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"TRANSITIONAL OPPORTUNITIES FOR  
SEX OFFENDERS NECESSITATED"

BY: PEDRO MORALES, JR.

Society is tired of the same old revolving-door politics and its trickle-down effects. It's evidenced by politically-inexperienced yet vociferous, Donald Trump as new President. Much like a politically-motivated revolution for change is what can begin from the bottom up as well, once society weighs the possible costs of inaction.

For instance, a February 2016 article in the Hartford Courant, titled: Reintegration of Inmates Stressed, places male recidivism rates lower than that of female recidivism; yet society nonetheless worry over male ex-felons reoffending. Moreover, there are concerns over the possible reoffense of a certain class of offender which--according to Bureau of Justice statistics--comprises one of the lowest recidivism rates: sex offenders. Even more strange is that the Connecticut Department of Correction (D.O.C), entrusted with protecting the public through reintegration programs, de-prioritizes the very ones society worries most about.

It is a startling fact that from a Risk Level Score of 1 through 4, with 4 being the highest, sex offenders are rated with a set score of 3. These are also required to complete an Offender Accountability Plan (OAP). That plan consists of programs which would ordinarily result in a reduction of the score level in any other class of offender. It would qualify inmates for reintegration programs necessary for successful re-entry into respective communities, halfway houses, and other legal release options. But since sex offenders are kept at an unchanging score level of 3, these higher profile offenders are in turn placed at risk of unsuccessful

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re-entry--in conflict with society's best interest.

To example some tragic incidents: Parole reform became reality at the expense of the Petitt family during a Cheshire home invasion, when one of the burglars on parole committed a sex offense. And in the aftermath the gruesome abduction and rape of two elderly women by convicted sex offender Leslie Williams. He, incidentally, was homeless for lack of a D.O.C reintegration program.

Sadly, history demonstrates that most reforms won't occur until tragic incidents inspire change, or when concerned citizens push the envelope enough for tighter reforms to a system that has run-amok.

Interestingly, the United States not only has the highest income taxes, but the highest incarceration rate in the world as well. With that many inmates returning back into society it should behoove policy makers, and Corrections officials to implement positive measures for both society and stigmatized individuals eventually re-entering society. This should apply to the especially loathed and feared crime category inmates, namely sex offenders.

It is abundantly obvious that public sentiment is essentially the same as a Gallup Poll determined: that society fears sex offenders more than murderers or even terrorists.

Oddly, sex offenders are systematically **de**-prioritized even in prison institutions that house a great number of this class of felon--like CT's Brooklyn CI. To reiterate: Sex offenders are required to complete rehabilitational programs (OAP) which, although garner them Risk Reduction Earned Credit, does nothing to lower their risk level score to qualify them for certain D.O.C transitional opportunities, early community release, some halfway houses, and transitional programs only accepting level 2 inmates.

Not so odd is the fact that most sex offenders do want to benefit from a healthier and sustained reintegration into society by attending transitional programs. Except that when one is made available for qualifying level 3 score sex offenders, they are then arbitrarily deemed "unsuitable", due to entrenched prejudice that permeates the entire Correctional system.

To example this charge, as it applies to the Brooklyn Correctional Institution, I requested a transitional referral from

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Deputy Warden William Colon. It yielded a response in conflict with set Exclusions of a transitional program called The Brooklyn Bridge Inpatient Program. The main Exclusion--pertaining to sex offender eligibility--is to have only ONE sex conviction on record. As a ONE-TIME sex offender, seeking to further my rehabilitation by addressing alcohol addiction, I was nonetheless denied as being "eligible" yet "unsuitable."

This may not reek of prejudice, or even be mildly suspicious to the biased who prefer such people to fail upon release. It has been more than a decade that the high set level 3 score policy for sex offenders has gone unchecked. It would not be an extreme leap to conjecture a convoluted and quite stealthy way for indifferent Corrections officials to fulfill their misinterpretation of the D.O.C Mission Statement: To protect the public. By releasing unprepared and homeless sex offenders to roam the streets ill-equipped to succeed gives Corrections officials what they predicted and wanted--keeping sex offenders off the streets once they're violated by parole or probation for relapse or committing a new crime.

This contention is not far-fetched, even as sex offender recidivism rates prove lower than most crime categories.

To compliment this contention is the aforementioned Courant newspaper article by Alan Martishi, titled, Reintegration of Inmates Stressed. In the Second Chance Initiative article the need to reduce recidivism is emphasized by Michael Lawlor, Under-Secretary for Criminal Justice Policy and Planning. Former Gov. Dannel P. Malloy was backing this initiative. He understood the absolute need for reintegration facilities that equip those returning into society with the necessary tools needed to succeed. Lawlor is quoted as emphasizing that "If you can't figure out a way to address those needs, it is a virtual certainty they're coming back" (Hartford Courant, Feb.18, 2016: B3).

Even though the systems that handle sex offender releases may vary from state to state, the possible costs of inaction remain the same. It's common sense that it shouldn't take a revolutionary Donald Trump politician, bureaucratic red tape, or an encore of the CT Cheshire home invasion to shake society into seeing what's needed: A call for

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change of the D.O.C's level 3 Risk Score policy that keeps what society fears most from receiving the transitional tools needed to succeed upon an inmates release.

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