



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
April 16, 2015

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The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition Welcomes Award-Winning Artist John Legend In Support of Campaign to End Mass Incarceration

AUSTIN, TX – The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC), along with Texas legislators and coalition partners, welcomed nine-time Grammy® Award winner John Legend to Austin on Thursday, April 16, in support of his FREE AMERICA campaign to end mass incarceration.

As part of FREE AMERICA, John Legend is embarking on a listening and learning tour across the country, visiting with incarcerated individuals, law enforcement, legislators, and experts who have been thinking critically about America’s prison problem. John Legend visited the Travis County Correctional Complex and stated, “I am visiting county jails and state prisons and will continue to visit more – to listen, to learn, to be led by those most affected as I do whatever I can to end mass incarceration.”

By collaborating at local and national levels, TCJC, John Legend, and other allies continue to build momentum in the shift from a “tough on crime” culture to one that is “smart on crime.” Right now, about 725,000 adults in Texas are incarcerated, on probation, or on parole. John Legend spoke with Texas legislators to encourage the momentum and face the problem of mass incarceration head on. “Texas has been a leader and I am here working alongside legislators and advocates who believe that every Texan deserves a better justice system. They say everything is bigger in Texas; unfortunately, so are your prisons and jails. I don’t believe that is because there are more criminals in Texas. Texans deserve a better justice system.”

During the press conference, John Legend, advocates, and legislators discussed proposals pending before the Legislature that could reduce the use of incarceration in Texas:

- Texas could stop making it a crime for students to skip school, run away, or break curfew. Texas could also raise the age of juvenile court jurisdiction from 17 to 18, and stop incarcerating children under the age of 13 in facilities across Texas.
- Texas could change and update the penalties for some crimes – crimes such as driving with an invalid license, low-level marijuana possession, prostitution, and property crimes – as well as reclassify certain misdemeanor and felony offenses.

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- Texas lawmakers can improve facility safety by passing bills that would allow Ombudsman programs to visit youth in county facilities and establish an independent Ombudsman program for the adult system. Lawmakers can also improve treatment for people who are incarcerated by providing more reentry resources and giving people in state jails credit for participating in programming.

“During these final months of the legislative session, it especially incumbent upon state leadership to support smart justice policies,” said TCJC’s Executive Director, Dr. Ana Yáñez-Correa. “Texas legislators must end the over-criminalization of youth, safely reduce incarceration by incentivizing probation and strengthening treatment programs, and improve transparency and accountability throughout our corrections systems.”

Speaking of TCJC, John Legend noted, “FREE AMERICA is proud to partner with the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition because they have been at the forefront in this fight for justice.” For over a decade, the organization has driven support for over 150 policies that have chipped away at Texas’ broken justice system. TCJC and a growing group of allies continue to fight for policies that move the needle on reform – providing people help without needlessly or continuously entangling them in the justice system – in efforts to create thriving, healthy Texas communities without violence.

[Press Release Enclosures & Additional Support](#)

- Enclosed: TCJC’s priority legislative agenda
- Organizations showing support at the press conference included the ACLU of Texas, AFSCME Local 3807, Christian Life Commission, Goodwill Industries of Central Texas, Grassroots Leadership, Texas Association of Business, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition Board and supporters, Texas Fair Defense Project, Texas NAACP, and Texas Public Policy Foundation and Right-On-Crime.

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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.