

FCLCA co-sponsors Senate Bill 180, the Repeal Ineffective Sentencing Enhancements (RISE) Act

The Friends Committee on Legislation of California (FCLCA), a Quaker-based lobby that advocates for state laws that are compassionate and respectful of the inherent worth of every person, is pleased to co-sponsor SB 180, the RISE Act. This important legislation repeals the three-year sentence enhancement for prior drug convictions excepting convictions involving a minor.

Senate Bill 180 will help undo the damage of the failed War on Drugs, which resulted in harsher sentences that tear families and communities apart, especially low-income communities of color. While these policies have militarized police departments and led to overcrowded prisons and jails that strain state and local budgets, they have failed to reduce the availability of illicit drugs or kept our communities safe.

California voters have twice repudiated the failed War on Drugs at the ballot. In 2000, the voters passed Proposition 36 to require that people convicted of low-level drug offenses may opt for treatment in lieu of incarceration. Then in 2014, voters passed Proposition 47 to change simple drug possession from a felony to a misdemeanor. The Legislature also passed SB 1010 to reduce the disparities between crack cocaine and powdered cocaine, which resulted in African-Americans serving longer sentences than white cocaine users for the same crime.

The RISE Act will further reduce racial disparities in our criminal justice system, as people of color are much more likely to be arrested and prosecuted for drug law violations even though rates of drug use and drug sales are comparable across racial lines. The uneven application of the law coupled with the lack of investment in marginalized communities undermines respect for our criminal justice system and our civic institutions. Senate Bill 180 will reduce the need for costly jail beds and free up funds for programs that help people overcome drug addiction and make our communities safer.

Rather than reflexively relying on destructive policies, it is time to utilize constructive approaches. Strong communities are built from the ground up, with good schools, after school programs, affordable housing, community-based health care and mental health services, vocational training, and child care programs, all of which help build robust economies.

For these reasons, FCLCA is proud to co-sponsor Senate Bill 180.

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