



Bill wouldn't allow parole to depend on treatment

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The Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — Prison inmates could not be denied parole solely because they could not participate in a yearlong therapy program aimed at helping change violent behavior under legislation introduced Wednesday.

State Sen. Mike Bishop, R-Rochester, sponsored the bill to increase the availability of the Assaultive Offender Program to inmates serving their minimum sentences. He said more treatment could help move inmates through the system, which would save money and ease prison crowding.

Bishop announced his bill the same day the advocacy group Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending, or CAPPs, released a report critical of the Assaultive Offender Program.

The report said many prisoners cannot complete the program before they are eligible for parole because of long waiting lists created by the minimum 44-week program. Program enrollment currently is at 2,053 and the waiting list is at 2,256 inmates, the report said.

CAPPs said the state Parole Board often denies release to inmates who haven't finished the program without consideration of the long waiting list.

Penny Ryder of the American Friends Service Committee, an Ann Arbor-based Quaker group, attributed some of the long waiting lists for the program to the Corrections Department's stagnant number of therapists since the early 1990s. She said the department should add 50 therapists.

Ryder said inmates are getting upset about the lack of therapy.

"Not only are they getting frustrated, their families are frustrated," she said at a Capitol news conference with Bishop and CAPPs director Barbara Levine.

The Department of Corrections has had 100 psychologists since 1991-92, spokesman Russ Marlan said. While the number of therapists hasn't changed in that period, the prison population has gone up from about 34,000 to a little more than 48,500, he said.

Marlan said Bishop's bill isn't necessary because the Parole Board doesn't base its decisions solely on whether an inmate has gone through the Assaultive Offender Program.

"It is a slice in the pie that the parole board reviews when making a decision," he said. "It's an important piece, but it's not the only piece."

Marlan, however, acknowledged some problems with the current Assaultive Offender Program.

He said the department is looking at putting together a statewide list of inmates who want to get in the program and is reviewing additional duties of therapists that might prevent them from having more meetings with inmates.

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The inmate treatment bill is Senate Bill 2066.

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