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EPIC ▪ MRA September 2004 Statewide Survey

CAPPS Corrections Issue Questions

Executive Summary

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In its monthly statewide omnibus survey for September 2004, EPIC ▪ MRA included a battery of questions commissioned by the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPS). A total of 610 interviews were conducted between September 15-19, with registered voters in Michigan, geographically stratified to represent the proportional regional vote contribution to a November election vote total in a presidential election year. The survey carries a margin of error of ±4 percent.

The CAPPS question battery was designed to elicit opinion on the funding priority that should be placed on several competing state government programs, as well as to measure respondents' perception of the crime-reducing effectiveness of several approaches to dealing with crime. The survey also measured the public's attitude toward amending the current manner in which the Michigan parole system operates and renders decisions.

As will be illustrated below, the data coming back from this survey clearly demonstrates willingness on the part of the Michigan public to a retooling of the way in which the state deals with its prison population. The state electorate lists "corrections" as last on a list of several state spending priorities, and views "long prison terms" as the least effective of several approaches to reducing crime. Moreover, there is wide acceptance of prison alternatives as a means to more efficiently spend corrections dollars.

Corrections Ranks Lowest Among Spending Priorities

In the ranking of budget priorities, respondents were read a list of six major service areas funded by state dollars. They were asked to rate on a scale of 0 – 10, the level of priority the legislature and the governor should give in funding each named area, with zero being the lowest priority, and ten meaning the highest priority.

The following table shows how respondents rank ordered spending priorities for six different government services:

TOTAL PRIORITY PERCENTAGES

	PRIORITY		TOTAL PRIORITY
	SOME 7-8	HIGH 9-10	
Kindergarten-12 th grade education	23%	67%	90%
Funding for local police and firefighters	43%	41%	84%
Public health, including mental health care and nursing home care for seniors	37%	46%	83%
Colleges and universities	37%	34%	71%
The environment	40%	29%	69%
Corrections	36%	17%	53%

Scores of 7 through 10 were tallied to create a composite "Total Priority" score. As is shown, K-12 education ranks highest on this scale with a total priority score of ninety percent. Conversely, corrections ranks the lowest with fifty-three percent. Perhaps more telling is the relative position

of the K-12 and Corrections service areas when just the very highest, “9 – 10” highest priority scores are compared.

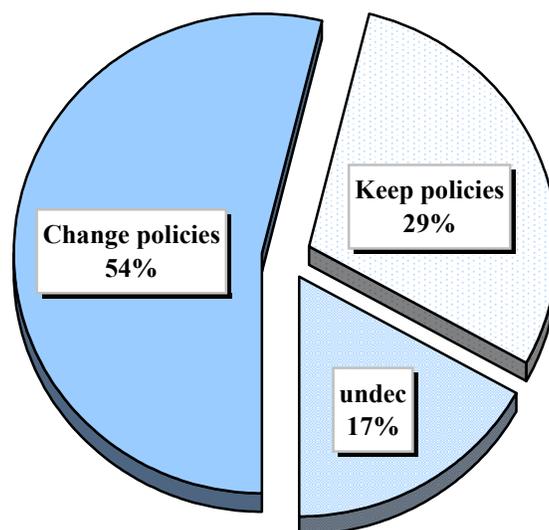
The very last position of corrections, falling better than ten points below the next lowest area of “The environment” strongly suggests that overall, the public might be receptive to a redistribution of budget resources from their mix.

Some subgroups were exceptions to this relative rating position for corrections, giving this government service area composite “Total Priority” numbers much higher than the norm. These groups include: “NASCAR” Females (74%) those in the “North” of Michigan (73%), those in the \$30,000 to \$40,000 household income range (68%), all respondents under 40 years of age (65%), and those who report “Never” attending church services (63%),

Parole Policy Change Favored

The notion that the public would be tolerant of some reordering of budget priorities *viz a vis* corrections is reinforced by data from related questions. For instance, the following question was posed to respondents:

“Michigan spends 1 in every 5 of its general fund dollars, a total of \$1.7 billion, to fund prisons. One important reason for increased prison spending has been the decisions of the parole board, comprised of people who have been appointed by the governor, to keep prisoners locked up. There are about 17,000 people in prison who have been kept past the date when they have completed the minimum sentence required by law. If about 7,200 of these prisoners could be safely released, which would save \$145 million, do you think the Legislature should take action to change the parole board’s policies, or, do you think existing parole policies should be kept?”



