

## ANOTHER INEFFECTIVE PRISON REFORM PLAN

I recently read an article in The Kansas City Call concerning the plan to spend \$296 million to reduce Missouri prison overcrowding. Let me be frank: the "Justice Reinvestment Initiative Plan" will be a failure and a complete waste of taxpayers' hard-earned dollars. Missourians deserve better and would be better served by spending \$485 million for two new prisons. Missouri lawmakers have a responsibility to pass legislation that best serves the interests of Missouri citizens; they have a responsibility to pass effective prison reform legislation, not throw away \$296 million.

Because of previous failed policies and get-tough-on-crime bills (the 85% law, the prior and persistent offender law, etc.), Missouri offenders are now being sentenced to offensively lenient sentences. In May of 2017, Brian K. Morrow was sentenced to 12 years in prison for stabbing Isaiah N. Jones to death. In June of 2017, a 19-year-old man, Ce-Antonyo D. Kennedy, beat and shot a 14-year-old girl, Alexis Kane, to death, at a Kansas City water park. He was sentenced to 15 years in prison, FOR KILLING A 14-YEAR-OLD GIRL! In August of 2017, a Jackson County judge sentenced a 22-year-old man, Jimmie Verge, to 45 years in prison FOR ROBBING AND KILLING TWO MEN! In January of 2018, a 22-year-old man, Davonte Gordon, was sentenced to 15 years in prison, for shooting and killing 20-year-old Kameron Gay at Kansas City's Peace Park.

At the end of 2017, Kansas City's murder count was 149. This carnage is happening all over the state and will continue to happen as long as these lenient sentences are given out, while offenders who have rehabilitated themselves remain in prison for life without the possibility of parole and other "death by incarceration" sentences.

Having been incarcerated for twenty-two and a half years, I've had plenty of time to keenly observe and reflect upon my past behavior and that of other offenders. In my expert opinion, offenders cannot be rehabilitated; they can only rehabilitate themselves.

Most offenders do not want to change; they only want people to believe that they do. The majority suffer from undiagnosed personality disorders. Only a handful actually take matters into their own hands and rehabilitate themselves. These are the offenders who deserve a second chance at building a life among society, not because they committed a nonviolent crime ("gateway crime"), not because they were juveniles when they took someone's life, not because they served a prescribed amount of time in prison, not because there are no available cells to put them in, and certainly not because they lucked out and received a plea offer due to prison overcrowding.

Most offenders' upbringings involved abuse, neglect, and/or



abandonment. When a child's physical and psychological needs are not met, it usually leaves a wound, a childhood trauma. Each instance or pattern of trauma causes personal and psychological issues, affecting social, emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and moral development. Many suffer from arrested development. At any given time, these offenders are subject to regress to a childish or adolescent state of mind. Others fantasize about being pimps and players, ballers and shot-callers, and drug kingpins, to alleviate their anxiety from bouts of inferiority and insecurity. Very few have healthy self-esteem and personal identity, so they spend a lot of their time fantasizing about creating one when released. The rest of their time is wasted distracting themselves with meaningless activities: playing games, using drugs, gambling, preening to maintain a narcissistic self-image, watching mindless TV, hanging on the phone all day and night, or sleeping.

Prison violence is mostly the result of drugs, protection of a self- or social image, or incompatibility with a cellmate, not prison overcrowding. Prison gangs are created due to the drug trade. A drug-free prison environment could be established by using drug-sniffing canines, creating an environment for learning and rehabilitation. A no-tolerance policy toward staff members, visitors, and offenders smuggling drugs into prisons should be adopted, with a legislatively enacted mandatory ten-year sentence for anyone caught smuggling drugs into a prison. If there were no drugs, there would be no need to waste money on drug-testing offenders, money that could be better spent elsewhere in the DOC.

Missouri offenders only receive \$7.50 each month (without a GED) or \$8.50 a month (with one) from the Department of Corrections. Since most prisons do not have paying jobs, offenders resort to prison "hustles" (gambling, stealing, extortion, drugs, etc.), or they rely on family and friends' generosity for financial support. These practices only perpetuate codependency and antisocial behavior, practically guaranteeing recidivism. Prisons should be self-sustaining (growing their own produce and making other things offenders need) but are not. A healthier diet would lower offender health care costs, but instead offenders are fed garbage and swill.

Offenders should be classified only after a thorough profile has been created by the Department of Corrections, detailing their social, physical, psychological, and criminal case histories, and providing an accurate model of each offender's radex of criminality. Special attention should be given to determine which offenders pose a potential threat to the safety of staff, offenders, and society--offenders who exhibit a high degree of psychopathic, paranoid, predatory, narcissistic, and/or emotionally unstable personality traits.

Based upon the offender's profile, a detailed rehabilitative plan should then be designed to address his/her childhood trauma,



self-esteem and identity issues; social, physical, and psychological needs; communication skills; educational needs--reading, writing, typing, vocational training, and financial education--money management and savings-account plan for release.

The people responsible for protecting the public can continue to play this disastrous game of nonviolent ("gateway crimes") versus violent offenders, advocating the release of offenders who have not been rehabilitated and will continue to reoffend no matter how many treatment and educational programs they are afforded. (This approach has already been done ad nauseam, and failed.) In the alternative, they can pass prison reform bills that give all offenders--violent and nonviolent alike--who rehabilitate themselves an opportunity to build a life among society. (For examples, see House Bills 2071 and 2072.) These are the offenders who deserve a second chance.

If society and the powers that be believe that offenders like myself are incorrigible because of the length of our sentences, then sponsor the enclosed bill and give us the right to end our own lives because no sane person would prefer to spend the rest of his/her life locked inside a room the size of a bathroom with another offender. Any person who continues to return to prison after being released is clearly insane and deserves to be here.

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