

# The Campaign for **TREATMENT NOT INCARCERATION**

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PRESS RELEASE

December 16, 2003

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## **New Poll: Maryland Voters Say Too Many Locked Up; Favor Shorter Sentences and Drug Treatment for Non-Violent Crimes**

*Coalition Launches New Campaign to Support Treatment, Not Incarceration in Maryland; Abolish Mandatory Minimums*

**Baltimore, Maryland**—A new poll released today finds that an overwhelming majority of Maryland voters—almost seven to one—(73% to 11%) see treatment as more effective at stopping drug use than prison, and most believe that the state is not doing enough to provide treatment to people in need. The poll found strong support for criminal justice reform, especially in the forms of reducing lengthy sentences, abolishing mandatory minimums, and diverting nonviolent offenders from prison into treatment.

The poll, conducted by the respected *Potomac Incorporated* polling firm, was released by the Campaign for Treatment Not Incarceration, [www.TreatNotJail.org](http://www.TreatNotJail.org), a coalition dedicated to making Maryland safer and more just by reducing the state's reliance on incarceration and expanding effective treatment programs. Made up of civil rights organizations, women's groups, treatment providers, policy specialists, communities of faith, defense attorneys, and other concerned groups, the coalition vowed to push policy makers to expand drug treatment and reform Maryland's criminal justice policies.

Potomac Incorporated is an opinion research and public affairs firm based in Bethesda, Maryland. They have been polling voters in the mid-Atlantic region since 1982 for clients including The (Baltimore) Sun, WTOP Radio, and ABC-7 TV, as well as numerous private organizations.

“The consensus for treatment instead of incarceration is crystal clear,” said Maryland Justice Coalition Director Tara Andrews. “Not only do Maryland voters believe that our prison system is broken, but they are hungry for more effective treatment options. That's what this campaign is about: common sense and cost effective justice reform. We must reduce the number of people needlessly incarcerated for non-violent offenses, and invest the money saved in treatment programs which are proven to reduce crime and help people turn their lives around.”

Maryland voters are concerned with crime in their state, and nearly six in ten voters (59%) worry about it affecting them personally. Voters believe by five to one that Maryland's drug problem is getting worse. But Maryland voters do not see prison as the answer. A majority believe that prisons actually make things worse—53% say that people who are incarcerated are *more likely* to commit crimes after being released than they were before entering prison. Maryland voters believe by two to one that there are too many people in prison. When asked which budget to cut during the upcoming session, the prison budget ranked first and in a face-off between cutting prisons and higher education, Maryland voters were three times as likely to support cutting prisons as universities.

Instead of prisons, Maryland voters favor solutions that address the *causes* of crime, and reject blunt approaches which mandate imprisonment. By an almost *universal mandate* (86% to 9%), respondents want judges to have the option to order “supervised treatment and counseling” rather than prison for some drug users.

Seven voters out of eight reject mandatory sentences. An overwhelming majority (70% to 17%) of voters would favor shortening sentences for non-violent offenders as a way to save money for the state. A plurality of voters (48% to 37%) would favor a provision that would increase the rate at which drug offenders earn time off their sentences for good behavior to the same rate as other nonviolent offenders.

“With African Americans making up 90% of the population incarcerated for drug offenses, and Maryland having the highest percentage of its prison population made up of African Americans of any state in the country, supporting treatment instead of incarceration is a top priority for the civil rights community,” said National Urban League Senior Scholar James R. Lanier, PhD. “We will fight for fairer and more sensible policies that promote justice and safety.”

Voters think Maryland needs to do more when it comes to treatment—only 15% think Maryland does enough. According to data from Maryland’s Alcohol and Drug Abuse Administration over 200,000 Marylanders needed but did not receive treatment for a drug problem in 2000. And under certain circumstances, voters think that even those who sell drugs may deserve treatment instead of prison, especially if the treatment was mandatory and court supervised and available only to drug users who sell to support their own habit.

“My own experience as a former addict and now treatment provider confirm what Maryland voters are saying—we need to provide more treatment outside of jail if we really want to make our communities healthy and strong,” said I Can’t, We Can Executive Director Israel Cason. “Prison only makes people worse. Treatment gives people the skills and tools they need to heal. If we don’t start expanding our community programs, we’ll only see things get worse.”

The poll is evidence of widespread support for the coalition’s proposals. Members expressed confidence that Maryland voters are ready for a fairer, more effective and more cost efficient justice system that promotes rehabilitation and treatment for drug offenders. The campaign promised to be loud and active during the upcoming legislative session, and to encourage legislators and the governor to do the right thing when it comes to justice issues in Maryland. Specifically, the campaign is promoting an agenda to:

- Divert non-violent offenders from prison to treatment.
- Abolish mandatory minimum sentences.
- Give non-violent drug offenders the same time off their sentences for good behavior as given to other non-violent offenders.
- Reform parole practices so that people are not sent back to prison for minor, non-criminal parole violations.

“When it comes to women, children, and families, there is no doubt that treatment is the way to go,” said Maryland Chapter of Now President Duchy Trachtenberg. “Prisons devastate and destroy communities and families and should not be used as a first line of defense for drug addiction. We need to give people the skills to build better lives for themselves, today and tomorrow.”

*For more information about the Campaign for Treatment Not Incarceration, and for a full copy of the poll, visit the website at [www.TreatNotJail.org](http://www.TreatNotJail.org) or contact Laura Jones at 202-363-7847, x308.*

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