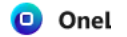




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The Crime Pendulum Swings Again: People Shouldn't be Defensive Over New DC and Maryland Crime Bills

By Robert Weiner (Page 1 of 1 pages) No comments

By Robert Weiner and Ben Kearney

Crime bills work, and new bills in Maryland (now pending in the state house) and the DC area passed on March 11th are urgently needed. The public mood on crime has gone back and forth on the crime issue between emphasizing prevention and enforcement and now, with the renewal of higher violent crime and fentanyl drug usage rates, the pendulum has swung again. During high crime periods, it is essential to ensure our streets are safe. Both the Maryland and DC bills present tough penalties to decrease the amount of active crime.

In 2023, crime in DC increased dramatically. According to an NBCWashington report [nbcwashington], homicides rose to 35% with over 274 people killed, robberies up 67%, and total violent crime was up 39%. The "Secure DC" bill, which became law on March 11th, now makes carjacking cases easier to prosecute, enacts a new felony for "organized retail theft", and allows for drug-free zones to be temporarily created, which have already begun to be implemented around the city. So far this year, homicides are down 32% in DC and violent crime is down 12%.

In Maryland, its juvenile crime bill that passed March 4th in its state Senate now heading to the opposing chamber, is set to handle gaps in the juvenile justice system, including letting judges extend probation periods in three-month intervals so children can complete any intervention or treatment programs required by the system, allow children who have already been found responsible for prior offenses to be detained while awaiting trial, and let cases be moved forward to the State's attorney for review if the department doesn't pursue formal charges. The bill has received some criticism, including from Public Defender Natasha M. Dartigue who said its passage "offers only a charade of safety and is alarmingly reminiscent of the detrimental 'tough on crime' policies of the past." However, the spike in juvenile crime in Maryland needs to be addressed and take action.

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America has seen bills enforce hard sentences for drug possession and crime. The Anti-Drug Abuse Act signed in October 1986 following the shocking death of rising basketball star Len Bias from cocaine overdose, helped make prosecution for possession of specific drugs easier. The Violent Crime Control and Law Enforcement Act of 1994 which President Biden supported when he was Senator and Judiciary Committee Chair, was crucial to remove crack cocaine and lower crime rates further. Since its passage, the bill has been criticized for extending tough-on-crime policies that overly criminalized Black Americans, despite half of the Congressional Black Caucus voting for that bill to be passed at the time and are now running away from it.

As Rep James Clyburn said to the New Yorker in 2020 [newyorker], "Crack cocaine was a scourge in the Black community, they wanted it out of those communities, and they had gotten very tough on drugs. And that's why yours truly, and other members of the Congressional Black Caucus, voted for that 1994 crime bill." Biden was still ridiculed by opponents for his support during his campaign for President. Donald Trump continued to state in the last 2020 Presidential Debate, "You

have done nothing other than the Crime Bill," to which Biden replied "Oh god. Not true." That bill was necessary for the situation in 1994 just as the new bills are needed thirty years later.

The new bills being passed in Maryland and DC stand to change and prevent the rate of drugs including fentanyl and juvenile crimes from continuing to rise. The public should not get defensive over the legislation that stands to fix the various drug and crime issues that have plagued our nation for over half a century.

Robert Weiner was the spokesman in the Clinton and George W. Bush White House Drug Policy Office. He was Communications Director of the House Government Operations and Judiciary Committees under committee chair and CBC founder John Conyers, and Senior Aide to Four-Star Gen/Drug Czar Barry McCaffrey and Reps. Charles Rangel, Claude Pepper, Ed Koch, and Sen Ted Kennedy. Ben Kearney is a Policy Analyst and Writer at Robert Weiner Associates and Solutions for Change.

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