

THE MESOCRATIC PARTY | POLICY WHITE PAPER

Safe and Fair

Fully Funded Police, Sentencing Reform, and a System That Actually Reduces Crime

Tough on crime. Tough on the reasons crime happens.

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Executive Summary

The United States incarcerates more people than any country on earth — in total numbers and per capita. Over 1.2 million people are in state and federal prisons. Another roughly 700,000 are in local jails on any given day. The total incarcerated population approaches 2 million.

States spent a combined \$63.6 billion on corrections in 2023. The federal Bureau of Prisons spent billions more. The median state cost per prisoner is approximately \$61,000 per year, with enormous variation: Mississippi spends under \$20,000 per inmate; Massachusetts spends nearly \$285,000.

And the system does not work. Recidivism rates remain stubbornly high — approximately 44% of released prisoners are rearrested within one year, and roughly two-thirds within three years. The United States spends more to incarcerate people than most countries spend to educate them, and the primary outcome is that most of the incarcerated return to prison.

The Mesocratic Party rejects the false choice between public safety and criminal justice reform. Both are possible. Both are necessary. And the evidence shows that doing both simultaneously produces better outcomes at lower cost.

The Mesocratic platform on criminal justice:

- **Fully fund police** — increase officer pay, improve training (de-escalation, mental health response, community policing), and reject the “defund” rhetoric that alienated communities and officers alike.
- **End mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses.** Judges should sentence based on circumstances, not formulas.

- **Expand drug courts nationally.** Drug courts reduce recidivism by 38-50% among participants and return \$2-3 for every dollar invested.
- **Invest in reentry programs.** Employment training, housing support, and substance abuse treatment for returning citizens reduce recidivism and generate tax revenue.
- **Deploy mental health co-responder teams.** Pair law enforcement with mental health professionals for crisis calls. Reduce use-of-force incidents and unnecessary incarceration.
- **Deschedule marijuana federally.** Regulate and tax it like alcohol. Stop criminalizing a substance that most Americans support legalizing.
- **Impose a federal death penalty moratorium.** The death penalty is more expensive than life imprisonment, disproportionately applied, and irreversible in cases of wrongful conviction.
- **Seal records for nonviolent offenders** who complete their sentences. Give people a real second chance.

The goal is a system that is safe — that protects communities, supports victims, and holds violent offenders accountable — and fair — that does not warehouse nonviolent offenders at enormous taxpayer expense, trap people in a cycle of recidivism, or pretend that incarceration alone constitutes justice.

1. The Problem: Mass Incarceration by the Numbers

1.1 The Scale

The United States has approximately 5% of the world's population and approximately 20% of the world's prisoners. Over 1.2 million people are held in state and federal prisons, with an additional 700,000+ in local jails.

The national state prison incarceration rate is approximately 327 per 100,000 residents — but this average masks enormous variation. Mississippi incarcerates at a rate of 668 per 100,000; Massachusetts at 89 per 100,000. The difference between the highest and lowest state incarceration rates is roughly sevenfold.

1.2 The Cost

Total state spending on corrections reached \$63.6 billion in 2023. The median state cost per prisoner is approximately \$61,000 per year.

State	Annual Cost Per Prisoner
Massachusetts	~\$285,000
New York (NYC)	~\$556,000 (jail)
California	~\$130,000
National median	~\$61,000
Federal (BOP)	~\$44,000

State	Annual Cost Per Prisoner
Mississippi	~\$20,000

Sources: USAFacts/Census Bureau; BOP; NYC Comptroller.

More than \$80 billion is spent annually across all levels of government on incarceration. This does not include the economic costs of lost productivity, family disruption, community destabilization, and the long-term earnings reduction experienced by formerly incarcerated people.

1.3 The Recidivism Failure

If the purpose of incarceration is to prevent future crime, the system is failing. Approximately 44% of released prisoners are rearrested within one year of release. Roughly two-thirds are rearrested within three years.

The American incarceration system warehouses people — it does not rehabilitate them. Most prisons provide inadequate access to education, vocational training, substance abuse treatment, and mental health care. When people are released with no skills, no housing, no support, and a criminal record that prevents legal employment, the result is predictable.

1.4 The Racial Disparity

The criminal justice system disproportionately incarcerates Black and Hispanic Americans. Black Americans are incarcerated at roughly five times the rate of white Americans. Hispanic Americans are incarcerated at approximately 1.3 times the rate of white Americans. These disparities persist after controlling for crime rates and reflect differences in policing, prosecution, sentencing, and the application of mandatory minimums.

