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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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The UConn Poll: Prison Crowding

PUBLIC ADVICE ON PRISON OVERCROWDING:

- RELAX MANDATORY MINIMUM SENTENCES AND PROVIDE ALTERNATIVES TO INCARCERATION FOR MENTALLY ILL AND DRUG OFFENDERS
- DON'T SPEND MORE MONEY ON SENDING PRISONERS OUT-OF-STATE AND BUILDING NEW PRISONS TO RELIEVE PRISON OVERCROWDING

This UConn Poll is based on a sample of 601 Connecticut residents. Sampling error is +/- 4%. The telephone survey was conducted from February 26 through March 1, 2004.

The latest *UConn Poll* shows that a majority of Connecticut residents (51%) oppose an increase in spending to send inmates to out-of-state prisons in order to reduce prison overcrowding. In addition, residents also oppose (53%) building more prisons in Connecticut, and an even larger amount (60%) oppose building prisons in their towns.

At the same time, residents show strong support for alternatives to incarceration for the mentally ill, substance abusers and parolees, as a way to deal with the prison overcrowding problem.

Sending mentally ill offenders to mental health facilities received the most support (89%), followed closely by support for sending drug abusers to substance abuse treatment instead of prison (84%). Providing more services for parolees also garnered substantial support (76%).

“When presented with prison overcrowding as an issue, Connecticut residents feel strongly that the best place for some offenders is not in prison” commented Chris Barnes, Associate Director of the Center for Survey Research and Analysis.

Prisons

A majority (51%) of Connecticut residents oppose increasing spending to send inmates to out-of-state prisons in order to reduce prison overcrowding, while 45% support increasing spending to send them out-of-state.

Over half (53%) of Connecticut residents oppose an increase in state spending to build more prisons *in Connecticut* in order to reduce prison overcrowding, while 43% support it.

State residents are particularly opposed to the construction of a new prison if it is in their community: 60% would oppose a new prison in their community, while 38% say they would support this action.

Overall, Connecticut residents are concerned about prison crowding in Connecticut: 30% believe it is a very serious issue, 35% believe that it is somewhat serious; 11% believe it is not too serious; and 5% believe it is not at all serious.

Alternatives to Incarceration to Relieve Prison Crowding

Close to nine out of ten residents (89%) support sending non-violent mentally ill offenders to mental health facilities instead of prison in order to reduce prison overcrowding, compared to 9% who oppose such measures.

Another 84% support replacing prison sentences with mandatory drug treatment and probation for people convicted of non-violent illegal drug use (14% oppose replacing sentences for drug offenders).

Respondents also support relaxing mandatory minimum sentences for first-time offenders in order to reduce prison overcrowding, but not as strongly: 61% support relaxing the sentences, while 33% oppose relaxing sentences.

Other proposals to ease the prison overcrowding problem are not as popular with Connecticut residents: only 45% support giving judges more flexibility in imposing reduced sentences in order to reduce prison overcrowding while 51% oppose giving them that flexibility.

“Although Connecticut residents are open to alternatives to incarceration, they don’t seem to support giving judges more flexibility in imposing sentences,” commented Barnes.

Public Perception of Goals of Sentencing

When asked what should be the most important goal once people convicted of crimes are in prison, 41% of Connecticut residents say that the goal should be to “rehabilitate them so they might not commit crimes in the future.”

Almost one fourth (24%) say that the most important goal should be to “punish them for the crime they committed;” another 22% say to “protect society by removing the criminal from it,” and 9% say to “deter others from committing crimes.”

Treatment of Convicted Criminals

Connecticut residents were also asked about the system’s treatment of convicted criminals.

Over half (52%) of residents think that those convicted of crimes have too many rights, 28% think that they have the correct amount of rights, and 8% think they have too few rights. Thirteen percent of respondents say that they do not know enough about the issue.

