



The 2013 Florida Legislative Session

Earlier this month, the 2013 Florida Legislature convened in regular session to deal with seemingly insurmountable challenges facing the state. Education, healthcare, workforce, and transportation issues will all come before our State's lawmakers during these critical weeks of "session." Of course, my eyes are trained on key legislation being advanced by the [Florida Smart Justice Alliance](#).



Senate Bill 1032 is designed to be common-sense, cost-effective legislation that introduces groundbreaking reforms to Florida's correctional system. The measure will reduce the cost of operating the prison system while enhancing public safety, by reducing the rate of offenders cycling in and out of Florida prisons.

The measure is being sponsored by two of the Legislature's leading figures on criminal justice issues: Rep. Dennis Baxley, chair of the House Judiciary Committee; and Sen. Thad Altman, who is a member of both the Senate Criminal Justice Committee and the Appropriations Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice. The proposals were developed by the Smart

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Justice Alliance over the past several months, including at a [Justice Summit](#) held in December in Orlando.

Key to the reforms will be working with non-violent offenders early in their criminal careers to provide treatment, which can eliminate underlying issues that lead to criminal activity for a large portion of these offenders. The legislation will also help provide these prisoners with the educational/vocational tools to get productive jobs after their release so they can live law-abiding lives, which would enhance public safety and avoid the expense of arresting, prosecuting and incarcerating these same individuals again.

Department of Corrections statistics that show two in five new admissions to the prison system each year are reoffenders, and only 23 percent of the 32,000 inmates released every year receive any kind of treatment. This perpetuates the cycle of inmates being released without treatment and, as a result, returning to criminal activity - and then returning to prison.

As the CEO of Bridges of America, I am firmly convinced that Florida can take a better approach to dealing with non-violent offenders. We need to do our best to move them away from a life of crime and onto the path of productive, law-abiding lives. The ideas contained in this legislation will make a meaningful difference in the lives of offenders, and in the lives of Floridians who might otherwise become their future crime victims.

I ask you all to keep an eye on this legislation and to lend your support if you have an opportunity. I will keep you posted, as well, and should I need your assistance, please know that I will call upon you. This kind of reform and the resulting shift in corrections philosophy will ultimately make Florida a safer place to live.

Sincerely,



President and CEO

www.bridgesofamerica.com

Bridges of America is a nonprofit organization founded in 1972 with the mission of changing criminal behavior through a practical, comprehensive approach that includes intensive substance-abuse counseling, parenting classes and work-release programs. Bridges' core value is a belief that people can change.

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