

The Problem with Truth in Sentencing

Truth in Sentencing brands itself as something fair and equitable, but in reality, it is a Trojan Horse that costs communities dearly. In practice, it has proven to prevent meaningful opportunities to reduce recidivism and increase public safety. Truth in Sentencing over-punishes those who have opportunities for rehabilitation, and the sustained cost depletes scarce resources that could be used to prevent violent crime. Mandating that every individual sentenced to a term of imprisonment will serve the same percentage of the sentence is bad policy. For instance, in Arizona, it means that each person that goes to prison will serve 85% of the sentence imposed, no matter the crime. So, an individual sentenced to prison for a drug possession crime and an individual sentenced to prison for armed robbery will both serve 85% of those sentences. There is no ability to earn time off a sentence, which is also known as receiving good time credits. The only exception to this rule is for crimes with statutory requirements in which the offender must serve 100% of the sentence, which applies to offenses like homicide and serious child-related crimes. Truth in Sentencing does nothing to prepare individuals to re-enter communities, and with 95% of all incarcerated eventually released, this blanket policy puts public safety in jeopardy.

THE INTENT



The intent behind Truth in Sentencing began simply, to achieve the following:

- › Consistent sentences.
- › Protecting victims including ensuring restitution and understandable sentences.
- › Reducing crime and recidivism.
- › Eliminating parole.
- › Showing a tough on crime attitude.

THE MYTHS



The myths behind Truth in Sentencing are prolific:

- › "Parole is a bad thing."
- › "Crime drops when we keep people in prison longer."
- › "All offenders should be treated the same way."
- › "Truth in sentencing keeps the community safe."

THE TRUTH



The truth behind Truth in Sentencing is why it needs to be reformed.

- **More than 95% of inmates are eventually released.**
 - Nearly all incarcerated offenders are released into the community. Truth in Sentencing schemes do nothing to prepare them for re-entry. It simply guarantees a determinant amount of time behind bars and little time for supervision in the community to ensure successful reintegration.
- **All crimes and all offenders are not the same.**
 - Treating an offender suffering from addiction the same as a violent predator makes no sense. Eliminating Truth in Sentencing schemes will allow sentences to remain consistent but tailor them to the individual and the specific crime to achieve the best long-term outcome for both the offender and society.
- **Parole is a good thing.**
 - Without parole it becomes impossible to provide appropriate supervision upon an offender's release. Traditional parole supervises released offenders during the parole period which is the remaining portion of their sentence to ensure they receive the necessary tools and assistance to re-integrate into society. For instance, if someone is released at 65% of their sentence, the remaining 35% will be supervised in the community by a parole officer. Releasing people that only have 15% percent of their sentence left for community supervision often leaves offenders lost and without the help or time they need to succeed outside of prison.
- **Ex-offenders are released though they are ill-prepared to succeed.**
 - Truth in Sentencing means that at 85% everyone is released, whether you work hard inside to prepare for your life outside or if you do nothing at all. Under a Truth in Sentencing scheme, offenders can literally sit in a cell for the entire 85% and be released without taking a class, learning a trade, or doing anything to educate themselves and prepare to succeed upon release.
- **There is no incentive for offenders to grow and better themselves while incarcerated.**
 - Offenders who get high school or college degrees, learn a trade, participate in self-help programs, or even learn to run a business while incarcerated still serve 85% of the imposed sentence without any ability to earn time off. Offenders who do nothing also serve 85% of the imposed sentence. Under a Truth in Sentencing scheme, offenders have no incentive to prepare for a better life outside prison.
- **There are extraordinary taxpayer costs without an effective return for those dollars. For instance, Arizona taxpayers spend over 1.3 billion a year incarcerating offenders.**
 - Truth in Sentencing has been in place in Arizona since 1994. Since implementation, it has skyrocketed corrections costs without any corresponding positive return on investment. Today, there are more people in prison and recidivism is higher. Taxpayers deserve better.