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Dear Friend,

I am a prisoner in the Massachusetts state prison system who writes short articles on current pressing issues that may effect those of us behind bars here in the Commonwealth.

As of late there have been numerous articles in the papers, as well as snippets on the T.V. news, about acting Governor Jane Swift's misguided ideas on the need for post-release supervision for prisoners leaving the system. She uses statistics on the high rates of re-offending among that group as her basis for the proposed plans. As is the norm with her highness, she is way off the mark.

Her manipulated statistics may have some solid basis in fact, but believe me her plans for post-release supervision are not the answer and would be destined for failure. An ill prepared prisoner who is thrust back onto the street with no support system, employment, or housing, will surely fail no matter how stringent a supervision program he is mandated to follow.

The base problem that creates recidivism and re-offending is the lack of adequate rehabilitative programs in our prisons which is coupled with the lack of a transitional and responsibility based, progressive release system. The bottom line is that for the most part Massachusetts prisoners are released from high security prisons directly into the communities of the Commonwealth. The animalistic attitudes and behaviors that are commonplace in these facilities are brought directly to the street. A severely flawed system.

To use this forum as a bitch session would be a waste of my energies. I hope to put forth a solution based in reality. The acting Governor's plans are based on a political agenda and she obviously has no real interest in true solutions as she has failed to do her homework on this issue. I guess homework won't get you re-elected as fast as Rederick may.

What needs to happen in Massachusetts is that a system of slow transition to lower security, higher responsibility facilities, with the eventual goal of winding up in a pre-release or work-release facility as the end result, must again be put in place. In the 1980's these type of facilities became political pariahs after the Willie Horton situation and a couple other closely related crimes that involved violent prisoners who should not have been allowed to be housed in lower security to begin with. A new system would need to be based on a prisoners adjustment within the prison system and his slow and gradual, monitored, transition through security levels. Of course the nature of the offense, mental health issues, and sentence structure, would also have to be part of the equation. Someone serving a life sentence would obviously not meet the criteria for a program geared toward integration back into the community. Neither would a sexual predator. The candidates would be culled from those prisoners who would someday be released and crimes fit required criteria.

The candidates would be required to attend, participate in, and successfully complete, rehabilitative programs at each security level. Upon completion a certain amount of disciplinary incident free time would have to be put in to show application of the skills aquired through the rehabilitative programs before the prisoner would be allowed to move on to a lower security level and more responsibility. The process would proceed this way until the prisoner is a couple of years away from his release date. He would then be ready for transition to the pre-release and then work-release facilities where he would be required to secure employment that will be continued upon release, save funds in order to secure safe housing prior to release, and build a post-release support system to help the prisoner deal with personal issues such as past drug or alcohol problems.

The whole system would be based on motivation and strict criteria meeting requirements. The responsibility would fully rest on the prisoners shoulders. If he chooses to pursue his goals he will be successful. If he chooses to continue detrimental behaviors he will do hard time. The benefits would be a system which produces prisoners who have something solid in their lives upon release. They will have worked hard for the things they have gained, will be proud of them, and will not want to give them up. They will be prepared to live productive lives. The head start they receive will eliminate critical elements of the period when post-release re-offending mostly occurs. The hurdles that present severe road blocks will be lifted and the focus can be on moving forward.

I'm certainly no expert on the logistics involved in getting this together, but it is far from rocket science. Current lower security, and even some higher security prisoners could be used to convert existing state properties into housing facilities. The money saved from costs to the trial courts could help in the funding. It can be done. It must be done. Our current system is flawed. It has to be fixed. A lot of the answers are contained behind prison walls. The prisoners know what works. We know which statistics are true and which make the Governors nose grow. Want to know the the REAL recidivism rate? Come to SBCC, enter the chow hall at meal time, ask each convict if they have been to prison before, write down the results and you have the TRUE rate. Try manipulating that statistic.

Many prisoners are motivated. Many, like myself, would rather be part of the solution than the problem. We have the answers if anyone cares to listen.

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Post Script; My hopes are that you may be willing to print this piece or the other similar piece I am enclosing, in a future issue of Outlook on Justice. Thank you. TJM

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