

# The Attorney General's "Smart on Crime" Initiative

## **About the Smart on Crime Initiative**

At the direction of the Attorney General in early 2013, the Justice Department launched a comprehensive review of the criminal justice system in order to identify reforms that would ensure federal laws are enforced more fairly and—in an era of reduced budgets—more efficiently. Five goals were identified as a part of this review:

1. *To ensure finite resources are devoted to the most important law enforcement priorities;*
2. *To promote fairer enforcement of the laws and alleviate disparate impacts of the criminal justice system*
3. *To ensure just punishments for low-level, nonviolent convictions*
4. *To bolster prevention and reentry efforts to deter crime and reduce recidivism*
5. *To strengthen protections for vulnerable populations*

## **Reform Sentencing to Eliminate Unfair Disparities and Reduce Overburdened Prisons**

- The Attorney General announced a change in Department of Justice charging policies so that certain people who have committed low-level, nonviolent drug offenses, who have no ties to large-scale organizations, gangs, or cartels will no longer be charged with offenses that impose draconian mandatory minimum sentences.
- The Attorney General also announced revised criteria for other categories of inmates seeking reduced sentences. This includes elderly inmates and certain inmates who are the only possible caregiver for their dependents. In both cases, under the revised policy, the Bureau of Prisons would generally consider inmates who did not commit violent crimes and have served significant portions of their sentences to be released early.
- The Attorney General provided guidance to federal prosecutors on recidivist enhancements. According to this directive, prosecutors should consider several factors including the use of violence and ties to large-scale criminal organizations when determining if recidivist enhancements are appropriate. When possible, prosecutors should seek to charge the defendant with a drug quantity lower than the necessary to trigger the mandatory minimum.

## **Pursue Alternatives to Incarceration for Low-Level, Non-Violent Crimes**

- The Department of Justice has also recommended the use of specialty courts and programs to deal with unique populations of offenders as recognition that incarceration is not the answer in every criminal case. Examples of these programs include diversion programs provide alternatives to incarceration for candidates with minimal criminal history or substance abuse issues.

## **Improve Reentry to Curb Repeat Offenses and Re-Victimization**

- The Attorney General issued guidance to department components to avoid the imposition of unnecessary collateral consequences upon the conviction of criminal offenses. Components considering new regulations must also consider whether or not those regulations can be more narrowly tailored to prevent collateral consequences that would prevent reentry for offenders.
- The Attorney General called on U.S. Attorneys to designate a prevention and reentry coordinator within each of their offices to focus on those efforts. As part of this directive, Assistant U.S. Attorneys will be newly encouraged to devote time to reentry issues in addition to casework.

## **Surge Resources to Violence Prevention and Protecting Most Vulnerable Populations**

- The Attorney General directed law enforcement partners to work with department components included the Community Oriented Policing Service (COPS) and the Office of Violence Against Women to share information regarding best strategies to prevent violence against vulnerable populations.