



## ALAN WILSON'S PROVEN LEADERSHIP IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM

For more than 15 years, South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson has built a foundation of dedicated leadership in criminal justice, public safety, and law enforcement. His experience makes him uniquely qualified to continue delivering meaningful reforms that directly impact the everyday lives of South Carolina families.

Wilson has worked closely with law enforcement, victim advocates, and all 16 solicitors to pass landmark legislation—including Emma's Law and the Ashley Hall bill—which have significantly improved child safety and domestic violence protections.

His efforts go beyond legislation. Wilson has led the fight against fentanyl and drug trafficking, dismantled major criminal rings, and prosecuted dangerous offenders whose crimes threaten our families and neighborhoods. His work has saved lives and reduced the scourge of violence across the state.

Wilson's advocacy for judicial reform—pushing for transparency, accountability, and fair judge selection—has helped start to reshape South Carolina's justice system. His reforms include overhauling court procedures, reducing case backlogs, and exposing corruption in high-profile cases. These efforts have laid the groundwork for a more just and equitable system, but there is still more work ahead.

His leadership on bail reform—strengthening tools to prevent repeat offenders from re-entering our communities—has already made a difference.

**Yet, ongoing challenges mean we must keep pushing for smarter, more effective policies that protect families and restore confidence in our courts and law enforcement.**

Wilson's proven record of fighting federal overreach—defending the Second Amendment, religious liberty, and our sovereignty—has set a standard of toughness that South Carolina needs to stay safe and free.

**Alan Wilson's experience provides a critical foundation for future reforms— reforms that will continue to impact families by making our communities safer, our justice system fairer, and our state more prosperous.**

**Wilson is the one leader who understands that while progress has been made, the work to Protect Our Families and Our Values remains ongoing—and he's prepared to lead that next chapter. And that starts with this upcoming legislative session.**

# SOUTH CAROLINA AG ALAN WILSON – CRIMINAL JUSTICE REFORM AND INITIATIVES

## INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

Alan Wilson has served as South Carolina’s Attorney General since 2011 and has led major historic reforms throughout the years. Over his tenure, Wilson has been involved in numerous criminal justice initiatives. He is a tough on crime, law and order leader who has focused on public safety and victims’ rights. Below is an overview of Wilson’s key actions in criminal justice reform.

## STRENGTHENING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE LAWS AND VICTIM PROTECTIONS

One of Wilson’s early priorities was combating South Carolina’s epidemic of domestic violence. He played a **major role in the passage of the 2015 Domestic Violence Reform Act**, a law that toughened penalties for abusers, introduced firearm bans for convicted domestic violence offenders, and even mandated school-based education on domestic abuse<sup>[3][4]</sup>. Governor Nikki Haley, who convened a task force on the issue, credited the law with making “harsher penalties” and a 10-year (or lifetime) gun ban for the worst offenders a reality<sup>[3]</sup>. Wilson, unable to attend the bill signing, “released a statement praising the governor for signing the bill,” underscoring his support<sup>[4]</sup>. These reforms addressed South Carolina’s long-held rank among the worst states for deadly domestic violence, and lawmakers noted the “sweeping changes to domestic violence laws and sentencing in 2015” as a turning point<sup>[5]</sup>.

Wilson’s commitment to domestic violence reform extends beyond legislation. Each October during **Domestic Violence Awareness Month**, he leads South Carolina’s **Silent Witness ceremony** at the State House, reading the names of victims killed by their partners<sup>[6]</sup>. “This ceremony reminds us that every life lost to domestic violence was a life of value and purpose,” Wilson stated in 2025, vowing to “strengthen our commitment to justice, protection, and the prevention of violence” in the community<sup>[7][8]</sup>. Such public speeches and memorials have kept attention on the issue, complementing the legal reforms by promoting awareness.

Wilson also helped overhaul how the state supports victims of crime. In 2017, South Carolina enacted what Wilson called the **most significant victims’ advocacy reform in decades**: a law consolidating disparate victim services into a single office under the Attorney General<sup>[9]</sup>.

This created a **Crime Victim Services Division** in Wilson’s office that unified the State Office of Victim Assistance, the Crime Victim Ombudsman, and various victim grant programs “with one phone number” and one location<sup>[10]</sup>. “I think it’s going to set the stage for a new era in how we... serve those...being a victim of a crime in South Carolina,” Wilson said, likening the one-stop model to making victim assistance as accessible as a “Costco” for services<sup>[9][11]</sup>. By streamlining victim support – an idea borne out of Gov. Haley’s Domestic Violence Task Force recommendations – Wilson aimed to make the justice system more navigable and responsive to victims’ needs.