1.5 The Drug Offense Problem

A significant portion of federal prisoners are incarcerated for drug offenses. At the federal level, nearly half of all inmates are serving time for drug-related crimes — many of them nonviolent. Mandatory minimum sentences require judges to impose fixed prison terms regardless of individual circumstances, filling prisons with people who are addicted rather than dangerous.

The War on Drugs, launched in the 1970s and escalated through the 1980s and 1990s, dramatically expanded the federal prison population without significantly reducing drug use. What it did was create the world's largest prison system and disproportionately affect communities of color.

2. The Data: What Actually Works

2.1 Drug Courts

Drug courts are the single most studied and most effective alternative to incarceration for substance-involved offenders.

A meta-analysis of 154 drug court evaluations found that drug court participation reduces recidivism by an average of 12 percentage points — equivalent to a drop from 50% to 38%. Some reviews report reductions of 38-50% among adult drug court participants. Studies funded by the Department of Justice found that 84% of drug court graduates have no serious rearrest within one year of graduation, and 72.5% have no arrests at the two-year mark.

The financial return is clear: an Urban Institute analysis found that drug courts return \$2.21 in benefits to the criminal justice system for every dollar invested. When expanded to all at-risk arrestees, the return increases to \$3.36 per dollar. A 10-year longitudinal study found that drug courts reduce costs by an average of \$1,392 per participant in the short term, with long-term public savings of \$6,744 per participant (or \$12,218 including reduced victimization costs).

There are now over 3,800 treatment courts across the United States, serving approximately 120,000 Americans annually. The evidence overwhelmingly supports expansion.

2.2 Reentry Programs

Reentry programs — providing employment training, housing assistance, substance abuse treatment, and mentoring to returning citizens — reduce recidivism and generate positive returns for taxpayers.

The RAND Corporation found that incarcerated individuals who participate in education programs are 43% less likely to recidivate than those who do not. Every dollar invested in prison education programs generates \$4-5 in savings through reduced reincarceration costs.

2.3 Mental Health Co-Responder Teams

Approximately 2 million people with serious mental illness are booked into jails each year. Many of these encounters begin as crisis calls — not crimes. Sending armed officers alone to respond to mental health crises produces predictably poor outcomes for everyone involved.

Co-responder models — pairing law enforcement officers with mental health professionals on crisis calls — reduce use-of-force incidents, reduce unnecessary arrests, reduce emergency room visits, and connect people in crisis with treatment rather than jail. Cities that have implemented co-responder programs report significant reductions in mental-health-related incarcerations.

2.4 States That Reformed: Texas, Georgia, Oklahoma

The strongest evidence for criminal justice reform comes not from liberal states but from conservative ones.

Texas began its reform journey in 2007, investing in drug courts, treatment programs, and probation alternatives rather than building new prisons. The result: the prison population declined, the crime rate fell, and the state saved billions in avoided construction and operating costs.

Georgia passed comprehensive sentencing reform in 2012, reducing mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses and investing savings in accountability courts and reentry. Crime continued to decline.

Oklahoma passed a ballot initiative in 2016 reclassifying simple drug possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. The prison population dropped, and the sky did not fall.

These states demonstrate that reducing incarceration and reducing crime are not contradictory goals. They are complementary.

2.5 International Comparison: Portugal and Norway

Portugal decriminalized the personal use of all drugs in 2001, redirecting resources from prosecution to treatment. Two decades later, drug-related deaths, HIV infection rates among drug users, and incarceration for drug offenses have all declined dramatically. Drug use rates did not increase.

Norway operates prisons focused on rehabilitation rather than punishment. Norwegian prisons emphasize education, vocational training, and gradual reintegration into society. Norway's recidivism rate is approximately 20% — less than one-third of the U.S. rate. The cost per inmate is higher, but the long-term societal cost is far lower.

3. The Proposal

3.1 Fully Fund Police — And Train Them Better

The Mesocratic Party supports fully funding law enforcement. Communities need police. Police need competitive pay, modern equipment, and adequate staffing.

But funding alone is not enough. Federal grants should be tied to training standards: de-escalation techniques, mental health crisis response, implicit bias training, community policing models, and duty-to-intervene policies. Well-trained officers produce better outcomes for communities and for themselves — fewer use-of-force incidents, fewer complaints, fewer injuries, fewer lawsuits.

