



MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
 FROM: ROBERT BLIZZARD – PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
 DATE: FEBRUARY 2, 2017
 RE: RECENT KENTUCKY STATEWIDE POLLING RESULTS

On behalf of the U.S. Justice Action Network, Public Opinion Strategies conducted a statewide survey of 500 registered voters (moe ± 4.4%) in Kentucky, January 30-February 1, 2017. Fully 40% of interviews were conducted via cell phone. This memo is to review the key findings from the survey.

KEY FINDINGS

- ***The vast majority of Kentuckians believe the state’s criminal justice system is in need of reform and there’s a strong belief that there are too many people in Kentucky prisons.***

Eighty-two percent (82%) of those polled believe Kentucky’s justice system is in need of reform (67%) or a “complete overhaul” (15%). Only a scarce percentage (15%) believe the system is working well as is.

Further, a plurality of Kentuckians believe there are too many people in prison (39%), and once voters hear that there are approximately 23,000 people in Kentucky’s jails and prisons, nearly half of the state’s voters (45%) say there are “too many people in prison.”

- ***An overwhelming majority believe the state should break down barriers to help ex-offenders.***

By an overwhelming 91%-8% margin, Kentuckians strongly agree that “We should break down barriers for ex-offenders so they can get jobs, support their families, and stop being dependent on government services that cost Kentucky taxpayers money.”

And, by a significant 83%-15% margin, Kentuckians strongly agree that “It does not matter whether an offender is in prison for months or years. What really matters is that the criminal justice system does a better job of making sure that when offenders do get out, they are less likely to commit another crime.”

	Agree	Disagree
Overall	83%	15%
Republicans	85%	14%
Democrats	82%	16%
Louisville Market	82%	17%
Lexington Market	82%	17%
Cincinnati/NKY Market	93%	5%
Other Rural Markets	82%	14%

- **There's significant agreement that the state's prisons should be put to the cost-benefit test and that some money should be shifted to programs like probation and parole.**

Fully 85% of Kentuckians agree that "Prisons are a government spending program, and just like any other government spending program, they need to be put to the cost-benefit test to make sure Kentucky taxpayers are getting the best bang for their buck."

And, 79% of voters across the Commonwealth agree that "Some of the money Kentucky is spending on locking up nonviolent offenders should be shifted to strengthening mandatory community supervision programs like probation and parole."

- **Two-thirds of Kentuckians agree there's a need to reform criminal codes.**

By a strong 66%-28% margin, Kentucky voters agree that "There are too many criminal laws on the books here in Kentucky, and we need to shrink and revise state criminal codes to make laws more transparent." Both Republicans (62%-35%) and Democrats (69%-23%) strongly agree.

- **By overwhelming margins, Kentucky voters across party lines favor criminal justice reforms.**

The following reforms are strongly supported by Kentuckians across the Commonwealth:

Reform	Overall	Among Republicans	Among Democrats
<i>Reduce costly prison time for low-level, non-violent offenders in Kentucky prisons and re-invest some of those savings to create a stronger, more cost-effective probation and parole system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes.</i>	90%-9%	86%-13%	93%-6%
<i>Replace mandatory minimum sentences with sentencing ranges so that judges can weigh the individual circumstances of each case, such as seriousness of the offense and the offender's criminal history, when determining the penalty.</i>	90%-8%	88%-10%	93%-6%
<i>Reform the state's criminal code to eliminate confusion, inconsistency, and duplication in laws that are on the books here in Kentucky.</i>	91%-7%	89%-9%	93%-5%
<i>Send fewer low-level, non-violent offenders to Kentucky prisons so that state funding can be used to keep violent criminals in prison.</i>	85%-12%	80%-16%	89%-10%
<i>Update theft laws that use outdated, decades-old values to determine the seriousness of the crime to better match current pricing in our economy.</i>	84%-13%	82%-14%	86%-10%

- **And, supporting these reform proposals can help Kentucky legislators at the ballot box.**

If voters learned that their State Legislator favored these courses of action to reform the state's criminal justice system, 63% say they'd be "more likely" to vote to re-elect them, with just 4% saying they'd be "less likely."

Republicans (56%-5%) and Democrats (70%-3%) would be "more likely" to re-elect their Legislators if they supported these reform proposals. In addition, voters in both GOP-held State House Seats (61%-4%) and in DEM-held State House Seats (65%-5%), as well as in GOP-held State Senate Seats (64%-4%) and DEM-held State Senate Seats (59%-6%) would be "more likely" to support their incumbent in the next Election.

- **Nearly three-quarters of voters support foregoing the use of money bail and using evaluations and other tools to help judges.**

By a vast 73%-25% margin, Kentucky voters strongly support the following:

“As you may know, when someone is accused of a crime, the judge must set bail, which can mean the person either is held in jail or pays money in order to be released until their case is heard.

Right now, many people are held in jail prior to their case being heard because they are unable to pay their bail, at times less than a few hundred dollars. Some people support a proposal that would forgo the use of monetary bail and instead use evaluations and other tools to help judges consider all important information, such as risk to public safety and whether they pose a flight risk before making release or jail decisions.

Would you support or oppose this reform proposal?”

- **By nearly four-to-one, Kentuckians want to reform the law to allow those who have been rehabilitated to gain access to government-issued occupational licenses.**

When voters are given the following background...

“The Kentucky state government currently issues official licenses to many professions, including massage therapists, private detectives, dietitians and athlete agents. This license is necessary before someone can join that profession. Many states have begun to open up these licenses to those with a minor criminal record that have proven they are rehabilitated.”

Fully 77% say they’d rather the state *“Reform the law and allow those who have been rehabilitated to have access to government-issued occupational licenses,”* while just 20% say they want Kentucky to *“Continue the practice of having a minor criminal record keep someone from receiving a government-issued occupational license.”*

- **Finally, there’s significant support for increasing Kentucky’s “felony theft threshold.”**

By a wide 72%-26% margin, Kentucky voters strongly support the following:

“Over the last few years, most states have raised their “felony theft threshold,” or the amount of money or value of property that is stolen that is considered a felony, rather than a misdemeanor.

This increase is due to inflation and other economic changes that have occurred in the last few decades. These states have not experienced any increase in property crime or larceny. Right now in Kentucky, the “felony theft threshold” has not been increased to match inflation, and is one of the lowest in the nation.

Would you support or oppose attempts to increase this threshold to bring Kentucky in line with the rest of the country?”