

Drug War Détente? A Review of State-level Drug Law Reform, 2009-2013

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REPORT SUMMARY

For More Information

The Vera Institute of Justice is an independent nonprofit organization that combines research, demonstration projects, and technical assistance to help leaders in government and civil society improve the systems people rely on for justice and safety. For more information about Vera's Center on Sentencing and Corrections, please contact Peggy McGarry at (212) 376-3131 or pmcgarry@vera.org.

This year marks the 20th anniversary of the 1994 Crime Bill. To examine the legacy of this landmark legislation, the lessons learned, and the path ahead, Vera is convening a series of conversations with experts and policymakers in Washington, DC, as well as issuing a series of reports on sentencing trends—where the states stand on mandatory minimums and other sentencing practices and the resulting collateral consequences.

This report is the second in that series. Look for updates on our website at <http://www.vera.org/federal-crime-bill-20>.

Ever since 1971, when President Richard Nixon declared an “all-out offensive” against drug abuse—“America’s public enemy number one”—drug interdiction has been a mainstay of crime control policy in the United States. Yet, despite more than four decades of concerted law enforcement effort, meaningful reductions in drug supply and use have remained elusive, and the fiscal and human costs of the “War on Drugs” have been immense.

In recent years, policymakers have begun to take note of research demonstrating that, for many offenders, community-based sanctions, including substance abuse treatment, are more effective at reducing recidivism than incarceration. Public attitudes, too, have shifted and now overwhelmingly support treatment and prevention efforts over punitive sanctioning policies.

From 2009 through 2013, more than 30 states passed nearly 50 bills reforming how their criminal justice systems define and enforce drug offenses. In reviewing this legislative activity, Vera’s Center on Sentencing and Corrections found that most efforts have focused on making change in one or a combination of the following five areas:

- > Repealing or limiting mandatory penalties
- > Modifying drug sentencing schemes
- > Expanding access to early release mechanisms
- > Expanding or strengthening community-based sanctions
- > Ameliorating collateral consequences

READ THE COMPLETE REPORT:

www.vera.org/state-drug-law-reform-review-2009-2013

MAPPING DRUG LAW REFORM

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