatory minimum sentences serve as a significant obstacle to implementing this. It is recommended that the legislature review the use of mandatory minimum sentences for non-violent crimes. Any review should encompass what offenses carry mandatory minimums and the length of the sentence imposed by mandatory minimums.

Politics and Financing

The role of the Governor in the pardon and parole process is a Constitutional responsibility. Reducing that role, through a Constitutional amendment, is one important step in helping to reduce prison overcrowding in Oklahoma. The Governor should be removed from the pardon and parole process for non-violent crimes but remain as part of the process for certain heinous and violent crimes. It was also recommended that a professional full time parole board be created similar to other states, which would have the necessary effect of a more realistic approach to parole assessments and the shortening of the time for parole review, approval and release.

Education and training must be mandated by CLEET to teach and promote law enforcement use of discretion. Law enforcement more than any entity of the criminal justice system has the ability to divert individuals from the system, thus having an impact on prison overcrowding and ensuring that people get social services.

Encourage the Department of Corrections to maximize volunteers, not for profit organizations, and academic institutional resources to operate programs within the corrections industry

Adoption of standards that provide more accountability and control over corrections at the county government level. Through the state appropriations process, counties could be provided further incentives and options for performance standards.

Recognize that other states utilize county options and alternatives. A strong and effective system for county level sentencing options should be created for the county and state to share both control and responsibility. For example, the state could match county raised revenue with state appropriations to improve county jails and increase alternative sentencing and treatment options.

An external review of Department of Corrections' internal regulations and procedures regarding misconduct, revocation of earned credits for time and administrative costs.

Other Recommendations

Public information campaigns focused on increasing the public's awareness of:

- Substance abuse and mental illness
- The status of the women/girls/children in Oklahoma
- The costs of a "tough on crime" vs. "smart on crime" approach to the crime rate and incarceration

“Justice in the life and conduct of the State is possible only as first it resides in the hearts and souls of the citizens” - Plato

An Overview of The Oklahoma Academy

Vision

Empowering Oklahomans to improve their quality of life through effective public policy development and implementation.

Mission

To identify issues facing Oklahoma; provide well-researched, objective information; foster nonpartisan collaboration; develop responsible recommendations; and encourage community and legislative action.

Motto

Moving Ideas Into Action

Concept and History

The idea of forming an “academy” for the purpose of looking closely into public policy issues affecting the future came in 1966 from Henry Bellmon during his first term as Governor of Oklahoma. After visiting Arizona and a meeting of the Arizona Academy for State Goals (now Arizona Town Hall), Bellmon was impressed with their ability to bring together a diverse, nonpartisan group of citizens from across the State to discuss public policy and then influence state government. Upon his return to Oklahoma, he gathered a small group of key business and civic leaders to create an “academy” for Oklahoma --- a private, nonprofit organization that would be separate from government, bring public policy issues to the forefront of people’s minds, provide research on issues under focus, and cause thoughtful and positive change to occur. The Oklahoma Academy was incorporated in 1967 as a private 501c3 nonprofit organization.

Revitalization of The Academy occurred in early 1985 when, upon his return from serving in the US Senate, Bellmon and other key leaders planned a rebirth of The Oklahoma Academy for State Goals. Improved methods of presenting the research, heightening the awareness of Oklahomans and gathering general consensus on recommendations that could be acted upon were developed. The Academy was reborn!

Members

People who are interested in the issues that affect the economy, health, education, and quality of life in Oklahoma are members of The Academy. Members are encouraged to be aware of how inter-related the critical issues are and to stay abreast of the various public policies and community actions that can improve the State as a whole.

Oklahoma Academy Programs and Events Held Annually

Oklahoma Summit (January)
Legislators’ Welcome Reception (February)
The Academy Salute (August)
Town Hall Conference (October)
Information Forums and Luncheons (throughout the year)
Outreach Receptions (throughout the year)
Holiday Membership Party (December)



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