

Cite and Release Policy: Affirmation

Since the tragic death of George Floyd, a reignited and rekindled emphasis on criminal justice reform has come to light. With countless community groups advocating for changes to an outdated criminal justice system, it is essential to take a step back and reflect on the reforms that must be made as our country continues to progress from our past. Our country has changed drastically since its first founding, and with those changes comes a need for social reforms. The current criminal justice system is seemingly obsolete in the status quo, often leading to overcrowded jails and inefficient government spending. Thus, the passing of the Cite and Release policy is imperative in taking steps towards improving the criminal justice system to become more applicable and appropriate in today's society.

In order to realize the necessity of the present policy, it is essential to fully understand the key advocating points of the cite-and-release proposal. A cite-and-release policy will virtually ensure that law enforcement officers issue citations, tickets, or warnings for specified low-level offenses, instead of implementing arrests. If the case is put under the cite-and-release policy, the accused party will be given a citation and summoned to handle charges at a later date instead of being immediately arrested and sent to jail. According to The Cato Institute, by implementing this policy, the 25% decrease of overall arrests will not only provide a source of relief to slowly crowding prisons but also lower the high government spending surrounding prison inadequacies. By eliminating discretionary arrests for the specified low-level offenses, individuals can also receive a wake-up call warning from their citation that paves the way for changes in present behavior. Instead of immediately punishing the accused with immediate arrest, a citation will allow for more self-reflection rather than resentment within an individual.

Currently, the United States spends hundreds of billions of dollars to maintain prisons. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, the average cost of mass incarceration in the United States is over \$81 billion. But this shocking figure only includes the cost of operating prisons and jails, not even taking into account the amount associated with court costs and other costs paid by families to support incarcerated loved ones. Even with this large budget, prison facilities are still overcrowded and inefficiently run. According to The Marshall Project, especially in the context of COVID-19, minimizing crowding means lowering chances of infection by over 47% and even death by over 23%. Amidst the prison population, the number of non-violent and low-risk criminals stand out. According to The Washington Post, with nearly 40 percent of the U.S. prison population, over 576,000 people, behind bars for no compelling public safety reason, the amount of taxpayers' money and government budget being wasted on containing these low-risks individuals is evident. With the passing of the cite-and-release policy, this unnecessary spending can be mitigated and used more wisely. Having a citation issued instead of jail time, individuals pay the price without adding to local prisons and jails' costs. With Houston spearheading this policy, other cities across our country will soon follow, effectively reducing the national prison spending tenfold.

Moreover, on top of the significant economic gain this policy brings, this executive order ultimately allows citizens to learn and move past their mistakes without being overwhelmed by the consequences. As job opportunities decrease with the rise in COVID-19 cases, many individuals' lack of income is more prominent than ever before. According to Police Chief Acevedo, struggles with income from COVID-19 has also been correlated with 32% increased crime rates, specifically low-risk crimes emphasized in this policy. But for these low-income constituents who are statistically more likely to commit these low-risk crimes, jail time or arrest

on their records can mean the end for their future. Prison Policy Initiative research shows that having a record reduces employer callback rates by over 50%, causing these individuals to be permanently left in a cycle of poverty and crime. As employers continuously reject them due to their criminal record, they must again resort to crime, no matter how small, to “stay afloat”. The Cite and Release legislation solves this inherent issue and ensures that their mistakes don’t wholly ruin these individuals. The criminal legal system that puts on punitive hardships for a low-level offense must be reformed.

Although this executive order might not be enough to solve our current crisis completely, it is undoubtedly a far-reaching step in the right direction. As Houston Mayor Turner stated regarding Cite and Released offenders, "The program allows them to make changes in their lives and face responsibility for their actions without having the stain of an arrest, or serving jail time, on their record." With this new executive order in place, the future of Houston has become more promising.

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