



James E. Shepard, Founder

Department of Criminal Justice

November 6, 2008

President-Elect Barack Obama
713 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. President:

Congratulations on your victory. It was a powerful accomplishment. Much as it is important to have a person of color in the White House, I think it even more important, after the past eight years, to have an intelligent and rational person at the helm. I am deeply pleased to see that come to pass.

I know that there is much to be done (or undone), and that you will have more to do than any human can manage in your first four years in office. Nevertheless, I am writing to you today to ask you to add one more item to your agenda. There is one more war – a forgotten war – which it is time to end.

I was not yet involved in law enforcement in 1971, when Richard Nixon declared the "War on Drugs." Since that time, I have spent 19 years as a criminal investigator, and another 13 years as a graduate student and college professor. I am writing today to tell you that the evidence is in: the War on Drugs is an epic failure. It has become a war on poor people.

There are 2.5 million people in U.S. prison and jails today, most of them there because of drugs. We incarcerate more of our population than any other country on Earth. About 46% of those incarcerated are black males – mainly drug offenders. It is estimated that 75% of prisoners have substance abuse issues, yet few receive treatment. There are more black men in prison today than are in college. One in nine black males between age 20 and 34 is in lockup – for drugs, mostly, and sentencing disparities that de facto favor the wealthy.

What do I propose? Get rid of Federal mandatory minimum sentences, divert drug offenders to treatment, decriminalize possession for personal use, stop withholding student aid to ex-offenders, spend our tax dollars to build schools instead of prisons – and there are many more things that can be done. Look to other nations and see what



works. I am a middling schoolteacher with no particular axe to grind on this topic, except that it does injustice to our people and reflects poorly on our nation. Some reasonably perceive that we are a punishment-thirsty public, trying to marginalize the indigent and imprison the weak. Prison is a poor solution for most social problems. It is time we accepted that this war on drugs, like many wars, cannot be won on the battlefield.

Thank you for taking the time to hear me out. If there is ever anything I can do to serve you or your administration, please do not hesitate to ask. Again, congratulations.

Sincerely,

Tom W. Cadwallader, PhD
Assistant Professor
Room 309, Whiting Criminal Justice Building
North Carolina Central University
1801 Fayetteville Street
Durham, NC 27707

(Voice) 919-530-7652
tcadwallader@ncsu.edu