



## LOUISIANANS FOR PRISON ALTERNATIVES

### **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

May 7, 2019

Contact: Elizabeth Johnson

[elizabeth.johnson@splcenter.org](mailto:elizabeth.johnson@splcenter.org) / 334-224-0059

### **LPA: Ineffective Habitual Offender Law Needs Reform**

The Louisiana House Administration of Criminal Justice Committee today voted in favor of [House Bill 518](#), which would reform the state's unjust, expensive and out-of-step [habitual offender](#) statute. The following statements are by members of [Louisianans for Prison Alternatives](#).

“Louisiana’s habitual offender law is abused, misused and ineffective. People with repeated convictions can go to prison for decades, or even life, for something as simple as stealing \$14 or possessing a marijuana cigarette,” said **Jamila Johnson, senior supervising attorney for the SPLC Action Fund**. “Habitual offender enhancements are most commonly used against people charged with non-violent offenses, often resulting from mental illness, substance abuse or poverty. Instead of addressing the root causes of repeat offenses, the habitual offender statute punishes these symptoms. And Louisianans are the ones footing the bill for these long, harmful and ineffective prison sentences. It is time to move on from this outdated and expensive practice and invest in a safer Louisiana.”

“Louisiana’s extreme Habitual Offender law has needlessly destroyed the lives of people who belong in their communities – not locked away in cages,” said **Alanah Odoms Hebert, ACLU of Louisiana executive director**. “Moving forward, we urge lawmakers to listen to their constituents, build on the justice reinvestment package and work to end our mass incarceration crisis once and for all.”

“Few things tell you more about the state of the criminal justice system than finding out about someone doing a life sentence for smoking marijuana, which is legal in 10 states and our nation's capital,” said **Norris Henderson, executive director of Voice of the Experienced (VOTE)**. “Louisiana sentences are so harsh on serious crimes, you can almost bet that nobody has been convicted of three major offenses – and yet thousands of people are serving 20, 40, 60 years and Life for a rap sheet that was crying out for help.”

###