

Bishop Harry Jackson Boldly Urges Obama to Pass This Act

Bishop Harry Jackson, chairman of the High Impact Leadership Coalition and one of the chief organizers of “The Reconciled Church: Healing the Racial Divide” summit in Dallas last week, has written an open letter to President Barack Obama, calling for him to address criminal justice reform in his State of the Union on Tuesday.

“Part of the mistrust of law enforcement in urban areas has to do with the large number of ex-convicts who live in our cities,” the letter says. “The 800-pound gorilla in the room is the growing number of black and brown Americans who are becoming part of a permanent underclass because of jail time. ... Ex-convicts have a problem with re-entry into society. Further, their families suffer because of the low-income potential and numerous other consequences of having a criminal conviction on their records.”

The Reconciled Church attracted more than 100 Christian leaders, including Andrew Young, the former U.N. ambassador, congressman and Atlanta mayor. The summit, hosted by Bishop T.D. Jakes at The Potter’ House, came in the wake of the recent killings of black males by white police officers in Ferguson, Missouri, and Staten Island, New York, and the slaying of two New York policemen.

One of the “Seven Bridges to Peace” highlighted at the summit was criminal-justice reform, with roughly two-thirds of the U.S. prison population being black or brown. The Department of Justice website says, “More than 650,000 ex-offenders are released from prison every year, and studies show that approximately two-thirds will likely be rearrested within three years of release.” Jackson’s letter calls for President Obama to support the passage of the Record Expungement

Designed to Enhance Employment Act or REDEEM. The act, sponsored by Sens. Rand Paul (R-Ky.) and Cory Booker (D-N.J.), calls for:

- Creating a way for non-violent ex-offenders to petition to seal their criminal records
- Automatically sealing and in some cases expunging juvenile records
- Incentivizing states to raise the age of adult criminal responsibility to 18
- Restricting significantly solitary confinement of juveniles
- Lifting the lifetime bans on certain types of federal assistance, including food and other aid, for many non-violent drug offenders' families
- Improving the accuracy of the FBI background check system

For the complete text of the letter, please visit .