



REPUBLICAN SUPPORT FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM IN THE SOUTH (2000-2025)

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The Princeton Policy Advocacy Clinic, at the request of the American Civil Liberties Union of Louisiana, reviewed the last 25 years of Republican-led criminal justice reform legislative efforts in the following **14 southern states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia.**

The Policy Advocacy Clinic research team found the following:

Since 2000, Republicans have introduced 1,330 criminal justice reform bills in 14 southern states. 472 of these bills—35.5 percent—became law. Republicans sponsored these bills 3,757 times.

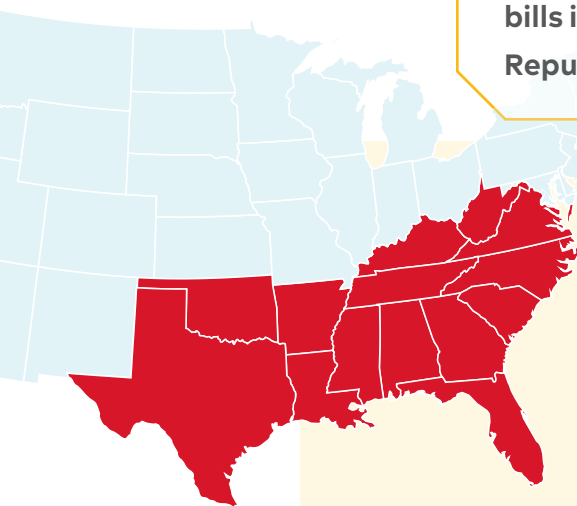
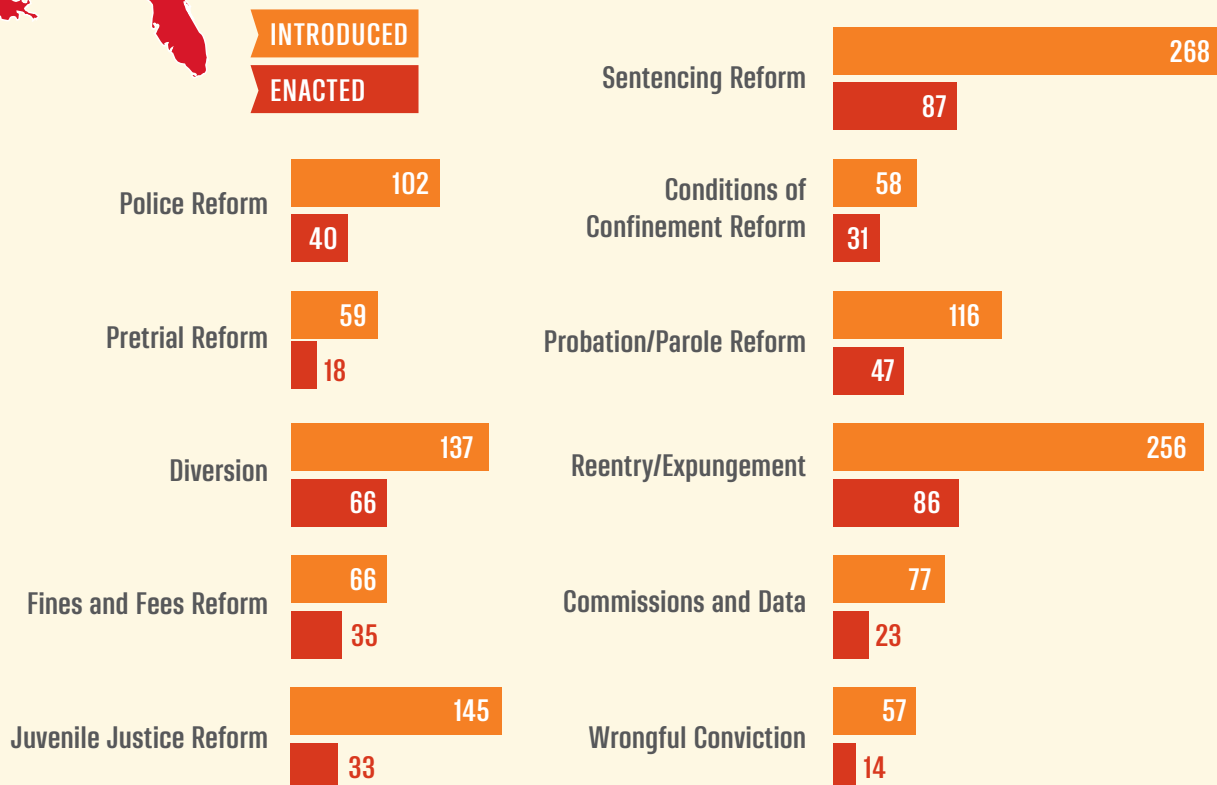


