MEMORANDUM

TO: The U.S. Justice Action Network
FROM: B.J. Martino
DATE: April 19th, 2016
RE: Summary Findings From A Survey of Voters in Selected Minnesota Legislative Districts

The Tarrance Group is pleased to present the U.S. Justice Action Network with the findings from a survey of likely voter attitudes in historically competitive legislative districts in Minnesota (10A, 10B, 11B, 12A, 14B, 17A, 17B, 24B, 27A, and 56B). All respondents interviewed in this study were part of a fully representative sample of N=402 registered “likely” voters. The margin of error for the sample is +/- 4.9% in 19 of 20 cases. The surveys were conducted on April 5-7, 2016.

Executive Summary

Nearly eight (8) in ten (10) (79%) of likely Minnesota voters in these districts support the proposal for comprehensive criminal justice reform, as read in detail, while only a meager 13% oppose. Furthermore, fully 74% of voters say they would be more likely to vote for a legislator who supported this reform. This supermajority more likely score extends across all partisan blocks:

- Among Republicans (34% of voters)- 72% more likely to vote for a legislator
- Among Independents (35% of voters)- 65% more likely to vote for a legislator
- Among DFL voters (31% of voters)- 87% more likely to vote for a legislator

Voters in these districts walk into the discussion more likely feeling that there are too many people in prison (45%) than that they are not enough (19%). There is overwhelming agreement that we should focus on putting away the most dangerous drug dealers, and not non-violent drug users.

And there is practically universal bipartisan agreement on three fundamental principles of criminal justice reform. Each of the following score 85% or more agreement among voters:

- Prisons cost Minnesota taxpayers a lot of money, and we should be focused on putting away more of the truly dangerous criminals. (91% agree)
- Being tough on crime is not about punishing drug addicts and the mentally ill. Being tough on crime is about putting away hardened and violent criminals who are selling and distributing drugs. (88% agree)
- We should be putting fewer low-risk non-violent drug users in prison, while increasing mandatory sentencing for violent and gang-related drug dealers. (85% agree)
Then, provided with the detailed explanations of the components of the comprehensive criminal justice reform proposal, solid supermajorities support each and every one of the components. Support for each of the components range from 65% to as high as 85%.

As noted, a follow-up question then asked total support for the reform proposal, which scored 80% support, with 74% saying they would be more likely to vote for a legislator who supported it.

Support for Components of Comprehensive Criminal Justice Reform

Eliminate the state mandatory minimum sentencing for drug offenders convicted of possessing a small amount of drugs and give judges more discretion in sentencing. 76%

Overhaul the sentencing guidelines to create new and tough mandatory penalties for higher level drug offenders while emphasizing treatment for first-time lower level drug users. 83%

Raise the amount of most drugs someone has to possess in order to receive a prison sentence. Heroin possession levels will remain the same. 65%

Create new penalties for marijuana drug dealers who are growing 100 or more marijuana plants. 62%

Impose tough new mandatory sentences for higher level drug offenders who possess firearms, have prior convictions, are part of or are leadership in a drug gang. 85%

Reduce the penalty for first time drug users convicted of possessing only a trace amount of drugs. 80%

Increase penalties for those convicted three or more times of possessing drug paraphernalia. 73%

Reinvest any funds saved from keeping low level drug users out of prison into community programs aimed at prevention and treatment of drug addiction. 84%

TOTAL SUPPORT FOR COMPREHENSIVE JUSTICE REFORM 79%

Including Minnesota, The Tarrance Group has worked for the U.S. Justice Action Network in seven states. This includes Florida, Kentucky, Missouri, North Carolina, Nevada, and Wisconsin.

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