## HUMAN TRAFFICKING AND CHILD EXPLOITATION INITIATIVES

When Wilson became Attorney General, South Carolina’s laws against trafficking were considered among the weakest in the nation<sup>[12]</sup>. In 2012, he worked with legislators in a successful effort to **strengthen the state’s human trafficking statutes**, dramatically improving penalties and tools for law enforcement<sup>[13]</sup>. During this process he established and assumed leadership of the **South Carolina Human Trafficking Task Force**, a statewide coalition of law enforcement, service providers, and advocates<sup>[12]</sup>. Thanks in part to these efforts, “South Carolina has gone from having one of the worst statutes in the country, to one of the best,” Wilson’s office observed<sup>[12]</sup>. Under his chairmanship, the task force issues annual reports and coordinates training and prevention programs<sup>[14]</sup>, reflecting a comprehensive approach to what Wilson frames as both a crime and human rights issue.

Wilson's office also leads South Carolina's Internet Crimes Against Children (ICAC) unit, tackling online child pornography and exploitation. He has grown the taskforce 4x times since he took office, by expanding the amount of agencies from 40 to 128 across the state. Wilson tripled the number of full-time positions fighting online child exploitation. Nearly 90% of all ICAC arrests in state history have been under Alan's time as Attorney General. These arrests have led to over 1,271 convictions under his leadership and that number continues to grow as they work through the legal process and clear cases each day.

## BAIL AND BOND REFORM

Wilson has been an outspoken advocate for **tightening South Carolina's bail system**, especially in response to repeat violent offenders cycling in and out of jail. In 2023, he and State Law Enforcement Division Chief Mark Keel pushed hard for a "bond reform" bill to curb what they called a "revolving door" for dangerous criminals<sup>[21]</sup>. "We desperately need bond reform passed as soon as possible," Wilson warned as lawmakers debated the measure. "Our current system allows for repeat offenders to continue a life of criminality and endanger our communities."<sup>[22]</sup> He specifically cited deficiencies in how defendants on pretrial release were monitored, noting that lack of oversight had "prevented accountability for those who fail to report violations" of their release conditions<sup>[23][24]</sup>.

Wilson's lobbying paid off. In June 2023, the General Assembly passed a **bond reform law** that incorporated many of Wilson's recommendations. In his words, "South Carolina is now one step closer to keeping violent criminals behind bars... Enough is enough."<sup>[25]</sup> The new law requires **stricter conditions and payment for bail**, notably mandating "full cash as payment to post bail for people charged with a firearm-involved offense or [a] subsequent violent offense while out on release for a first offense."<sup>[26]</sup> This means a repeat violent offender (or anyone accused of a serious crime with a gun) can no longer use a bail bondsman's 10% payment – they must put up the entire amount, making pretrial release far more difficult<sup>[26]</sup>. The law also bolstered electronic GPS monitoring standards, as Wilson had urged. Under the reforms, only state-certified monitoring companies can be used, and they must provide law enforcement with real-time alerts on violations<sup>[27][28]</sup>. Courts are empowered to require specific high-quality monitors for certain defendants, closing loopholes that previously let dangerous individuals exploit lax monitoring<sup>[28][29]</sup>.

Wilson hailed the bond reforms as a victory for public safety, crediting the legislature for addressing what he called a long-festering problem<sup>[23][30]</sup>. The initiative reflects Wilson's general approach of prioritizing **incapacitation of violent offenders** and responding to public outcry over high-profile crimes committed by suspects out on bond. Wilson has countered that the law targets only those who pose the gravest threats, arguing that "by strengthening... oversight and accountability...South Carolina will be a safer place for everyone."<sup>[22][31]</sup>

## JUDICIAL SYSTEM REFORMS AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Beyond changes to criminal statutes, Wilson has pushed for structural reform of South Carolina's judicial system. In particular, he has been a leading voice calling for **overhauling the state's method of selecting judges**. South Carolina is one of only two states where the legislature plays the primary role in electing judges, and Wilson argues this concentration of power has led to imbalances – for example, allegations that some judges appointed by lawmakers have set low bonds or issued lenient sentences that frustrate prosecutors. "Our judicial selection process desperately needs reform, and we're almost there," Wilson said in 2024 as a reform bill advanced<sup>[32]</sup>. The legislation (S.1046) would give the executive branch (the Governor or his appointees) a greater role in appointing judges, injecting more balance between the branches of government<sup>[33]</sup>. "This bill is not perfect, but it is progress," Wilson noted, urging lawmakers to get it to the Governor's desk<sup>[32]</sup>.