FIGURE 1

Breaking it Down: Republican-Sponsored Criminal Justice Reform by Category

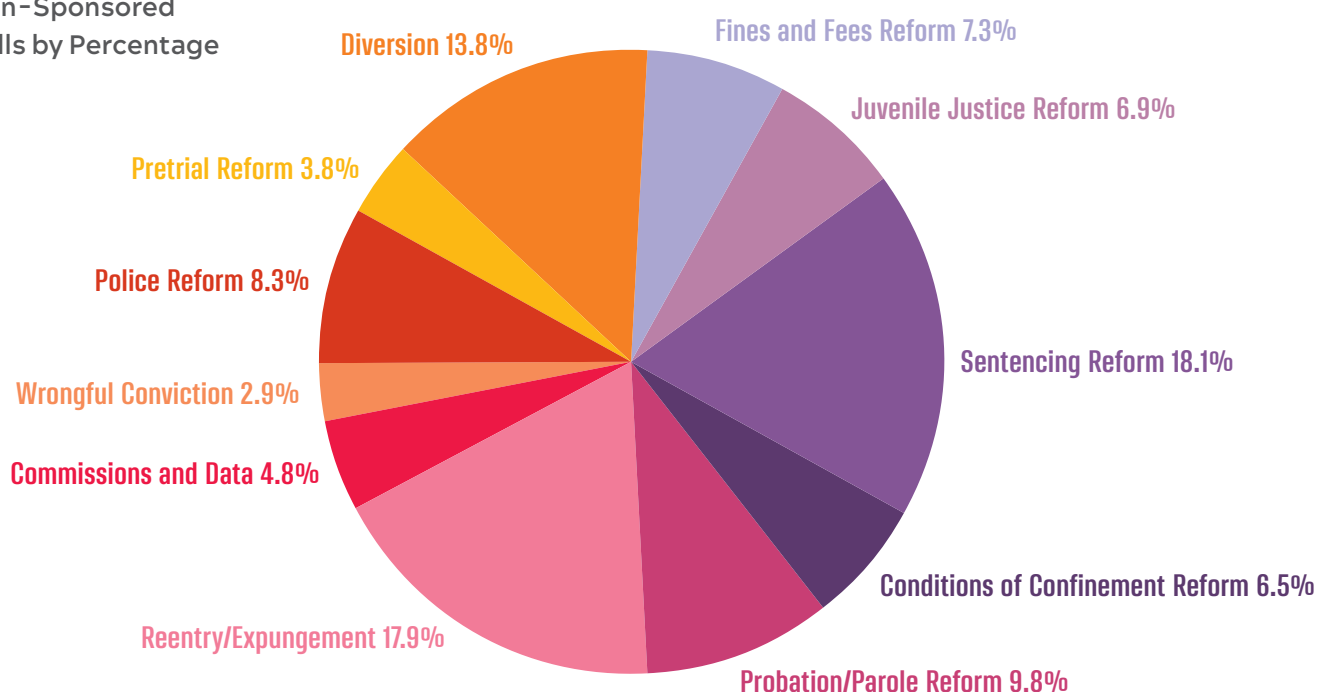


Within these 14 southern states, Republican-led efforts have resulted in:

- **192 successful reform laws addressing pre-confinement practices**, ranging from police accountability and expansion of diversion programs to eliminating court fines and fees and keeping young people out of the prison system. Republicans have sponsored these pre-confinement reform bills 1,469 times.
- **118 successful reform laws addressing length and conditions of confinement**, ranging from sentence reductions to improving conditions for pregnant incarcerated women. Republicans have sponsored these confinement reform bills 1,013 times.
- **171 successful reform laws addressing post-confinement conditions**, ranging from probation and parole reforms and aiding people leaving prison to expanding opportunities for criminal record expungement. Republicans have sponsored these post-confinement reform bills 1,309 times.

