

TEXAS ADVOCATES SHOW SUPPORT FOR ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION

“Treatment First: A Day of Awareness” Event Sheds Light on Rehabilitation as Alternative to Jail

AUSTIN, TX (March 16, 2017) – A diverse group of more than 100 Texas legislators, community leaders, addiction experts, entertainers, inspirational speakers, and people impacted by the justice system convened on Friday, March 10, at the State Capitol to raise awareness for substance use disorder and support for treatment and rehabilitative opportunities as an alternative to incarceration in Texas.

Hosted by the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) and the Texas Smart-On-Crime Coalition, the “Treatment First: A Day of Awareness” event shed light on the need to reclassify low-level possession drug penalties to Class A misdemeanors. This reclassification would allow the offender to receive treatment for his or her underlying causes of substance use disorder at the pretrial level when it is most effective; an approach that actually saves Texas taxpayers millions of dollars.

“This event was all about communicating the fact that prisons are not a substitute for treatment,” said Shakira Pumphrey, Policy Director, TCJC. “People who do not pose a legitimate threat to public safety shouldn’t take up costly prison or jail beds. By providing effective treatment and rehabilitative services, we save the state money, improve public safety, and promote family unity when we treat the underlying causes of addiction. It also helps these individuals’ chances of staying on the right path, allowing them to continue to fulfill employment and other life-sustaining obligations.”

Attendees also had the opportunity to hear first-hand from people personally impacted by incarceration. Former Michigan Speaker of the House, Craig DeRoche, who currently serves as Senior Vice President for advocacy and public policy at Prison Fellowship (the nation’s largest outreach to prisoners, former prisoners, and their families) keynoted the event. DeRoche made front-page news when, at 34, he became the Speaker of the Michigan House of Representatives. In 2010, he made national headlines again for two alcohol-related arrests, revealing a long-concealed addiction to alcohol. It was only after his arrests, the ensuing rehab, and a renewed focus on his Christian faith that Craig entered lasting recovery.

Other speakers included Gary Cobb, Former Assistant District Attorney, Travis County; Cathy DeWitt, Vice President of Governmental Affairs, Texas Association of Business; Barbara Hood, Jail Outreach Program, Haven for Hope; Nicholas “Nico” LaHood, Criminal District Attorney, Bexar County; Mike Lozito, Director of Judicial Services, Bexar County; Michela Marinelli, Associate Professor of Pharmacy, University of Texas at Austin; Douglas Smith, Policy Analyst, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition; Reginald Smith, Peer Policy Fellow, Certified Peer Specialist; and Lauren Johnson and Dara Musick of Conspire Theatre.

Tens of thousands of people are arrested each year for low-level, nonviolent drug possession offenses, squandering limited jail space on people who need help with addiction. These individuals receive little to no treatment, contributing to a high re-arrest rate – meaning more valuable resources spent by law enforcement, Texas courts, and local jails. In addition, Texas spends approximately \$60 million annually to incarcerate people for possessing drugs in amounts consistent with personal use and indicative of addiction.

To learn more about the “Treatment First: A Day of Awareness” event, including photos, expert opinions, and stories by those impacted by the justice system, please visit:

<http://www.txsmart.org/treatment-first-day-awareness-0>.

To help fight for reforms at the Capitol, visit: <http://www.texascjc.org/donate>. You can also contact your legislative representative by visiting this link: <http://www.fyi.legis.state.tx.us/Home.aspx>.

About the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC)

The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition works with peers, policy-makers, practitioners, and community members to identify and promote smart justice policies that safely reduce the state's costly over-reliance on incarceration – creating stronger families, less taxpayer waste, and safer communities.

For more information on the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition and/or to support the Coalition and its work, visit: www.texascjc.org.

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