



The Tennessee General Assembly
425 5th Avenue North
Nashville, TN 37243

March 21, 2022

Honorable Member of the General Assembly:

When punishments fit the crime, we advance fairness, honor justice, and increase public trust in our justice system essential for keeping communities safe. As the nation's largest Christian non-profit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, Prison Fellowship urges you to pass SB1528.

Prison Fellowship witnesses firsthand the costs of addiction to families and communities. Drug distribution crimes demand accountability, including through incarceration where appropriate. However, penalties for drug crime are often disproportional, fail to meaningfully curb substance abuse, and direct limited state dollars away from key public safety strategies like more effective police forces and violence reduction strategies.¹

Through passage of SB2734, Tennessee lawmakers modernized the state code's Drug Free School Zone penalty structure, which triggered mandatory, enhanced sentences for drug distribution within 1,000 feet of a school—even when this conduct did not pose a danger to youth.² By reducing the zone scope from 1,000 to 500 feet, SB2734 created a geographic boundary better aligned with the legitimate purposes of the sentencing enhancement. Additionally, the law granted courts greater ability to punish in alignment with the specific defendant involved, harm done, and exposure of vulnerable populations to drug activity. SB2734 was not applied retroactively, meaning that individuals currently in Tennessee prisons are serving prison terms lawmakers now recognize as inappropriate and unfair.

Access to a just penalty should not depend on the date when a person is sentenced. By passing SB1528, the Tennessee General Assembly would ensure that potentially eligible men and women in state prisons can have their sentences reviewed under the reformed sentencing structure previously enacted by a decisive margin in SB2734. It allows for careful, individual court review of incarcerated individuals sentenced under prior law—with appropriate consideration of public safety, criminal history, and the defendant's conduct during incarceration.

Proportional, consistent punishments honor human dignity and advance justice. We implore you and your colleagues to swiftly pass SB1528.

Sincerely,

Heather Rice-Minus
Senior Vice President of Advocacy and Church Mobilization
Prison Fellowship

¹ Pew, *More Imprisonment Does Not Reduce State Drug Problems*, The Pew Charitable Trusts (March 2018), <https://www.pewtrusts.org/en/research-and-analysis/issue-briefs/2018/03/more-imprisonment-does-not-reduce-state-drug-problems>.

² Julie Warren, *A Conservative Case for Drug-Free School Zone Reform*, Right on Crime (May 2020), <https://rightoncrime.com/a-conservative-case-for-drug-free-school-zone-reform/>.