

Hello, my name is Megan Griffin and I'm a member of Temple Beth Shalom in Santa Ana. Thank you very much for taking the time to meet with me today. I am in Washington with hundreds of other teens from the Reform Jewish movement to participate in the L'taken seminar, an intensive four-day program, focused on Jewish values and social justice, sponsored by the Religious Action Center, which is the legislative office of the Union for Reform Judaism whose 900 congregations across North America encompass 1.5 million Reform Jews, and the Central Conference of American Rabbis, whose membership includes over 2000 Reform Rabbis. I would like to discuss with you the issue concerning the criminal justice system.

In the United States today, our prisons hold the highest incarcerated population both in total number and in proportion around the world.

Criminal Justice reform is an issue that drastically needs to be changed.

Amounting to the number of individuals that are placed in jail, half of them engage in illegal drug use and sale. As a means of combatting this problem, I believe that a solution includes addressing these issues not as criminal behavior, but as a public health concern. Presently, those taken into custody for drug related crimes are given sentences, complete them, and then go right back to being on the streets. The habits these individuals had before

prison return, and they now become entangled in a cycle that never stops repeating itself. Instead, by providing the necessary rehabilitation, substance abusers can find the assistance they need to help them recover from their addiction problem.

In addition to the health issues, racial discrimination is a recurring problem in the criminal justice system. One in every three black men born today can expect to serve some time in prison, as compared to one in every 17 white men. This statistic shows that African Americans are more likely to be arrested for drug related offenses than their white counterparts, yet both groups are equally at fault for selling and using illegal substances. What we need is a criminal justice system that remains unbiased.

The Torah explains tzedek, tzedek, tridof, justice justice shall pursue. This applies as treating others with righteous acts. Along the lines of this is providing people with necessary procedures to better themselves. In this case it includes giving access to rehabilitation centers for those with substance addictions. Additionally, as stated in the Union for Reform Judaism resolution on crime from 1968, rather than inflicting harsh punishment and curtailing civil liberties, we should treat the causes of crime and disorder and

reject proposals which ignore those causes by emphasis upon vengeful or unconstitutional means. Aligning with this is the reiteration of treating substance abuse as a disease and finding a cure for it. Substance abuse is a disease just as cancer is a disease. My grandmother, who has been in remission for over a year now, knows firsthand how to successfully overcome diseases. In order for her to regain her health, she went through extensive chemotherapy and frequent doctor appointments. Only through proper care was she able to successfully battle her disease. Worldwide, people handle cancer as a life or death issue and prioritize its treatment. So why can't we do the same for those who have substance addictions? After all, it comes down to the same central idea, maintain and treat a person with a disease. Similar to this idea, we need to find a way to treat the disease of substance abuse and just putting someone in jail is not a cure.

Through the Sentencing Reform Act of 2015 (H.R. 3713), it addresses the change needed to take action toward the criminal justice system. One provision of this would reduce the mandatory minimum sentences for nonviolent drug offenses. During the era of tough on crimes, 70's and 80's, there needed to be an established minimum sentence for drug abusers to abide by when being convicted. However, we have moved past that era and

need to alter the decisions made in those previous years. Through this legislation, it would apply that change and begin improving the criminal justice system. This alteration would involve focusing on a more rehabilitative treatment instead of sending these individuals to prison and not providing them the necessary resources to treat their addiction.

Your support for the Sentencing Reform Act secures the first step for starting the process to supply these convicted individuals with the correct treatment. By acknowledging that action needs to be taken to resolve the conflicts involved in the criminal justice system, reform towards creating a solution can soon be found in the near future. I want to thank you again for your time. It was a pleasure meeting you and discussing this issue that I find important. Thank you and have a great day.