

# Momentum builds for justice reform

By The Editorial Board

A critical mass appears to be forming to limit America's prison population growth.

That became clear Oct. 22. At the White House, leaders of a [powerful new coalition of police chiefs and prosecutors](#) who support lowering the incarceration rate met with President Barack Obama, [who has taken on that cause](#). On Capitol Hill, a bipartisan bill to reduce sentences for nonviolent drug offenders passed its first major test with approval by the [Senate Judiciary Committee](#).

Both developments are crucial to turn our nation from tough on crime to smart on crime.

The group's founding members include Fresno Police Chief Jerry Dyer, Los Angeles Police Chief Charlie Beck, San Diego County District Attorney Bonnie Dumanis, San Diego Police Chief Shelley Zimmerman, and San Francisco D.A. George Gascón and Police Chief Greg Suhr.

It should reassure Americans that 130 law enforcement leaders are joining advocacy groups to say that merely locking more people away doesn't improve public safety.

They're calling for alternatives to prison, including mental health and drug treatment; reducing punishment for some crimes; and strengthening ties between police and communities.

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By passing mandatory minimum sentences, Congress is partly responsible for the population in federal and state prisons and local jails soaring from 500,000 in 1980 to 2.2 million now.

Far too many inmates are in for drug offenses, filling cells that should be reserved for violent criminals. The [legislation](#) would start fixing that by shortening mandatory federal sentences for repeat drug offenders and giving federal judges more discretion in drug cases.

Last week, Obama launched a nationwide tour to promote his vision of criminal justice reform. On Oct. 21, he visited a family center in West Virginia to [highlight the heroin epidemic](#). He plans to speak Tuesday to the International Association of Chiefs of Police in Chicago.

He should bring his tour to California, which is focusing on sentencing reform. The tough-on-crime crowd is pushing back. Some presidential leadership is in order.