

The EO 1-68 is a bill that was signed on September 28th, 2020 with the primary goal of switching the punishments of minor crimes in Harris County from jail time to a ticket. This policy, which includes a Cite and Release (CAR) segment, attempts to reduce the jail population and produce “a more humane way to handle low-level offenders” by exchanging jail time from minor crimes for a monetary ticket. [1] However, it is clear that the writers of the bill didn’t think about how it would affect people of different income classes, and therefore may have caused an increase in repeat crimes. Thus I negate.

First, we must clearly understand the purpose of this bill; to create a system in which people can take responsibility for their crimes without having to go through jail time. This seems like a good idea at first because it reduces the amount of time that police officers take on jailing procedures but quickly falls short of its original goal. One of the problems is a vague repeat offender clause. The EO 1-68 tries to combat repeat offenses by stating those repeat offenders will have their punishments ‘enhanced’, but it is not specified to what degree, and judging by the trends set in this legislation, it is more likely that the bill will lead to a larger ticket rather than jail time. [2] Even though the clause may be alluding to personal punishments based on past convictions, the possible repetition is not as guaranteed of a solution as jail time for repeat offenders, even though it may simplify work for police officers and make it easy for first-time offenders.

In addition to this clause, having a ticket causes various problems based on their income class. A monetary ticket can create a financial burden on the convict instead of teaching them a lesson (especially if they have a lower income) that may cause them to turn to crime. It is nearly

a given that income has a negative correlation with crime rates, [3] with “income inequality and unemployment rate [increasing] crime rate” [4] according to a study from the Journal of Economic Structures. With the greater likelihood of lower-income people being offenders, tickets can do more harm than good, which then may lead to them turning towards crime in a fit of desperation. A similar problem affects higher-income offenders; because they have a more expendable income, they can easily write off tickets and can continue to repeat offenses. This is not a problem for first-time offenders, where the system benefits them, but for the people who can afford to pay for the ticket and repeatedly commit minor crimes. This is a loophole they can use to get out of more severe punishments. Therefore, using tickets to relieve stress by getting rid of the strain of an arrest or jail time may inadvertently cause more problems than it solves.

Even though the intentions behind the bill are positive, it struggles to fulfill the goals it was set to complete. Due to a vague repeat offense clause along with problems surrounding income disparity, I believe that this policy creates problems instead of lessening them. To be frank, I don't support the jail time policy. However, EO 1-68 isn't the most efficient possible solution to the problem, and therefore must be redrafted before fully committing to it. Perhaps a stricter method that doesn't involve a monetary payment can be added as a revision to this bill to fix it, but until then, I oppose this bill.

Sources:

- [1] <https://www.houstontx.gov/mayor/press/2020/cite-and-release-program.html>
- [2] <http://www.houstontx.gov/execorders/1-68.pdf>
- [3] <https://www.huduser.gov/portal/periodicals/em/summer16/highlight2.html>
- [4] <https://journalofeconomicstructures.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40008-020-00220-6>