

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 2, 2017

CONTACT: Amie Young, Communications and Events Manager, 913-490-4105, ayoung@aclukansas.org

ACLU of Kansas Statement on State Prison Crises

OVERLAND PARK, KS --- The following statement can be attributed to Micah Kubic, executive director of the ACLU of Kansas:

"Kansans have been rightly appalled by recent disclosures about conditions and events in our state prisons, especially at El Dorado. The recent string of crises and emergencies in Kansas prisons should be a wake-up call to every resident of this state: our state's criminal justice system is badly broken. Fixing this broken system demands the urgent attention of the state legislature. With our partners in Kansans for Smart Justice, we have proposed a series of reforms that will help fix the system while making our communities safer and stronger.

Correctional staff have very difficult jobs and should be better-compensated than they currently are. Fixing the system should not be *only* about increasing the pay for or number of correctional staff, it should also be about reducing the size of the prison population. Kansas correctional facilities have too many people in them; the state's prison population has more than quadrupled over the last forty years, even though crime is at an all-time low. Thousands of Kansans are serving time in prison as direct result of diagnosed mental health or substance abuse problems. No one – not individuals, families, or our communities – is well-served by these current policies that send individuals with mental health or substance abuse to prison instead of treatment.

If we really want to make our communities safer, the way to do it is through immediate reform of the broken criminal justice system. If we want to make our correctional facilities safer and increase compensation for the hard-working staff there, the way to do it is through immediate reform of the system. For example, if we changed Kansas law to make simple, non-violent drug possession a *misdemeanor* instead of a *felony* – as other states like Alaska and Oklahoma have – we could significantly reduce the prison population and save millions of dollars that could be used for mental and behavioral health treatment as well as improved conditions for correctional staff. Smarter criminal justice policies would ensure our prisons are adequately staffed, that we are not needlessly sending people to prison instead of treatment, and we could save money doing it.

At the ACLU of Kansas, we desperately hope that legislators will respond to the situation in our prisons by considering the sort of serious, systemic reform that is [wildly popular with Kansans](#). That means a response that goes beyond the immediate crisis of staff pay and morale, and

addressing the underlying issue: a broken system that sends too many people to prison, for too long, for too trivial of reasons, that costs taxpayers too much money, and that harms communities in the process."