



## Stopping “Free the Felons” - Sample Speech

(approximately 1100 words, 8 minutes)

“Keeping Texas Safe from Criminals”

Texans are tough. We always have been, and we’re proud of it, but we’re also proud to be fair: people have always come to Texas because they knew that if you worked hard and kept your nose clean, you’d get a fair shake—a fair chance to start a business, to raise a family, to build something you could be proud of. But not everybody wants to work hard and play by the rules. Some people cheat, some steal, and some do much, much worse. We have a place for people like that in Texas, and it’s called prison. But right now, there’s a bunch of people up in Austin who think they know better—they think we’re *too* tough on criminals, and they’re trying to ram a bill through the legislature that’s all kinds of bad news for Texas. And we need to stand up and stop it.

We’ve seen this before—they’re calling it “Today’s Texas Justice,” but it’s really yesterday’s news. It’s nothing they didn’t try back in the sixties and seventies, and we know what that got us—riots in the streets and a skyrocketing murder rate. It’s time we took a stand and put a stop to this dangerous legislation.

The first thing these folks want to do is to ease up on drug addicts and junkies. Now, I may have missed the news report, but last time I checked, the War on Drugs was far from over. Kids are smoking pot in junior high, and they’re dealing hard drugs in high school. The last thing we need is to sound the retreat, but that’s exactly what they’re trying to do. They want to cut the penalties for everything from marijuana to heroin to crystal meth, because somehow it’s a good idea that we let more of these people out of jail earlier. Weaker laws means more drug users in our neighborhoods, in our communities, and in our schools. We’d be telling kids that it’s really not a big deal—“it’s just a little pot, it’s not *really* a crime...” There’s just no way that’s a good idea.

Next, they want to let people out of jail without posting any type of bond—not one red cent. “Posting Bail” will be a thing of the past. It is literally a “Get Out of Jail Free” card for thousands of offenders who will go right back out into the streets to keep on doing what got them there in the first place. And why wouldn’t they? When a criminal gets out on bail, he knows that there’s a bail bondsman who’s going to come looking for him if he decides to skip town. But with “pre-trial services,” it’s a social worker or a drug counselor who’s supposed to be responsible for making sure people accused of serious crimes somehow decide to show up for their court dates. Now, we all understand “innocent until proven guilty,” and it’s important to recognize that some people who get arrested and brought to jail really didn’t do anything wrong. But there’s a system in place for those people to post bail and go home, and there’s no need to tear the whole system down. Just ask the family of Dante Thomas. He was arrested in 2016 for stabbing his girlfriend to death—a crime he confessed to—and they let him out anyway. Within days, he’d shot his aunt to death and wounded a cousin. And all the social workers in the world wouldn’t have stopped him.

Then we have the parts of this bill that are designed to help felons cover their tracks. I’m not making this up—it’s right there in the legislation. Some folks think that having a felony on their

record makes life a little too hard for these guys. Well, maybe they should have thought of that before they robbed a liquor store or broke into their neighbor's house. Maybe they should have thought about that when they were smoking on that crack pipe or selling that meth. Because these folks want to make it easier to "seal the records" of what a felon's done—even though the whole point of a record is that it's supposed to last forever, so people can know what kind of person they're dealing with. But no—they want to "ban the box" and prohibit—legally prohibit—employers from asking about felony convictions on an employment application. And on top of that, they think it's a bad idea that Texas doesn't give food stamps to convicted drug offenders. They think we're not handing out enough taxpayer money to drug users already, so they want to cut out the law that says if you have a drug conviction, you're the *last* person who needs to get food stamps. If you think drugs and food stamps are a great combination, there's some people in Austin who think just like you do. But if you're like me, then we need to work together to stop this bill.

But that's not even the worst of it. No, the worst part is where seventeen year-old murders and rapists get tossed into the juvenile system with children as young as ten. At seventeen, you're old enough to join the army. You're old enough to get married, you're old enough to put in a fair day's work for a fair day's pay, and in Texas, you're old enough to be treated like an adult by the courts and the police. I haven't met a seventeen year-old yet who didn't know right from wrong, but I've met a few that are six-foot-four, two hundred pounds, and willing to try anything they think they can get away with. But for some reason now we're supposed to throw these young predators—tattooed gang bangers, killers, young men and women who have committed unspeakable acts—and we're supposed to treat them like they're children who just didn't know any better. Never mind the cost—keeping someone locked up in the juvenile system for a year costs about four times what it would cost to keep them in the adult system—it just flat doesn't make any sense.

So, what we've got to do is stop this bad idea in its tracks. We've got to stop them from weakening the drug laws, stop them from giving out "Get Out of Jail Free" cards, stop them from helping felons hide, and stop them from protecting young predators. Because if we don't, then who's to say it's not going to be your door or mine they decide to knock down at one in the morning. Call your legislators, talk to your pastor, post it on your Facebook—we've got to stop this bill before it stops one of us.