

Cannon, Courtney

From: Weiss, Rachel
Sent: Thursday, December 05, 2013 8:24 AM
To: Cannon, Courtney
Subject: FW: LJIC, Dec. 5th---error corrected

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Rachel,

I am not going to be able to make it to Helena tomorrow. I have some health issues that prevent me from traveling. I am disappointed. I am requesting that you (or Rep. MacDonald, Senator Murphy) read the following statement into the record and to the committee. Thank you.

Madam Chair and members of the LJIC,

Unfortunately I am unable to attend today's hearings due to health issues. My testimony is centering around the problems that many inmates experience when reaching parole eligibility. I have received correspondence from inmates who are eligible for parole. They meet all sentencing requirements. The parole board then adds additional requirements.

For instance, inmate Randy Harris who is in the Dawson County Correctional Facility. His sentencing was seven years with the DOC in 2011. According to Mr. Harris he completed all the programs that were recommended by the court of sentencing. He became eligible for parole. On July 30, 2013 he went before parole board and they granted him parole after he met the following requirements: 60 to 90 days of aftercare and 6 months to a year of pre-release. To be brief, a mental health specialist deemed him not a good candidate for the boot camp because of PTSD. The parole board decided that he unless he attends the boot camp he will serve another 4 1/2 years.

It appears to me that the BOPP is adding additional requirements beyond the courts of sentencing. During my tenure on the LJIC I heard of many such accounts. Many of you have as well. Mr. Harris concluded there may be as many as 830 paroles granted by BOPP. I would like to know how many of those are still sitting in prison?

I read recently that, per capita wise, the United States has six times as many people incarcerated as Communist China. I understand that Montana ranks around number two. This is absurd. We are leaving a trail of broken families, broken marriages, poverty and despair by not getting those who are eligible out of the system.

There is a solution. I encourage the LJIC to look into what Texas (and I believe 15 other states) are doing in regard to parole eligibility. It is a computer based system that is working. Paroles are granted on a point system. The BOPP becomes unnecessary. Any chance of personality conflicts or prejudices are removed. The same principle can be applied to parole offices. The Texas system sorts out those who are most likely to re-offend.

It is a win-win situation; the inmate gets fair and just treatment, families are reunited, and it will help end the cycle of poverty for them. Children are the big benefactors. Additionally, there can be millions in tax dollars saved. It is common sense to change the process to a proven, more efficient way of evaluating parole applicants. In my opinion, it would be a huge disservice to the people of Montana to continue using the same outdated system.

In closing, I would like to thank Chair MacDonald, Senator Murphy and the committee members for their hard work and support of the bills that were a result of the Restorative Justice Study Bill I carried in the 2011 session.

Respectfully,