A lower percentage of residents (32%) think that inmates in Connecticut prisons are generally treated better than they should be. Another 5% think that they are treated worse than they should be and 46% think they are treated about the right amount. Eighteen percent don't have an opinion on the issue.

Residents have more favorable opinions about the lengths of prison sentences in Connecticut. Only 7% think that criminals in Connecticut receive prison sentences that are too long; 36% think they are too short; and 35% think they are about right. Twenty-two percent say they do not know enough about the issue.

Residents were asked whether they agree with the statement "In most cases, efforts to rehabilitate non-violent prisoners are a waste of time and money." Over two-thirds of respondents (69%) disagree while 27% agree with the statement.

SURVEY QUESTIONS:

Q1. Thinking about those who are CONVICTED of crimes in Connecticut, do you think that they have too many rights, too few rights, or about the correct amount of rights?

<i>State Residents:</i>	Too Many %	Too Few %	Correct Amount %	DK/REF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	52	8	28	13

Q2. Do you currently think that criminals in Connecticut receive prison sentences that are too long, about right, or too short?

<i>State Residents:</i>	Too Long %	About Right %	Too Short %	DK/REF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	7	35	36	22

Q3. Do you think that inmates in Connecticut prisons are generally treated better than they should be, worse than they should be, or are they treated about right?

<i>State Residents:</i>	Better %	Worse %	About Right %	DK/REF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	32	5	46	18

Q4. Overall, how would you describe the problem of prison crowding in Connecticut--is it very serious, somewhat serious, not too serious, or not serious at all?

<i>State Residents:</i>	Very Serious %	Somewhat Serious %	Not Too Serious %	Not at All Serious %	DK/REF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	30	35	11	5	19

Q5. Once people convicted of crimes are in prison, which of the following do you think should be the most important goal? Should it be to (READ CHOICES 1-4)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Punish them for the crime they committed %	Rehabilitate them so they might not commit crimes in the future %	Deter others from committing crimes %	Protect society by removing the criminal from it %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	24	41	9	22	4

IQ6. There is growing concern about prison crowding problems in Connecticut and the legislature is trying to figure out how to deal with this issue.

Q6. Would you support or oppose increasing state spending to build more prisons in Connecticut in order to reduce prison crowding? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	16	27	19	34	5

Q7. Would you support or oppose increasing state spending to send inmates to out-of-state prisons in order to reduce prison crowding? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	22	23	16	35	4

Q7a. If, in order to reduce prison crowding in Connecticut, state officials decided to build a new prison, would you support or oppose the construction of a new prison in your community? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	15	23	13	47	3

Q8. Would you support or oppose relaxing mandatory minimum sentences for first-time offenders in order to reduce prison crowding? (Probe: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	30	31	12	21	6

Q9. Would you support or oppose increasing the number of programs that provide education, employment, counseling and transitional services to parolees in order to reduce prison crowding? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	44	32	10	12	2

Q10. Would you support or oppose giving judges more flexibility in imposing reduced sentences in order to reduce prison crowding? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT).

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	20	25	15	36	4

Q11. Would you support or oppose sending non-violent, mentally ill offenders to mental health facilities instead of prison in order to reduce prison crowding? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	64	25	3	6	2

Q12. Would you support or oppose replacing prison sentences with mandatory drug treatment and probation for people convicted of non-violent illegal drug use in order to reduce prison crowding? (PROBE: SUPPORT/OPPOSE STRONGLY/SOMEWHAT)

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Support %	Somewhat Support %	Somewhat Oppose %	Strongly Oppose %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	52	32	5	9	3

Q13. Please tell me if you agree with the following statement: In most cases, efforts to rehabilitate non-violent prisoners are a waste of time and money. (If Agree/Disagree, ask:) Is that strongly agree/disagree or somewhat agree/disagree?

<i>State Residents:</i>	Strongly Agree %	Somewhat Agree %	Somewhat Disagree %	Strongly Disagree %	DK/RF %
Feb 26-Mar 1, 2004	14	13	29	40	4