



**Texas Center for
Justice & Equity**
SOLUTIONS FOR SAFE, HEALTHY,
JUST COMMUNITIES

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**Drug Policy Report Highlights Failure of War on Drugs in Texas, Promise of Harm Reduction and
Public Health-Based Strategies**

New Report from Texas Center for Justice and Equity Released Today

(AUSTIN, TX) – Today, the Texas Center for Justice and Equity (TCJE) released a [new report](#), “Reversing the War on Drugs in Texas: Prioritizing REAL Public Health and Safety for Texans.” The report, released during National Public Health Week, details the failures of the state’s existing drug policy and outlines solutions that decriminalize drug use and prioritize health and dignity for drug users. “Reversing the War on Drugs in Texas” is authored by Policy Analyst Sarah Reyes and Director of Policy and Advocacy Alycia Castillo.

“For too long, drug policy has been based on feelings instead of what matters most: ensuring people are healthy and safe,” said **Sarah Reyes, Policy Analyst and co-author**. “The damaging narrative – that drug use is inherently immoral, and that addiction is a personal failure – has fueled a destructive and racist War on Drugs that continues to tear apart marginalized communities. By reversing criminalization and implementing evidence-based harm reduction strategies, leaders can begin to repair this harm and take steps towards actual community health.”

The report covers myths about drug use, the impact of the War on Drugs in Texas, and the state’s history of insufficient and harmful programming. TCJE has previously released research on these programs, including the [state jail model](#) and state-funded [treatment programs](#), as well as a [data visualization](#) on the consequences of the drug war in Travis County (Austin). “Reversing the War on Drugs in Texas” notes the specific harms of policymakers’ prioritization of criminalization over health, including the drug war’s unique impacts on women, kids, and people with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

The authors recommend that policymakers follow the below recommendations:

- Decriminalize drug use by ending criminal penalties and bookings for most drug offenses.
 - Lawmakers can and should acknowledge that drug use is not inherently wrong, nor is it an inherent risk to public safety.
 - As a first step, lawmakers should enact policies that bring an end to bookings for Class C misdemeanors and citation-eligible offenses, like possession of marijuana and possession of drug paraphernalia.

- Phase out the use of state jails and Substance Abuse Felony Punishment (SAFP) programs.
 - In 2019, Texas’ state jail system housed more than 15,000 people, approximately 43 percent of whom were serving time for possession of less than a gram of a controlled substance. Meanwhile, SAFP programs house about 6,000 people every year.
 - Lawmakers should begin to phase out state jails and SAFP programs and shift the savings towards local, evidence-based treatment programming.

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- Implement harm reduction strategies.
 - Harm reduction practices aim to minimize negative health, social, and legal impacts associated with drug use and drug policies, with the goal of keeping people alive and encouraging positive change in their lives.
 - Harm reduction acknowledges that people will always use drugs and prioritizes their safety and well-being.
 - Lawmakers should allocate funding to harm reduction strategies including, but not limited to:
 - *Syringe programs*, which should be allowed and expanded without the threat of prosecution or arrest for drug paraphernalia;
 - *Drug testing*, along with quality controls for drug manufacturing after legalization;
 - *Evidence-based education around substance use*, to replace Texas’s debunked education model rooted in abstinence and instead give young people the tools to make safe and healthy choices; and
 - *Expanded Good Samaritan Law*, which would provide protection from prosecution for drug offenses to all 9-1-1 callers requesting emergency assistance for a suspected overdose (without the exclusions of HB 1694, a Good Samaritan Law passed in 2021).
- Expand health care access.
 - Lawmakers should expand access to Medicaid, along with expansions to existing treatment services, access to Naloxone, and access to Medicated-Assisted Treatment (MAT).
- Enact and expand justice and community reinvestment initiatives.
 - These initiatives seek to manage and save costs associated with the corrections system by shrinking its impact, then redeploying savings to agencies and community-based programs that serve to prevent and address the root causes of crime.

“Reversing the War on Drugs in Texas: Prioritizing REAL Public Health and Safety for Texans” is available on the [Texas Center for Justice and Equity website](#).

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The Texas Center for Justice and Equity (formerly the Texas Criminal Justice Coalition) advances solutions and builds coalitions to end mass incarceration and foster safer Texas communities.