



Criminal Justice Reform Questionnaire: *Candidate Responses*
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SARA RATCLIFFE (D) Candidate for House District 62

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, we need to push for automatic restoration of rights. The current governor has moved us backwards by requiring an application for released persons to have their rights restored. That should change. A critical need is more focus on proactive systems change to address mental health needs in the community. We also need to build communication and relationships between law enforcement and our broader community, by building partnerships with other public professionals, like social service agencies and mental health practitioners, to fulfill unmet needs before a crisis is reached. We must work with a larger coalition to develop community solutions to those situations where police may not be the best equipped to respond. We need additional training and screening to help law enforcement with the tools to de-escalate and additional help to implement solutions after the crisis has subsided. There also is the need to make sure anyone in prison or with past offenses for marijuana-related crimes that have now been decriminalized should have their records expunged. Finally, those restored or released need to have access to assistance and support to gain employment, secure safe housing, and address their other needs to re enter our communities with success.

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

Solitary confinement should not be used in prison.

There should be a VADOC ombudsman to handle those issues regarding the dignity of inmates and having a formal avenue for prison-related complaints. It would help streamline the process and reduce issues associated with prisoner and guard incidents.

Since parole does not exist in Virginia for most inmates, the idea of sentence reduction for those who demonstrate positive growth while serving in prison, was a constructive step toward recognizing that people can change. Sentencing reforms could go a long way toward encouraging that growth and change among non-violent offenders, will reduce the burden on our penal system, and allow more families to have hope of being reunited with their loved ones.

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

Recidivism rates need to be reduced and returning citizens to prison for smaller technical violations is directly in conflict with a goal of successful integration back into their communities. Working with formerly incarcerated people to find the services, help, and systems they need, including trusted advocates, can better help us ensure they are able to successfully reintegrate and get them back with their family and friends. A system that is designed for them to fail also breeds distrust in the criminal justice system.