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**On Opening Day of 87th Texas Legislative Session, Texas Criminal Justice Coalition
Urges Lawmakers to Prioritize Justice Reform**

Justice Advocacy Group Reiterates Importance of Spending Values, Cutting Losses in 2021

AUSTIN, TX — Kicking off the opening day of Texas’s 87th Legislative Session, where state leadership will be contending with a billion-dollar budget shortfall, the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) repeated their previous call for lawmakers to prioritize communities over corrections in an unprecedented year. **TCJC Executive Director Leah Pinney** released the following statement.

“In a session like never before, shrinking our bloated, harmful, ineffective justice system has never been more important. Every taxpayer dollar that goes into growing this broken system could be stretched further by investing in our communities instead. Our leaders must recognize this opportunity to reap significant savings during a budget deficit while protecting lives in a global pandemic.”

In October, TCJC released an [open letter](#) urging Texas leaders, legislators, and staff to prioritize justice reform during the state’s upcoming legislative session.

“Taxpayer spending on criminal justice has escalated as social institutions and community-needed resources have been dramatically reduced by both state and local governments,” the letter reads, referencing Texas’ now \$4 billion annual corrections budget. “Alarming, policing, arrests, and criminal punishments have become the default response to people with mental illness and substance use disorder, people experiencing poverty and homelessness, students struggling with social-emotional issues, and people facing a host of other hurdles.”

“Instead of addressing the underlying causes of criminality that have allowed mass incarceration to run rampant, cities and counties continue to rely heavily on the reactive—and costly—responses of policing and incarceration, cutting short people’s opportunities to find stability, support their families, continue their education, or join the workforce,” the letter continued.

After conducting extensive research on how the Texas justice system could be transformed to save money and lives at every point of contact, TCJC compiled a communities-first portfolio called “[Spend Your Values, Cut Your Losses](#).” The recommended solutions represent a top-down realignment in how taxpayer money is spent.

The *Spend Your Values* portfolio includes seven Smart and Safe Justice System Solutions, which are as follows:

1. [Lower penalties](#) for minor drug possession to free up funding for strategies that get Texans back on their feet.
2. Require probation practices to [focus on rehabilitation](#) and more prudently use taxpayer dollars.

3. [Reform our parole system](#) by providing rehabilitation before parole review, saving hundreds of millions of dollars annually.
4. [Support reentry strategies](#) that prioritize housing and employment stability and wise spending.
5. [Make smarter use of treatment](#) programs to ensure participant success.
6. [Ensure success for Texas kids](#) through cost-effective strategies that meet their needs.
7. [Close more prisons](#) and reallocate dollars to community needs and crime prevention.

The *Spend Your Values* guide is available as both a [PDF portfolio](#) and a one-stop-shop [set of webpages](#), which will be updated as relevant bills are filed.

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The Texas Criminal Justice Coalition (TCJC) advances solutions and builds coalitions to end mass incarceration and build safer Texas communities. To learn more about TCJC, visit www.TexasCJC.org.