

**To:** Interested Parties  
**From:** Katie Connolly, Senior Vice President, Benenson Strategy Group  
**Re:** Connecticut Polling Results  
**Date:** September 25, 2018

- The results of our poll of Connecticut voters conducted in early September clearly demonstrate that the state’s voters want to reduce the number of their fellow residents who are locked up for minor crimes and first offenses. They would be supportive of leaders who will work to make communities safer through addressing the root causes of crime, and of providing rehabilitation programs and support for people who have been released from prison so they can get their lives back on track.
- A clear majority of Connecticut voters – including 52% of the Independent voters whose votes are likely to be a decisive factor in November – believe reducing the number of people in the state’s prisons is an important issue.
  - 58% of voters say it’s important to reduce the number of people in prison in Connecticut. This includes 81% of Democrats, 52% of Independent voters and even a third of Republican voters.
- A majority of Connecticut voters see actions that would reduce the prison population and reinvest that money into crime prevention and rehabilitation programs as ultimately beneficial to their communities, while less than a third believe reducing the prison population will be harmful to communities.

<i>Making reforms that reduce the prison population would...</i>	All Voters	Dems	Ind	Rep
<b>Help communities</b> by saving taxpayer dollars that can be reinvested into preventing crime and rehabilitating offenders.	58%	78%	53%	38%
<b>Harm communities</b> because criminals who belong behind bars will be let out.	29%	14%	30%	52%

- Further, 64% of voters, including nearly half of Republicans (47%) and 61% of Independents, **disagree** that “*Any change that reduces the number of people in prison is likely to mean more crime in the future.*”
- These views are rooted in voters’ strong belief in redemption and second chances for those who have been convicted of a crime. In a forced choice question:
  - 82% of voters agreed “*People who have been convicted of a crime can turn their lives around and become productive members of our community if they can get the right kind of help.*”
    - This cuts across partisan divides: 92% of Democrats, 80% of Independents and 71% of Republicans agree.
  - Just 12% sided with the view that “*People who have been convicted of a crime are unlikely to change and will almost always be a danger to society.*”
- A purely ‘tough on crime’ approach that suggests inflexible prison sentences are the only answer doesn’t resonate in Connecticut. When forced to choose between two options:
  - Nearly three-quarters of voters agreed “*If you do the crime, you should pay a price, but **prison isn’t the only answer** and we should encourage offenders to work hard to improve themselves.*”
    - This includes 62% of Republicans and 69% of Independent voters.
  - Just 25% sided with “*If you do the crime, you should do the time, no exceptions and no breaks for good behavior.*”



- While most voters believe some type of punishment is necessary for those who have committed a crime, they firmly believe that Connecticut has a responsibility to rehabilitate prisoners.
  - 64% of all voters, including 68% of Independents and 50% of Republicans, **strongly** agree that *“The primary purpose of prison should be to make sure people who have been convicted of a crime pay a price, but we also **have a responsibility to rehabilitate criminals** while they are in prison, so that they can become productive members of our community when they are released.”* (90% agreed overall)
- A broad group of voters agree that directing more resources to addressing the root causes of many crimes would be a better use of taxpayer dollars than locking up those who are not a danger to others – and that this has potential to make their communities safer.
  - 82% agreed (including 60% strongly) that *“If we stopped imprisoning people who are not truly dangerous and treated the problems that lead people to commit crime in the first place, like drug addiction and mental illness, we could make our communities safer.”*
  - 78% agreed (including 48% strongly) that *“Dangerous criminals should be sent to prison, but we waste too much taxpayer money locking up people who are not dangerous to others.”*
- This mindset leads Connecticut voters to support a wide variety of criminal justice reform policies such as prison diversion programs and increased funding and support for reentry programs for recently released prisoners.
  - This includes the Risk Reduction Earned Credit program that began in 2011, which is supported by 86% of voters (53% strongly support it).

<u>% support</u> for changing the criminal justice system in CT by...	All Voters	Dems	Ind	Rep
Increasing funding for programs that make our communities safer by <b>helping people coming out of prison to find jobs, housing and medical care</b> so they have a better shot of becoming productive members of society	87%	90%	90%	78%
Allow people convicted of misdemeanors to have their <b>criminal record erased if they go five years without a new conviction</b> after they've been released from prison	85%	85%	90%	76%
Sending <b>first time offenders</b> who have been convicted of a crime <b>into proven programs</b> that address the root causes of crime <b>instead of sending them to prison</b>	76%	90%	75%	57%
Pass a law that <b>prohibits former prisoners from being discriminated against due to their criminal record</b> when it comes to things like housing, employment, education and insurance	74%	88%	73%	56%

### Methodology

Benenson Strategy Group conducted 507 telephone interviews from September 5-10, 2018 on behalf of the American Civil Liberties Union of Connecticut. All respondents were registered voters in Connecticut who are likely to vote in the 2018 gubernatorial election. The margin of error for the data set is  $\pm 4.3\%$  at the 95% confidence level and it is higher among subgroups.

