



MEMORANDUM

TO: INTERESTED PARTIES
FROM: ROBERT BLIZZARD – PUBLIC OPINION STRATEGIES
DATE: OCTOBER 5, 2015
RE: RECENT MICHIGAN STATEWIDE POLLING RESULTS

On behalf of the U.S. Justice Action Network, Public Opinion Strategies conducted a statewide survey of 500 registered voters (moe \pm 4.4%) in Michigan, September 7-9, 2015. Fully 35% of the interviews were conducted via cell phone. The purpose of this memo is to review the key findings from the survey.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Few Michiganders believe the state's criminal justice system is working well.**
Just 18% of Michigan voters say the state's criminal justice system is "working pretty well as it is," with 15% saying it needs a "complete overhaul" and nearly two-thirds who say it needs "major reform" or "minor reform."
- **A significant majority agree prisons need to be put to the cost-benefit test by lawmakers.**
By an overwhelming 85%-12% margin, Michiganders strongly agree that "Prisons are a government spending program, and just like any other government spending program; they need to be put to the cost-benefit test to make sure Michigan taxpayers are getting the best bang for their buck." Fully 94% of Republicans, 84% of Independents, and 77% of Democrats agree.
- **More than three-quarters agree that some of the money Michigan spends on non-violent offenders should be shifted to supervision programs.**
By a vast 79%-20% margin, Michiganders strongly agree that "Some of the money Michigan is spending on locking up nonviolent offenders should be shifted to strengthening mandatory community supervision programs like probation and parole." Fully 67% of Republicans, 83% of Independents, and 83% of Democrats agree.
- **And, most Michigan voters believe there are more effective, less expensive alternatives to prison for non-violent offenders.**
By a significant 71%-26% margin, Michigan voters side with the first statement below:

Which ONE of the following statements comes closer to your own opinion?

*Some people say that with nearly 60,000 people in Michigan's jails and prisons, that's too many and it costs the state too much. There are more effective, less expensive alternatives to prison for non-violent offenders and expanding those alternatives is the best way to reduce the crime rate.
...while...*

Other people say that any person who commits a crime belongs behind bars, end of story. It may cost a lot of money to run prisons, but it would cost society more in the long run if more criminals were out on the street.

- ***Michiganders agree that the system should do a better job of making sure when offenders get out they are less likely to commit another crime AND they become less dependent on government.***

By an 82%-16% margin, Michigan voters strongly agree that “It does not matter whether an offender is in prison for months or years. What really matters is that the criminal justice system does a better job of making sure that when an offender does get out, they are less likely to commit another crime.”

And, by 84%-13%, Michiganders agree that “We should break down barriers for ex-offenders so they can get jobs, support their families, and stop being dependent on government services that cost Michigan taxpayers money.”

- ***There’s very strong support for proposals aimed at reforming the state’s criminal justice system.***

By 87%-10%, Michigan voters strongly support a proposal that would “Reduce prison time for low-risk, non-violent offenders in Michigan prisons and re-invest some of those savings to create a stronger probation and parole system that holds offenders accountable for their crimes.” This proposal is supported by 85% of Republicans, 85% of Independents, and 89% of Democrats.

And, by a significant 90%-9% margin, Michiganders strongly support a proposal that would “Replace mandatory minimum sentences with sentencing ranges so that judges can weigh the individual circumstances of each case, such as seriousness of the offense and the offender’s criminal history, when determining the penalty.” This proposal is supported by 89% of Republicans, 90% of Independents, and 90% of Democrats.

- ***Supporting these proposals can help Michigan legislators at the ballot box next November.***

If voters learned that their State Legislator favored these courses of action to reform the state’s criminal justice system, 53% say they’d be “more likely” to vote to re-elect them, with just 7% saying they’d be “less likely.”

Republicans (48%-6%), Independents (50%-7%), and Democrats (62%-8%) would all be “more likely” to re-elect their Legislator if they supported these reform proposals. In addition, voters in both GOP-held State House Seats (48%-6%) and in DEM-held State House Seats (60%-8%) would be “more likely” to support their incumbent next fall.