
I. Summary of the John Howard Association (JHA): For over 100 years, JHA has served the people Illinois by providing crucial independent citizen oversight of the correctional policies and practices employed in our state.

II. Purpose of HB 94:

If passed into law, this bill will encourage people in prison serving long prison sentences to engage in programming that will better prepare them for reentry into our communities and reduce recidivism.

III. Why this proposed amendment to Section 3-6-3 of Article 5 of the Code of Corrections is needed:

Far too often, initiatives aiming to rehabilitate prisoners are limited to “low level offenders.” The people serving long sentences for serious criminal offenses, however, are more often than not the prisoners in most need of educational and other rehabilitative programming.

- Most of the prisoners that will be affected by this bill will serve approximately 30 years and 6 months in prison prior to being released.¹
- The median age of these prisoners at the time they committed their offense was 22, and over half were between the ages of 14 and 22 when they committed the criminal offense that resulted in their current incarceration.
- As things stand, the age of this cohort of prisoners will range between 38 and 94 when they are released, with 58 being the average age at time of projected release.

To frame the issue bluntly, the numbers cited above illustrates that the limited cohort of prisoners affected by HB 94 will return to a society that has drastically changed subsequent to their incarceration. In order to have a realistic chance at successfully reintegrating into our communities upon release, these are the prisoners that should be

¹ Figures contained herein are based upon an analysis of IDOC’s prison population dataset as of 12-31-18, available at https://www2.illinois.gov/idoc/reportsandstatistics/Pages/Prison-Population-Data-Sets.aspx; methodology underlying creation of sample used for the analysis conducted in support of this testimony available upon request.
participating in rehabilitative programing while in IDOC custody, especially educational/vocational programming.

In addition, it is worth noting that approximately half of the prisoners included in my analysis are scheduled to be released within the next five years. So, many of these prisoners will soon be returning to our communities. Thus, this is not a question of whether or not we want to release serious offenders from prison (IDOC is compelled by law to release them on their projected outdates), but, rather, it is question of the manner in which we want them to return to our communities, prepared or not prepared.

IV. What HB 94 will not do:

• This bill will not undermine the Truth in Sentencing statutory good time formula enacted in 1998. Prisoners currently required to serve 100% of their sentence will still be required to serve 100% of their sentence if this bill becomes law. The same is true of prisoners required to serve 85% of their sentence.

• This bill will not undermine public safety. On the contrary, data pertaining to prisoners that participate in programming suggests otherwise. IDOC prisoners that successfully complete programing are less likely to recidivate compared to other prisoners.\(^2\)

Prisoners who are considered by IDOC officials to be a threat to the safety and security of an institution are not permitted to be employed in correctional industries or participate in formal education programs. Therefore, prisoners with a history of violence towards staff or other prisoners, or commit what are known as major rule violations while incarcerated are highly unlikely to receive sentence credits for educational programming.

Respectfully submitted,

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\(^2\) Source: IDOC’s Office of Adult Education and Vocational Services FY 18 Annual Report and ICI website.