

The Post and Courier

Letters to the Editor

Wednesday, January 20, 2010
Charleston, SC

Reform ex-felons

Re your Jan. 10 story "Crime bills may get some traction": "Holistic" criminal justice reform means that all branches involved need to "work smarter," not that the police alone need expanded and possibly unconstitutional powers.

Both Senate Bill 191, which permits warrantless searches and Senate Bill 005, which denies bail, run counter to reform. To protect police officers from allegations of abuse of power, the power to search and arrest should be limited to situations when a judicial officer has authorized a warrant.

S005 would require magistrates to deny bail to individuals arrested while released pending trial, a provision that raises constitutional concerns and that could easily be abused. Enhanced training and information sharing should be implemented so that magistrates can make the best possible judicial decisions about the actual risk to the community that an offender poses.

We support proposals being considered by the Legislature's Sentencing Reform Commission that aim to reduce repeat offenses and contain our burgeoning prison population in order to reserve beds for the most violent offenders.

We need to pass legislation that diverts non-violent offenders to community-based and treatment programs and supports them with enhanced supervision by professional probation and parole officers. Returning offenders need ID cards, job training and treatment for mental illness and substance abuse.

A positive step would be stronger measures to help eligible ex-felons register to vote, a proven means to help them become contributing members of their community. Then we can concentrate law enforcement resources on ensuring that the criminals who truly pose a danger to their fellow citizens remain behind bars.

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