



Criminal Justice Reform Questionnaire: *Candidate Responses*  
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**Joel Griffin** Candidate State Senate District 27

**1. Describe what you consider to be the most pressing needs for reform in the Commonwealth's criminal justice system. Please be as specific as you can.**

First, the standard for expanding voting access in Virginia is unacceptable. Each application to restore voting rights is reviewed by a committee without a clear and consistent rubric. This process should be repealed, so that individuals who have served their time have their rights reinstated.

Second, we should fund and promote drug treatment courts, mental health courts, and probationary programs as alternatives to incarceration for some nonviolent offenders. By focusing on rehabilitation, providing new opportunities for personal growth, and reducing the root causes of crime, we can thereby reduce recidivism and improve public safety.

Third, we need to make the re-entry process easier for formerly incarcerated individuals. We can do this in part by investing in education and job training programs to help individuals successfully transition back into their communities. Employment is a step towards reducing recidivism.

Finally, we must support victims of crime and ensure that they are treated with compassion and respect. This support should not be solely focused on the incident but in the weeks/months following the crime. This could include providing therapists/counselors, recommended

medical services/appointments resulting from the crime, advisors in the court hearings and

incarceration process, etc. This can be achieved through additional funding for victim services programs.

**2. What are your thoughts on solitary confinement, the good time law, and creating a VADOC ombudsman?**

Solitary confinement should only be used as a last resort for the safety of inmates and staff, as it can have serious negative effects on an individual's mental and emotional health. While we work to reduce the use of solitary confinement we must also provide VADOC staff with the tools, training, and resources they need to maintain order while ensuring everyone's safety.

Regarding the good time law, I believe it is important to incentivize good behavior and participation in rehabilitative programs. However, participation doesn't necessarily equate to rehabilitation. We must define criteria for success, measure outcomes, and ensure that the law is being implemented fairly and consistently. The objective must reduce unintended consequences that threaten public safety while offering opportunities

to incarcerated individuals to change their outcomes. Inmates must not be released before they are fully rehabilitated or if they continue to pose a threat to the community.

I support the creation of a VADOC ombudsman position to improve transparency and accountability within the VADOC. This position should identify systemic issues that need to be updated, revised, retrained, and in some cases corrected. Simultaneously it could provide an independent resource to address inmate grievances appropriately that would otherwise lead to litigious outcomes. Positive outcomes from this role could be the reduction of frivolous lawsuits and decreased use of taxpayer dollars spent on redundant programs within VADOC. This proposal has bipartisan support and passed the Senate unanimously.

**3. Returning citizens are sent back to prison for technical violations more than for any new crimes. What are your reactions or recommendations?**

I'm concerned about the high number of non-violent citizens who are sent back to prison for technical violations. Repeated reincarceration due to non-violent technicalities rather than additional crimes committed only increases the likelihood that the individual becomes a permanent resident in prison. We should instead focus on providing returning citizens with the support they need to successfully reintegrate into society. The criminal justice system should include access to education and job training, as well as mental health and addiction treatment for those who need it. The investment in these programs reduces the cost to taxpayers who are otherwise paying for individuals serving lengthy sentences in the VADOC system.