Wilson **campaigns for judicial reform for years**, intensifying his efforts after high-profile instances of repeat offenders getting out on low bonds. In March 2023, he convened a bipartisan coalition of over half of South Carolina’s county sheriffs and solicitors (prosecutors) to demand changes to the judge selection process<sup>[33]</sup>. The message: allow the Executive Branch a say in choosing judges “to balance the power between the branches of government and create accountability.”<sup>[33]</sup> Through public forums, panels, and legislative testimony<sup>[34][35]</sup>, Wilson built support by arguing that judicial reform is not merely a separation-of-powers issue – it has real public safety impacts. He points out that **judges’ decisions on bail, sentencing, and trials directly affect criminal justice outcomes**, and thus a more transparent, accountable appointment process could result in a bench that more consistently upholds tough-on-crime principles. By 2024, Wilson’s advocacy helped propel the reform bill into a conference committee to reconcile House and Senate versions<sup>[36]</sup>. As of that year, the effort was still ongoing, but Wilson’s push aligns with a broader concern in South Carolina that the judiciary had become insular. His stance has drawn some bipartisan agreement (as sheriffs, solicitors, and even some legislators joined him), though it also faces resistance from lawmakers protective of legislative prerogative in judge selection.

Wilson has also intervened in specific cases to **enforce accountability in sentencing**. A notable example is the 2023 controversy over the secret early release of convicted murderer *Jeroid Price*. Price, who was serving a 35-year term for a 2002 murder, was released 16 years early via a sealed judicial order that bypassed normal procedures<sup>[37][38]</sup>. When Wilson’s office learned of this secret deal – which had been arranged without notifying victims or the AG – he acted swiftly. Wilson filed motions with the state Supreme Court, arguing the release was improper. In an unusual but dramatic move, the **South Carolina Supreme Court agreed with Wilson** and voided the order, sending Price back to prison<sup>[37][39]</sup>. “We agree with the Court’s decision and appreciate it holding the state actors and lower court accountable for not following the law,” Wilson said after the ruling, adding that the case “proves no one is above the law in South Carolina.”<sup>[39][40]</sup> He then launched a review of other inmates’ releases to ensure no similar cases had slipped through<sup>[41][42]</sup>. The incident prompted Governor Henry McMaster to mandate that in future any motions to reduce criminal sentences must be reported to the Attorney General at least 10 days in advance, so the AG can review them for legality<sup>[43][44]</sup>. McMaster explicitly noted that **simply incarcerating criminals isn’t enough if quiet maneuvers later let them out early**, declaring “we must also ensure that they stay in prison” – a sentiment Wilson strongly echoed<sup>[45][46]</sup>. This episode reinforced Wilson’s image as a defender of **victims’ rights and sentencing integrity**; however, it also highlighted systemic issues in South Carolina’s judicial culture that Wilson seeks to reform through more structural changes.

## STANCE ON DRUG POLICY

In the realm of opioids and harder drugs, Wilson has taken a proactive enforcement stance. He frequently links rising violent crime to the **fentanyl crisis and cross-border drug trafficking**. For example, in March 2025 Wilson joined a U.S. Department of Justice forum with President Trump, where he emphasized that “fentanyl...being trafficked into our states” via the southern border is one of the top issues “keeping [him] up at night.”<sup>[56][57]</sup> Standing alongside Trump, Wilson praised federal-state collaborations that resulted in “significant arrests and successful prosecutions in major criminal cases” – particularly against drug cartels – and lauded efforts to “crack[] down on drug cartels” and “uphold[] the rule of law.”<sup>[58][59]</sup> This reflects Wilson’s general alignment with the national **law-and-order coalition** on drug policy: focus on interdiction and prosecution of traffickers, rather than harm-reduction or decriminalization strategies. Wilson helped push for stricter penalties on drug dealers, which ultimately led to the fentanyl-induced homicide bill being passed into law. The Attorney General’s Office has been able to charge dealers with murder because of this law.

## CAPITAL PUNISHMENT AND OTHER LAW-AND-ORDER POLICIES

Attorney General Wilson is a staunch proponent of the **death penalty** and has taken steps to ensure South Carolina can carry out capital sentences. For several years, the state had an effective moratorium on executions because it lacked the drugs for lethal injection and had no alternative method. Wilson supported a 2021 law that designated the electric chair as the default execution method and added the **firing squad** as an option – making South Carolina one of the few states to revert to this older execution technique<sup>[60][61]</sup>. In March 2022, the Department of Corrections notified Wilson that it had finished preparations for firing-squad executions under the new law<sup>[62]</sup>. Shortly thereafter, Wilson’s office moved to set execution dates for inmates who had exhausted their appeals, signaling that executions would resume using the newly authorized methods. Wilson has defended the firing squad measure, arguing that the state must enforce lawful sentences and bring closure to victims’ families<sup>[63]</sup>. (Advocacy groups like the ACLU have challenged aspects of South Carolina’s death penalty, such as secrecy around execution drugs, naming Wilson as a defendant in lawsuits, but these challenges are ongoing<sup>[64]</sup>.)

