



Criminal Justice Reform Questionnaire: *Candidate Responses*  
April 2023

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**Joshua Cole (D)** Candidate for House District 65

**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.**

While criminal justice reform is a vast topic, my top three issues are investments in mental health infrastructure, automatic restoration of rights, and restoring funding to regional police academies. Our criminal justice system often is the answer for behavioral health treatment and it shouldn't be. We should have dedicated staff and funding directed toward community-based treatment and programming for those suffering from mental health crises. In 2020, I was pleased to co-patron HB5043 to create the Marcus Alert System, which requires every locality to establish a voluntary database to be made available to the 9-1-1 alert system and to provide mental health information and emergency contact information for response to an emergency or crisis. Rebuilding our communities means providing people with a second chance, which is why I support rehabilitation. I also believe in community policing, building trust between citizens and the police, and reinvesting funds and resources into our community will help keep everyone safe. As a Delegate, I voted to increase police pay and funds for police academies while also advocating for higher training standards, so that our officers are better trained to protect everyone in our community.

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

For solitary confinement, I was the chief co-patron for SB1301 in 2021 which prohibited solitary confinement practices in the Commonwealth. Solitary confinement is cruel and should not be used in our jails and prisons. I support reforming good time credit and as such, I voted in favor of the 2020 good time credit bill. I support creating a VADOC ombudsman. Increasing oversight and accountability in the criminal justice system will not only improve prison conditions but also help avoid future costs and bring transparency to taxpayer dollars.

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

It is disheartening to see recidivism rates for returning citizens for technical violations more than for any new crimes. When the criminal justice system focuses on technical issues more than anything new, it takes away people's ability to grow past prior mistakes and be a contributing member of society.

In 2021, I was in office when probation reform was passed and it has improved the system by quite a bit. I'm happy to see it being implemented properly and we should continue to make similar changes.