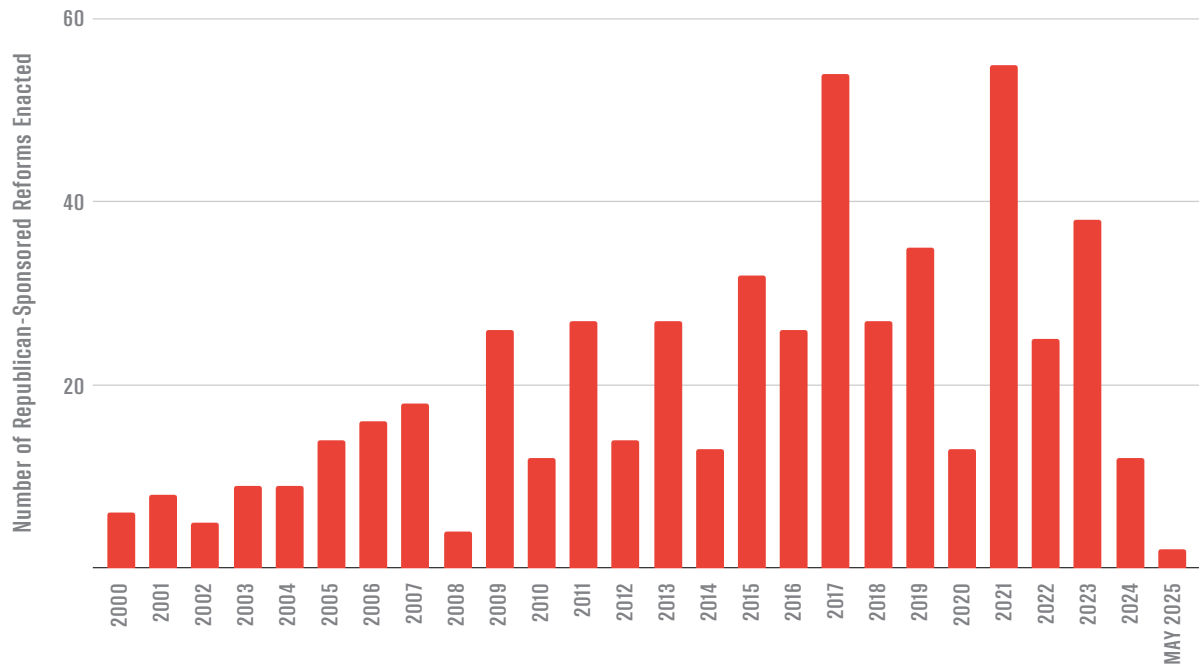
FIGURE 2

Categories of Enacted
Republican-Sponsored
Reform Bills by Percentage



Conservatives have led meaningful criminal justice reform efforts in every state in the South during the legislative sessions of every year between 2000 and 2025. Reasons they provided include believing that such reforms can improve safety, reduce recidivism, strengthen communities, and save taxpayer dollars.

Republican support for these reforms was consistent with positions taken by top national and state Republicans.

FIGURE 3**Republican-Sponsored Reform Bills
Enacted by Year (2000–May 2025)****On December 21, 2018 President Donald Trump remarked on the First Step Act:**

“Today, I’m thrilled to announce my support for this bipartisan bill that will make our communities safer and give former inmates a second chance life after they have served their time.”¹

Former Texas Governor Rick Perry in 2015:

“A big, expensive prison system — one that offers no hope for second chances and redemption — is not conservative policy. Conservative policy is smart on crime.”²

This is consistent with the view of national conservative organizations, who recently released, along with progressive organizations, the following joint principles on bipartisan criminal justice reform, emphasizing the joint values of safety, fairness, dignity and accountability: www.bipartisancjr.org.

¹ “Remarks by President Trump on H.R. 5682, the FIRST STEP Act,” The White House, last modified November 14, 2018. Accessed April 18, 2025, <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-h-r-5682-first-step-act/>.

² Rick Perry, “Follow the Texas Model,” in *Solutions: American Leaders Speak out on Criminal Justice*, ed. Inimai Chettiar and Michael Waldman (New York, NY: Brennan Center for Justice at New York University School of Law, 2015), 92.