



CITIZENS ALLIANCE ON PRISONS & PUBLIC SPENDING

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Michigan Voters Solidly Support Investment in Crime Prevention, Less Spending on Incarceration

Majority of Voters Statewide Favor Change in Parole Policy

LANSING, MI. – A solid majority of Michigan voters prefer investing *more* resources in crime prevention and *less* on incarceration, according to a recent statewide public opinion poll commissioned by a non-profit citizens' group.

The poll was conducted by the Lansing-based research firm EPIC-MRA for the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPS), which advocates shifting resources now spent on excessive incarceration to services that prevent crime and rehabilitate offenders.

“Many political races we’re monitoring right now may be too close to call, but that is certainly not the case with this poll,” said John Cavanagh, secretary-treasurer of EPIC-MRA. “When it comes to corrections issues, Michigan voters are clearly open to a greater commitment to crime prevention programs, less emphasis on prison spending and the opportunity for prisoners who have paid their debt to society to return to the community.”

Michigan’s prison population has grown from 15,000 to nearly 50,000 in the past two decades. At \$1.7 billion, Corrections’ share of the general fund budget has quadrupled from 5 percent to 20 percent.

Key findings from the EPIC-MRA study show that:

- Corrections ranks lowest among spending priorities.
- Voters favor a change in parole policies that incarcerate thousands of people who could be safely released.
- Early childhood education is viewed as the most effective crime-reducing approach while long prison terms are viewed as the least effective.
- There is strong support for parole of “good” prisoners and for instituting review of parole board decisions.
- Voters prefer non-prison alternatives for technical parole violations.
- Voters agree that parole should be fair and that prison alternatives save money.

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Asked about the effectiveness of approaches to reducing crime, survey respondents placed early childhood education, programs for juvenile offenders, treatment for the mentally ill, reducing high school drop out rates and decreasing child abuse and neglect close together at the top of the list. They consider long prison terms the least effective method of reducing crime.

When asked about their priorities for funding state services, 90 percent of the respondents said K-12 education is a priority, followed by funding for public health, including mental health care and nursing home care for seniors, and local police and fire fighters. Next came colleges and universities, followed by the environment. Corrections, with only 17 percent of respondents calling it a high priority, was at the bottom.

“Michigan’s taxpayers get it. They know that the solution to crime is prevention,” said Barbara Levine, executive director of CAPPs. “This survey shows people realize it makes more sense to invest in getting kids’ lives on track than it does to spend the money on punishment after lives have been derailed.”

The survey also asked questions about parole policies. Of those polled:

- 74 percent favor making parole board decisions subject to review or appeal to ensure fairness.
- 72 percent prefer to have technical parole violators disciplined in the community rather than returned to prison for an average of two years.
- 85 percent say that where there is no evidence that prisoners are currently dangerous, they should be given a second chance when they reach their minimum sentence.

“When someone has served the minimum sentence imposed by the court, society’s need for punishment has been satisfied,” said Levine. “This poll demonstrates that a majority of Michigan voters understand this concept and agree that unless there is evidence that someone still presents a threat to the community, it is a waste of money and lives to continue their incarceration.”

Recommendations for making parole decisions fairer, more cost-effective, and more transparent appear in two recent CAPPs research reports: *No way out: Michigan’s parole board redefines the meaning of ‘life’* and *The high cost of denying parole: an analysis of prisoners eligible for release*. Both are available at www.capps-mi.org.

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[Editor’s note: a copy of the poll executive summary is available at www.capps-mi.org.]