

Florida Sheriffs and Police Chiefs Debunk the Myth That Drug Offenders in State Prison Are Non-Violent, Low Level Offenders

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Today, the Florida Sheriffs Association (FSA) and Florida Police Chiefs Association (FPCA) gathered at the Florida Capitol to debunk the myth that drug offenders in the state prison are non-violent, low level offenders.

Data from the Florida Department of Corrections (FDC) establishes that most inmates incarcerated in Florida's prisons (56%) have been previously convicted of violent offenses, and over 95% of all prisoners are repeat offenders. Despite these facts, advocates for eliminating minimum mandatory sentences and releasing drug offenders 35% earlier than their judge-imposed sentences have recently identified these repeat criminals as low-risk, non-violent offenders. An analysis of inmate data from the Department of Corrections shows this assertion is wrong.

A recent analysis examined the criminal history of the 10,917 inmates in FDC custody as of October 2019, who were convicted of a drug-related crime. These inmates accounted for a total of 394,019 prior criminal charges, or an average of 36 charges per inmate, prior to their current incarceration.

Most importantly, 85% of these drug offender inmates committed a forcible felony¹, a burglary, or both prior to their current prison sentence. Forcible felonies are violent crimes committed against a person.

Looking at the 10,917 drug-related offenders currently incarcerated in the FDC:

- On average, each inmate had 36 prior criminal charges and an average of 18 convictions
- 85% of these inmates committed a prior forcible felony, a burglary or both, prior to the current state incarceration

Of the 2,184 drug trafficking offenders currently incarcerated at FDC:

- On average, each drug trafficker had 18 prior criminal charges and 16 convictions
- 88% of these inmates committed a prior forcible felony, a burglary or both, prior to their current state incarceration

As the data shows in this report, there are no first-time drug offenders ending up in our state prisons. These inmates have long criminal histories that have led them to this point of state incarceration. It is now up to these inmates, after numerous interactions with the criminal justice system, to decide if they want to be rehabilitated or to continue their criminal behavior after their release. We should continue to offer a helping hand toward their rehabilitation, but not at the expense of handing out lesser sentences after these criminals have already turned away from numerous second chances.

“This analysis debunks the myths of the criminal justice reform debate regarding our state prisons being full of first-time drug offenders,” said FSA President and Pinellas County Sheriff Bob Gualtieri. “The state prisons are made up of inmates with long criminal histories. Of the 10,917 drug-related offenders currently in the Florida Department of Corrections, 85% of these

inmates committed a prior forcible felony, a burglary or both, prior to the current state incarceration.”

"The vast majority of criminals in prison for drug-related crimes are high-risk, violent offenders," said Chief Gary Hester, government affairs coordinator for The Florida Police Chiefs Association. "And the vast majority of them are repeat offenders – they keep committing crimes, over and over. And this report proves it."

To read the full report, please visit: <https://www.flsheriffs.org/reform-myths>.

[1] FSS 776.08 defines a forcible felony as treason; murder; manslaughter; sexual battery; carjacking; home-invasion robbery; robbery; burglary; arson; kidnapping; aggravated assault; aggravated battery; aggravated stalking; aircraft piracy; unlawful throwing, placing, or discharging of a destructive device or bomb; and any other felony which involves the use or threat of physical force or violence against any individual.

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Florida Sheriffs Association:

The Florida Sheriffs Association is a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) corporation made up of the 67 Sheriffs of Florida, approximately 2,500 business leaders and 83,000 citizens throughout the state. Founded in 1893, FSA has steadfastly served the citizens of Florida by supporting the needs of the state's law enforcement community. Through the Florida Sheriffs Association, Sheriffs are given a forum to address lawmakers to push for positive changes in Florida's public safety arena. FSA also provides Sheriffs' Offices much-needed programs such as affordable training, special task forces and legislative and legal services. Dedicated to the prevention of juvenile delinquency and the development of lawful, productive citizens, FSA has established and funded the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches with facilities throughout the state to help restore hope, fulfill dreams, and prepare boys and girls for the future. It has grown to be one of the largest and most successful state law enforcement associations in the nation. For more information on the Florida Sheriffs Association, visit www.flsheriffs.org.

Florida Police Chiefs Association:

The Florida Police Chiefs Association is the third largest state police chiefs association in the United States. It is composed of more than 1000 of the state's top law enforcement executives. FPCA serves municipal police departments, airport police, railroad, college and university police, school board/district police, tribal police, railroad or port authority police, private business and security firms. The FPCA has members representing every region of the state. The Association was originally organized in 1952 to promote legislation that would enhance public security by providing superior police protection for the residents of Florida and its many visitors. Today, with the same goal, its role has expanded to provide better communication, education, and training for the state's various police and security agencies. The FPCA facilitates the dissemination of information, provides continuing police training, and promotes a better understanding of the police profession in general. Through conferences, seminars, and special training courses, the FPCA ensures the highest degree of preparedness and responsiveness among the state's many agencies and officers. The Association provides a forum for sharing information on the latest crime-fighting strategies, tools and techniques. By enhancing communications between agencies at all levels, the Association fosters the highest degree of police professionalism and competence. Membership in the Florida Police

Chiefs Association supports and maintains the highest standards of public safety and police protection for the millions of people who live, work and play in the State of Florida.

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