

Don't Believe The Hype!

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There is a lot of talk in the media about Criminal Justice Reform in Massachusetts. This coverage has led to a number of rumors spreading around Norfolk. The Lifers' Group is committed to keeping its members informed on any legislative or legal changes that affect the Norfolk population. As such, here is a quick review of what is and is not happening on Beacon Hill.

1. **NO laws related to criminal justice reformed have yet to pass the Massachusetts legislature:** Lawmakers, including the governor have filed their proposed legislation. Over the next several months, these bills will be debated first in committee, then in the House and Senate. Bills passed by both the House and Senate will be forwarded to the governor. He can veto any bill he chooses, although the House and Senate can override his veto if they have enough votes.
2. **One proposal is to raise the juvenile age to 21:** There are at least three bills that seek to raise the juvenile age to 21. This may or may not affect those currently sentenced. If one of the bills is passed and is "prospective," than it would only impact those sentenced **AFTER** the law went into effect. If it is "retroactive," it would cover everyone currently serving time and all those going forward.
3. **The Governor is proposing additional opportunities for good time:** The governor filed a bill (which like any other must pass the House and Senate) to provide the opportunity to earn up to 15 days good time each month. But note, his bill has a number of restrictions, such as, those serving a mandatory minimum sentence that involves violence will not qualify. Keep in mind, this again is just one proposal.
4. **There are proposals to make changes to the parole process, use of solitary confinement, and much more:** Some of these ideas may become law, many will not. The important thing is to stay informed and learn the **FACTS!** One of the worse things we can do is trade in rumors on such an important issue.

Some Tips to Stay Informed:

Sign up for the Lifers' Group - The Lifers' Group is in regular contact with lawmakers and has a number of upcoming presentations and speakers that will specifically cover the proposed criminal justice reform effort.

Pay Close Attention to Media Reports: Radio and tv due to the limited time they can devote to a particular story often can only report highlights. Newspapers provide more details, but still cannot print all the text of a proposed law. The best source of information is the proposed bill itself. But if broadcast media is your only source, always ask yourself, "Am I listening to a news report or opinion-based talk show?"; "Are they reporting on ideas, proposed legislation or a passed law?"; "Is the source reliable?"

BE SKEPTICAL: There is an old line, believe half of what you see in prison and less of what you hear. In our environment, where we seek hope at every turn, it is easy to hear what we want to hear. Always ask yourself, "Did I hear that correctly?" If you do hear a development, confirm that others heard the same thing. Just like with the media, seek sources that are trustworthy, not simply people who will tell you what you want to hear.