As seen from the chart above, a solid majority believe the legislature should step in to alter what is described as an unnecessarily expensive parole board policy of routinely denying parole.

Early Childhood Education Viewed as Most Effective Crime-Reducing Approach – Long Prison Terms, Least Effective

Like the ranking of budget priorities earlier in the survey, respondents were read a list of eight different approaches to reducing crime. They were asked to rate on a scale of 0 – 10, the level of effectiveness they believed each approach had in crime-reduction, with zero being the least effective, and ten meaning the most effective.

The following table shows how respondents rank ordered the effectiveness of eight different approaches to reducing crime:

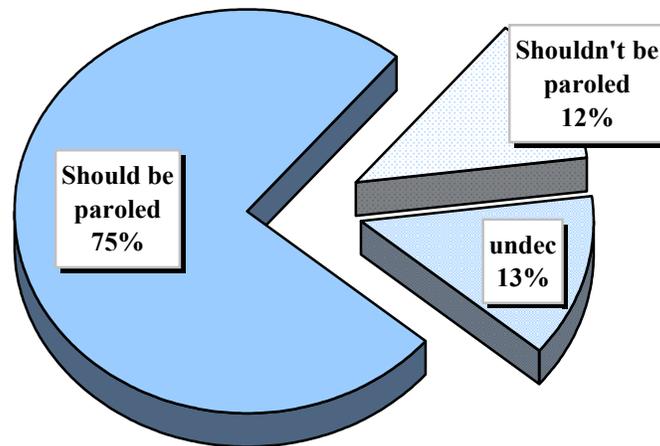
TOTAL EFFECTIVE

	EFFECTIVE		TOTAL EFFECTIVE
	SOME 7-8	EXTREME 9-10	
Early childhood education	30%	48%	78%
Comprehensive programs for juvenile offenders	45%	32%	77%
Increasing the availability of treatment for the mentally ill	39%	37%	76%
Reducing high school truancy and drop out rates	33%	41%	74%
Programs to decrease child abuse and neglect	36%	37%	73%
Substance abuse prevention and treatment	39%	27%	66%
Intensive supervision for probationers	38%	21%	59%
Long prison terms	32%	23%	55%

Some subgroups were exceptions to this relative rating position for long prison terms, giving this crime-reducing approach a composite “Total Effective” numbers much higher than the norm. These groups include: Republican Women (71%), Macomb County residents and GOP men (69%), 30 to 35 year olds and those with household income of \$60,000 to \$75,000 (67%), and those in the “Grand” map region (66%),

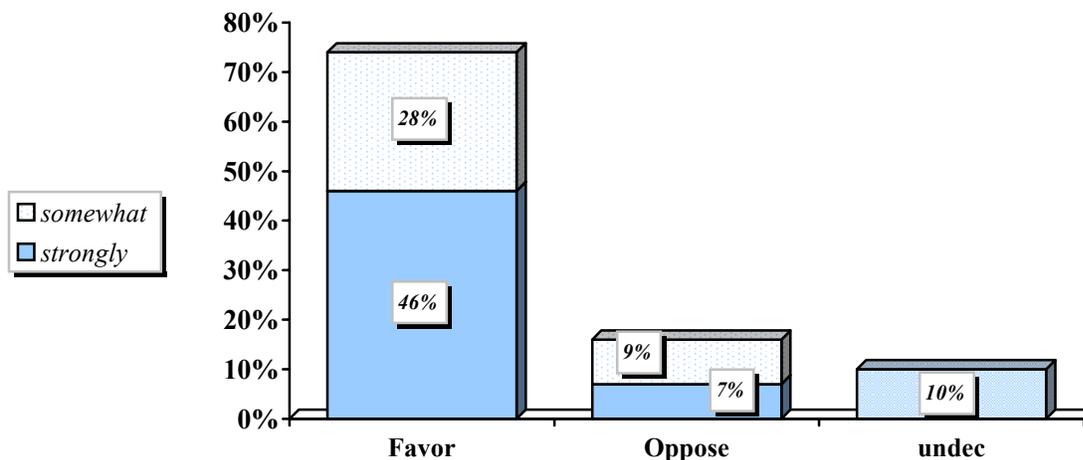
Overwhelming Majority Support for Parole of “Good” Prisoners and for Instituting Review of Parole Board Decisions