Another legislative reform Wilson supported was closing the “Charleston loophole” on firearms, in response to the 2013 **Ashley Hall school shooting incident**. (In that case, a mentally ill individual was able to buy a gun due to incomplete reporting of mental health adjudications.) Wilson backed the “Ashley Hall bill”, which improved background check reporting for mental health records<sup>[66]</sup>. Additionally, he helped pass **Emma’s Law** in 2014 – named for a child killed by a drunk driver – which requires ignition interlock devices for certain DUI offenders to curb repeat drunk driving<sup>[66]</sup>. These laws, while not always labeled “criminal justice reform” in the broad sense, were targeted fixes to public safety gaps, and Wilson’s advocacy was pivotal in their enactment<sup>[66]</sup>. They underscore his pattern of reacting to tragedies with legislative solutions to prevent recurrence, aligning with a traditional crime-control mindset.

## IMPACT AND BROADER TRENDS

**Impact in South Carolina:** Many of Wilson’s initiatives have had tangible if gradual impacts on South Carolina’s criminal justice landscape. The 2015 domestic violence reforms, for instance, coincided with a modest improvement in the state’s national ranking for women killed by men – moving South Carolina out of the infamous #1 spot it once held (though the state still ranks high)<sup>[67][5]</sup>. The human trafficking law of 2012 gave prosecutors new tools, leading to an increase in trafficking prosecutions and victim identifications reported in subsequent task force annual reports<sup>[14]</sup>. The 2023 bond reform was a direct response to a spike in violent crimes committed by repeat offenders on bond; while it is too early to measure outcomes, law enforcement leaders believe it will **reduce recidivism on pretrial release** and deter habitual offenders<sup>[23][26]</sup>.

Wilson’s push for judicial reform could significantly reshape the balance of power in South Carolina’s government and potentially produce a judiciary more aligned with his tough-on-crime priorities. However, this effort has also raised **controversy**. Detractors worry that giving the executive more sway could politicize the bench, while supporters argue it would break up an old-boy network and yield judges more attuned to community safety. As of 2025, the long-term impact remains to be seen, pending legislative action.

**Comparison with Broader Trends:** Alan Wilson’s approach in many ways diverges from the “**progressive**” **criminal justice reform movement** seen in other states over the past decade. Nationally, there has been bipartisan momentum to reduce mass incarceration – through measures like lowering nonviolent drug sentences, expanding parole, de-emphasizing cash bail, and legalizing cannabis. By contrast, Wilson has largely **resisted or opposed reforms aimed at leniency** or decriminalization. For example, while 38 states have adopted medical marijuana programs, Wilson has been a vehement opponent, staking a position more hardline than even some federal law enforcement leaders<sup>[48]</sup>. And at a time when states like New York, New Jersey, and Illinois moved to limit cash bail to reduce pretrial detention, South Carolina under Wilson went the opposite direction in 2023 – *increasing cash bail requirements for certain offenses*<sup>[26]</sup>.

Republican leaders in many states have recently called for rolling back bail reforms and imposing tougher penalties on fentanyl dealers, and Wilson's initiatives fit that pattern. South Carolina's 2023 bond law, for instance, was praised by police organizations and conservative commentators as pushing back against a "revolving door" justice system<sup>[68][69]</sup>.

Wilson's advocacy on domestic violence and trafficking mirrors bipartisan reform currents – virtually all states have strengthened domestic violence laws and anti-trafficking efforts in the past decade, often with broad support. In those areas, Wilson's contributions (like consolidating victim services and championing victims' rights) are in step with national best practices focusing on victim-centered justice<sup>[9][10]</sup>. His support for measures like ignition interlocks (Emma's Law) aligns with evidence-based strategies to prevent crime and protect families. Even his stance on judicial selection reform is part of a larger conversation about **balancing judicial independence with accountability** – a topic in several states, though the solutions vary.

He has consistently prioritized public safety, stringent enforcement, and victims' rights, often pushing for **harsher penalties or stricter controls** (whether in fighting domestic abusers, repeat violent offenders on bond, or drug traffickers). He has opposed liberalizing measures like marijuana decriminalization and shown skepticism toward decarceration trends, putting him at odds with reform advocates on those issues<sup>[47][51]</sup>.

Ultimately, the **impact** of Wilson's efforts can be seen in the legal infrastructure South Carolina has built during his tenure: stronger penalties for violent and repeat offenders, more support for victims, new tools against modern crimes like trafficking, and – notably – a state that has so far bucked certain national reform trends (remaining tough on drugs and skeptical of reducing penalties). As Wilson finishes his time as Attorney General, finishing reforms he has championed for years will be a focal point. His legacy will be marked by the historic reforms, that emphasize accountability and public safety, he's brought to South Carolina's criminal justice system.

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