

Thank you, Chair Durbin, Ranking Member Graham, and Members of the Judiciary Committee. I'm honored to be here today to commemorate the five-year anniversary of the First Step Act.

Growing up in Cleveland, I witnessed firsthand the damage that a broken criminal justice system can wreak on families and communities. So, when I got the chance to work on a landmark criminal justice reform bill during my time in the Trump administration, I jumped at it. Not only was this an issue near and dear to my heart, but criminal justice reform was also a priority issue for the Trump administration. Providing hope to forgotten communities was a large reason President Trump was elected, and the First Step Act remains one of his greatest achievements.

I worked with many people in this room on both sides of the aisle to help pass the law. It was a bipartisan achievement. We garnered support from major law enforcement organizations, such as the Fraternal Order of Police and the International Association of Chiefs of Police.

Right-of-center groups such as Right on Crime, Americans for Prosperity, the American Conservative Union, Prison Fellowship, Tzedek Association, and Safe Streets and Second chances and many others also worked hard to support the bill and are continuing to lead on criminal justice reform issues today.

And let's not forget that the First Step Act was inspired by other successful reforms in conservative states, including Texas and Georgia.

But, it takes more than one party to pass landmark legislation, so we worked hand in hand with Democratic leaders in the House and Senate and with left-of-center groups such as the ACLU, Cut 50 or Dream, and Families Against Mandatory Minimums.

Together, we were able to pass a bill that improved prison conditions, increased evidence-based rehabilitative programming, allowed earned early release to halfway houses and home confinement, kept incarcerated people closer to their families, did away with draconian mandatory minimum sentencing laws, and much more.

The First Step Act has been a tremendous success.

However, some critics of the law have cherry-picked rare cases of recidivism to sow fear in the public and make them turn away from these types of commonsense reforms. I've even heard the claim the First Step Act actually contributed to the rise in crime we witnessed during the pandemic.

That is simply not true.

The First Step Act prioritized public safety by requiring each inmate to undergo a public safety threat assessment before they were granted early release to a halfway house or home confinement. According to federal data, the recidivism rate for [federal](#) prisoners is about 43%. For those released under the First Step Act, the [rate](#) is just 12%. And technical [violations](#) – not new crimes – account for a *third* of that number.

Furthermore, a recent [examination](#) of Bureau of Prisons data by the Council on Criminal Justice found that the recidivism rate for people released under the First Step Act is roughly 37% lower than the rate for similarly situated people released before the law's passage.

We are now at a crossroads with a critical choice to make. We can either pursue policies that have proven to fail, or we can follow in the footsteps of the First Step Act and continue to adopt policies that are smart on crime.

That is exactly what I have continued to work on since I left the White House. I've partnered with right-of-center and law enforcement groups to continue pushing for reforms like the First Step Act that are *smart* on crime, and to ensure that criminal justice reforms continue to be a bipartisan effort. In response to the rising crime during the pandemic, we created a coalition called [Public Safety Solutions for America](#) that is guided by four commonsense conservative principles for reducing crime.

The first principle is supporting our police by properly funding law enforcement. The police have one of the hardest jobs there is, and they need our support. We need to ensure that there are enough police on the streets and that departments can attract, train, and retain the best talent. [Studies show](#) that proper training reduces officer misconduct and can improve police-community relations. In the same vein, we must hold officers who violate the law and deny people their civil rights accountable to the fullest extent of the law.

The second is focusing law enforcement time and resources on preventing and solving the most serious crimes. Police are too often asked to play the role of social worker by dealing with the mentally ill, people facing drug addiction, and the homeless. Community groups are much better equipped than police to handle these issues. If communities take on a larger role, police will be able to focus more on what matters most – preventing and solving violent crimes.

The third principle is implementing evidence-based policies that have been proven to reduce violent crime. Dallas is a prime example. Dallas Police Chief Eddie Garcia has implemented [tactics](#) such as focused deterrence, hot-spot policing, and urban blight reduction. As a result, overall violent crime has decreased in the city for the third year in a row. I've had the privilege of working with Chief Garcia to share his tactics with communities across the country.

The fourth principle revolves around continuing to enact smart-on-crime solutions that hold people accountable for wrongdoing and increase public safety while respecting the dignity of all humans. That means learning from communities that are succeeding on crime and implementing proven solutions in other communities.

These types of smart-on-crime solutions resonate with conservative voters. [Polling](#) from The Adams Project indicates that 86% of Republican primary voters agree with the policies laid out in the First Step Act. What's more, they viewed attacks on it for what they are: political posturing.

Solutions that follow smart on crime principles, such as the First Step Act, are the key to improving public safety. While more reforms are needed, we must be careful to reject any changes to our justice system that do not balance accountability with rehabilitation. Reforms that do not strike this balance, as we have seen in many major cities, have made communities less safe.

Americans deserve a more effective criminal justice system – one that supports our police, holds criminals accountable, and helps those who have earned a second chance successfully re-enter society, without wasting taxpayer dollars. The First Step Act was a bipartisan win that

accomplished all this. We can and should strive for more bipartisan wins like it because, at the end of the day, safety for all Americans should not be political.

Thank you all for your time today.

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