

CRIMINAL JUSTICE

LWV POSITIONS THAT SUPPORT ACTION ON CRIMINAL JUSTICE/JUVENILE JUSTICE

LWVUS

Equality of opportunity: The League supports programs in basic education, occupational education and retraining when needed at any point of an individual's working career.

Education and employment criteria: The League supports programs that assist people to become self-supporting, contributing members of society.

LWVUS Impact on Issues, 2006-2008

<http://www.lwv.org/AM/Template.cfm?Section=Issues>

LWVSC

The LWVSC supports: (1) Pre-release and work release programs that facilitate an inmate's re-entry into his/her community as a productive citizen. (2) The inclusion of successful completion of academic, vocational, or technical education.

The LWVSC supports: improvements in function of the Department of Corrections and the Department of Juvenile Justice to include attention to the offender's responsibility to the community and his/her return to the community.

LWVSC Agenda for Action, 2007-2009

For the full LWVSC stand on public policies dealing with Criminal Justice and Juvenile Justice, see "State League Positions," pp. 9-10, at <http://www.lwvsc.org/issuesandaction.html>.

HISTORY

At Convention 2007, Criminal Justice, specifically rehabilitation and education programs to promote inmate reentry into society and to reduce recidivism, was adopted as an action priority for the 2007-2009 biennium.

LWVSC ACTION PRIORITY FOR 2007 – 2009 BIENNIUM

At the 2007 convention, the League of Women Voters of South Carolina adopted Criminal Justice (and, specifically, prisoner rehabilitation) as an action priority for 2007 – 2009.

Background:

At the end of 2005 a record 7 million people (one in every 32 American adults) were behind bars, on probation or on parole. South Carolina had 65,338 people incarcerated, on probation or on parole. It is estimated that, nationally, within 3 years of release, two-thirds of former prisoners are rearrested.

Our concern:

The general public expects prisoners who have served their time should return to society as law abiding, taxpaying citizens. In order for this to occur, while in prison, inmates need to be required to participate in programs that prepare them for release. These include—at a minimum—mental and physical evaluations, GED classes, job training, anger management, domestic violence treatment, alcohol and drug treatment. It is no excuse for the state to say that there are no programs or that inmates refuse to participate; inmates are incarcerated and fully under state control. Post-incarceration, prisoner re-entry programs also are critical in curbing recidivism. It is a betrayal of public trust for the state to do little or nothing.

Our present system requires that probationers or parolees comply with many of the programs listed above at their own expense. Failure to do so subjects them to further prison time. In fact, most prisoners simply do not have the money or skills to comply.

It may take legislative action or be a part of judicial sentencing to accomplish prisoner rehabilitation in South Carolina's prisons and jails. It will certainly require additional funding. In any event, all prisoners not given the death penalty or life without parole will be released and return to our communities. It is clearly a matter of public security that released prisoners do not return to crime.

Our basic question is: What should the state do with our inmate population to reduce recidivism and increase public safety?

Action by LWVSC and local Leagues:

- Examine the availability of and need for specific rehabilitation programs in South Carolina prisons and jails. Investigate best-practices models from other states.
- Create public awareness by holding public programs on the relationship between prison rehabilitation and re-entry programs, and recidivism.
- Educate and ask the South Carolina Legislature to fully fund rehabilitation and re-entry programs in the state.

Sharon Fratepietro, Chair, LWVSC Criminal Justice Committee

Tel.: 843-670-3077 Email: sharoninsc@hotmail.com

Barbara Zia, President, LWVSC

Tel.: 843-216-3550 Email: ziabl@comcast.net