By an over three-to-one margin of seventy-five percent to twelve percent, respondents believe parole should be granted to well-behaved prisoners deemed not dangerous, after they have served their minimum sentence.



Those subgroups responding in percentages lower than the norm that prisoners should be paroled after serving their minimum sentence included: 30 to 35 year olds (54%), and those in the Lansing media market and males under 40 (66%)

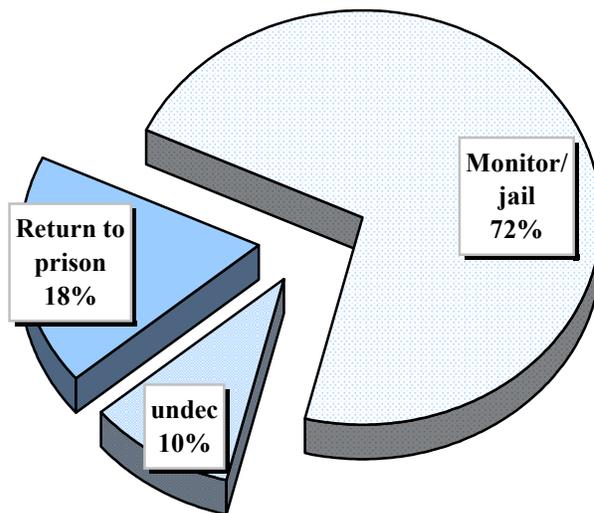
Similarly, an overwhelming majority of respondents favor a proposal that would make parole board decisions, like sentencing decisions rendered by judges, subject to appeal and/or review.



Those subgroups more strongly opposed than the norm to instituting a review process for parole decisions included: Older men (29%), and those in the “North” map region, Republican men, and residents of the Traverse City media market (27%).

Heavy Support for Non-Prison Alternative for Technical Parole Violation

By a wide margin of 72 percent to 18%, respondents chose electronic tether or county jail for 30 days as preferable to a 2-year return to state prison for violation of conditions of parole not involving a crime.



Strong Agreement With Premise That Parole Should be Fair and Prison Alternatives Save Money

Respondents were read a rotated list of statements concerning the circumstances of the granting of parole, as well as statements asserting the cost effectiveness of alternatives to prison. They were then asked to agree or disagree with each of those statements. The following table illustrates the results:

	AGREE		DISAGREE		undec
	<i>strong</i>	Total	<i>strong</i>	Total	
Procedures should exist to make sure parole decisions are fair and impartial	71%	94%	1%	2%	4%
A lot of money could be saved in our prison system if non-violent offenders were sentenced to less expensive alternative sentencing options, such as electronic tethers at their home or work, the use of half-way houses or the use of other non-prison alternatives. Such alternatives should be used whenever possible	60%	85%	4%	11%	4%
Where there is no evidence that they are currently dangerous, people who have served their minimum sentences should be given a second chance	57%	85%	5%	10%	5%
Less money should be spent on prisons and more on crime prevention efforts	45%	75%	6%	17%	8%
Too much money is being spent sending people back to prison, even if they have made technical parole violations	34%	59%	11%	22%	19%

At thirty-two percent Disagree, only the Lansing media market subgroup voiced significantly stronger disagreement with the last statement (Too much money is being spent sending people back to prison ...) than the norm.