The Mesocratic Party rejects “defund the police” as both bad policy and bad politics. It also rejects unconditional support for policing practices that produce harmful outcomes. Fund police. Train police. Hold police accountable. These are not contradictions.

3.2 End Mandatory Minimums for Nonviolent Drug Offenses

Mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses should be eliminated at the federal level. Judges should be free to consider the individual circumstances of each case: the nature of the offense, the defendant's history, the availability of treatment, and the likelihood of rehabilitation.

This does not mean light sentences for drug traffickers. It means proportionate sentences for nonviolent offenders — particularly those whose primary problem is addiction, not criminal intent.

3.3 Expand Drug Courts Nationally

Federal funding should expand drug court capacity to serve every eligible defendant in every federal judicial district and incentivize state adoption. The evidence supporting drug courts is among the strongest in all of criminal justice policy: they reduce recidivism, reduce costs, and produce better outcomes for participants and communities.

3.4 Invest in Reentry

Every person released from prison either reenters society successfully or returns to prison. Reentry investment — employment training, transitional housing, substance abuse treatment, and mentoring — is the most cost-effective approach to reducing recidivism.

Federal funding for reentry programs should be expanded and tied to measurable outcomes: employment rates, recidivism rates, and housing stability among participants.

3.5 Mental Health Co-Responder Teams

Federal grants should fund the deployment of mental health co-responder teams in every jurisdiction with a population over 50,000. These teams pair trained mental health professionals with law enforcement officers for crisis response calls, reducing the number of mental health encounters that result in arrest, use of force, or emergency room transport.

3.6 Deschedule Marijuana

Marijuana should be removed from the federal Controlled Substances Act entirely — not rescheduled, descheduled. It should be regulated and taxed by the states, similar to alcohol.

The federal prohibition of marijuana is incoherent: the majority of states have legalized it for medical or recreational use, and enforcement of federal law is effectively suspended in those states. Meanwhile, federal prohibition creates banking barriers for legal state-level businesses, prevents proper research, and maintains a criminal-record burden for people in states that have not legalized.

Tax revenue from state-level marijuana legalization has been substantial. Colorado alone has generated over \$2 billion in marijuana tax revenue since legalization. Nationally, the combined revenue potential is significant and can be directed toward treatment, education, and public safety.

3.7 Death Penalty Moratorium

The Mesocratic Party supports a federal moratorium on the death penalty. The case is not primarily moral — it is practical:

- The death penalty is more expensive than life imprisonment (due to mandatory appeals, specialized incarceration, and legal costs).
- It is disproportionately applied to people of color and people who cannot afford effective legal representation.
- It has not been demonstrated to deter crime.
- It is irreversible in cases of wrongful conviction — and since 1973, more than 190 people on death row have been exonerated.

A moratorium allows time for a comprehensive review of the system's fairness, effectiveness, and cost. It does not preclude reinstatement if the review demonstrates that capital punishment can be applied justly and effectively.

3.8 Record-Sealing for Nonviolent Offenses

People who complete their sentences for nonviolent offenses should be eligible to have their records sealed after a waiting period of good behavior (typically 3-5 years post-completion). Sealed records are not destroyed — they remain accessible to law enforcement — but they are not visible to employers, landlords, or the general public.

A criminal record is the single largest barrier to post-incarceration employment. Without employment, recidivism is almost certain. Record-sealing breaks this cycle for people who have served their time and demonstrated rehabilitation.

4. The Math: What It Costs

Reform	Annual Cost/Savings
Increased police training (federal grants)	-\$3 to -\$5 billion
Drug court expansion	-\$1 to -\$2 billion
Reentry program investment	-\$2 to -\$3 billion
Mental health co-responder teams	-\$1 to -\$2 billion
Reduced incarceration (fewer nonviolent drug offenders)	+\$5 to -\$10 billion
Reduced recidivism (reentry + drug courts)	+\$3 to -\$5 billion
Marijuana tax revenue (federal share)	+\$3 to -\$5 billion
Record-sealing (increased employment/tax revenue)	+\$1 to -\$2 billion
NET FISCAL IMPACT	+\$5 to +\$10 billion in savings

The current system costs over \$80 billion per year and produces 44% one-year recidivism. Spending \$7-12 billion per year on evidence-based alternatives while reducing the

incarcerated population by 15-20% would save \$5-10 billion annually while improving public safety outcomes.

