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SANNICANDRO, ELDRIDGE HIGHLIGHT PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM IN RECENT POLL

(April 11 — State House) Co-chairs of the Harm Reduction and Drug Law Reform Caucus, Representative Tom Sannicandro (D-Ashland) and Senator Jamie Eldridge (D-Acton), announced Friday that Massachusetts residents are ready for criminal justice reform, based on data presented by MassINC Polling Group at Tuesday's monthly caucus meeting.

"Our current system is broken, it costs too much, and it doesn't get results," said Representative Sannicandro. "Massachusetts residents prefer policies that keep families together and reduce harm to their communities."

"It's clear from the MassINC polling, the large membership of the Drug Law Reform Caucus, and the countless stories of people across Massachusetts struggling with substance abuse that our government's current approach to addiction and incarceration is broken, and that we need to make significant reforms," said Senator Jamie Eldridge.

At Tuesday's caucus meeting, the independent non-partisan organization MassINC Polling presented their recent public opinion polling data on criminal justice in Massachusetts.

The poll found that nearly two thirds of Massachusetts residents want the criminal justice system to focus on prevention and rehabilitation for non-violent criminals and drug users and that the majority of respondents believe the current system is too focused on punishment. Two thirds of residents want reforms that result in fewer people being sent to prison.

The poll also found that by more than a two-to-one margin, public opinion sees drug use as a public health issue rather than a crime. And more than four in five residents believe that treatment for drug users is more effective than incarceration for reducing crime.

When respondents learned that other states have lowered their crime rates with similar reform policies, support rose to 91 percent.

MassINC pollsters at the briefing described these findings as largely consistent with national and state polls by the Pew Center for the States.

Often seen as a third rail issue during election years when elected officials can feel pressured to be tough on crime, the data showed public opinion follows similar trends for registered and non-registered voters alike.

“What we see in public opinion is that drug policy reform is no longer seen as solely a social justice issue,” said Representative Sannicandro. “It’s also a matter of fiscal responsibility, public safety, and common sense for the majority of Massachusetts residents.”

The Harm Reduction and Drug Law Reform Caucus was formed last year to bring together legislators from both parties to create a forum for addressing the root causes of mass incarceration and currently has over 50 members from the House and Senate.

The Caucus recently endorsed two budget recommendations for the 2015 Fiscal Year Budget to increase funding for the Bureau of Substance Abuse Services and for specialty court programs that divert non-violent drug offenders and those with mental health problems from incarceration.

The MassINC Polling report Ready for Reform? Public Opinion on Criminal Justice Reform in Massachusetts can be found at: www.massincpolling.com/?p=1334

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