

# ARIZONA CAPITOL TIMES

non-daily  newspaper of the year

## American Friends Service Committee is incorrect on corrections

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Maricopa County Attorney Bill Montgomery (Cronkite News Service Photo by Christina Silvestri)

A sponsored analysis of Arizona's sentencing policies by American Friends Service Committee (appearing in the March 14 edition Arizona Capitol Times in the "Courts and Corrections" Focus section) lacks relevant data about the state's prison population and ignores smart, effective policies that are already in effect.

It's curious to see the AFSC tout a 2012 survey showing strong support among Arizona voters for prison alternatives which our state

instituted long ago. Evidently, the group is unaware that Arizona currently provides mental health courts, diversion programs, drug treatment programs and earned time credit – and has for years.

Arizona, we are told, has the sixth highest incarceration rate in the U.S., a finding which we are not told includes the federal prison population, over which the state has no control. Total inmate population in state prison grew less than 2 percent since 2010, hardly an explosive increase especially considering the state's total population grew nearly twice as much over the same period. Dire predictions of unsustainable growth in inmate population have simply not materialized. In fact, previous plans to build additional correctional facilities in Arizona were shelved several years ago.

The real question is not how many people are in Arizona's prisons, but which people.

According to a recent analysis commissioned by the Arizona Prosecuting Attorney's Advisory Council (APAAC), more than 95 percent of current inmates have multiple felony convictions and/or a conviction for a violent felony, sex offense, dangerous crime against children, or other dangerous offense.

This is the expected result of policies enacted 20 years ago that target the most serious criminals for incarceration. Another expected result is the precipitous drop in crime Arizona has enjoyed over this period – also ignored by the AFSC. In the last decade alone, Arizona's rate of Part 1 crimes – which include murder, rape, robbery aggravated assault, burglary, vehicle theft and arson – has fallen twice as much as the national rate.

The fact is, crime prevention through incapacitation saves taxpayers money. The same APAAC study estimates Arizona sentencing laws led to the incarceration of 3,100 offenders who otherwise would not have been sent to prison. That translates into the prevention of roughly 98,038 additional crimes and a savings of more than \$360 million in crime-related costs.

Policy makers and fellow Arizonans would be better served to have the Capitol Times assign one of its capable reporters to this topic instead of relying on column space purchased by an uninformed out-of-state interest group bent on promoting a reckless agenda under the guise of fiscal conservatism.

- Bill Montgomery is Maricopa County attorney.

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