5. Who Benefits

5.1 Impact by Group

Communities: Less crime. Safer neighborhoods. Police who are better trained and supported. Mental health crises handled by professionals. Fewer people cycling through the revolving door of incarceration.

Taxpayers: Lower total spending on corrections. Higher returns from treatment and reentry investments. Marijuana tax revenue. Reduced economic drag from mass incarceration.

Police officers: Better training. Mental health support. Co-responder teams for crisis calls. Higher pay funded by federal grants. A system that supports officers rather than setting them up for failure.

Nonviolent offenders: Proportionate sentencing. Access to treatment instead of prison for addiction. Reentry support. Record-sealing for a genuine second chance.

Victims: A system focused on prevention — not just punishment — reduces future victimization. Drug courts and reentry programs produce fewer repeat offenders. That means fewer future victims.

Families: The collateral damage of mass incarceration falls hardest on families — children who lose parents, spouses who lose partners, communities that lose members. Reducing unnecessary incarceration strengthens families.

5.2 Honest Trade-Offs

Some offenders will reoffend. No system eliminates crime entirely. The question is whether the alternative system produces less recidivism than the current one — and the evidence says it does, dramatically.

Marijuana descheduling is politically divisive. Despite majority public support, some communities and states oppose legalization. Federal descheduling allows states to maintain their own restrictions.

The death penalty moratorium faces strong opposition. A significant minority of Americans supports capital punishment. The Mesocratic position is a moratorium — a pause for review — not abolition.

Police reform is sensitive terrain. Any discussion of police training and accountability risks being perceived as anti-police. The Mesocratic position is explicitly pro-police and pro-accountability. Better training protects officers as much as it protects communities.

6. Implementation

Phase 1 (Year 1): Federal drug court expansion funding. Mental health co-responder grant program. Police training standards tied to federal grants.

Phase 2 (Years 1-2): Federal sentencing reform legislation — eliminate mandatory minimums for nonviolent drug offenses. Begin reentry program expansion.

Phase 3 (Years 2-3): Marijuana descheduling (executive action to initiate, legislation to codify). Record-sealing legislation for nonviolent offenses.

Phase 4 (Year 3+): Federal death penalty moratorium. Comprehensive review of capital punishment system. Ongoing monitoring and adjustment of reform outcomes.

7. How the Parties Compare on Criminal Justice

	Republican	Mesocratic	Democrat
Police funding	Increase, back the blue	Fully fund + training standards	Mixed (some “defund” rhetoric)
Sentencing reform	Oppose most reform	End mandatory minimums (nonviolent)	Broad sentencing reform
Drug courts	Some support	National expansion	Support
Marijuana	Oppose legalization (mostly)	Federal descheduling	Support legalization
Death penalty	Support	Moratorium + review	Oppose (mostly)
Private prisons	Support	Phase out	Oppose
Reentry	Minimal investment	Major expansion	Support expansion
Approach	Punishment-first	Safety + reform together	Reform-first

The Mesocratic position is unique because it refuses to choose between public safety and justice reform. Fund police and reform sentencing. Expand drug courts and hold violent offenders accountable. Treat addiction as a health problem and crime as a law enforcement problem. These are not contradictions — they are the evidence-based combination that actually reduces crime.

8. Conclusion

The United States has tried punishment as a primary strategy for fifty years. The result is the largest prison system in the world, the highest incarceration rate among developed

nations, recidivism rates that would get any private business shut down, racial disparities that undermine the legitimacy of the system, and a price tag exceeding \$80 billion per year.

The evidence for what works is not ambiguous. Drug courts reduce recidivism by 38-50%. Reentry programs reduce it by 43%. Mental health co-responder teams reduce unnecessary arrests and use-of-force incidents. States that have reformed — including deeply conservative states like Texas, Georgia, and Oklahoma — have reduced both incarceration and crime simultaneously.

The current system is not tough on crime. It is expensive on crime. It spends enormous sums to warehouse people in conditions that make them more likely to reoffend, then releases them with no support and wonders why they come back.

A system that is truly tough on crime invests in prevention, treats addiction, trains police, holds violent offenders accountable, gives nonviolent offenders a real path back, and measures its success not by how many people it locks up — but by how many people it keeps from coming back.

That is what safe and fair looks like. It costs less. It works better. And the evidence is already in.

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