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'Watered down' parole and probation reforms fail, but 2 criminal justice bills head to governor's desk

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The Michigan Capitol building on Dec. 17, 2014. (*Tonya Moutzalias / MLive*)

LANSING — Half of [the reforms to Michigan prisons proposed by Rep. Joe Haveman](#) passed the Michigan Senate before the end of the lame-duck session, but the most serious reforms failed.

House Bills [5928](#) and [5929](#) create a Justice Policy Commission to analyze and propose amendments to sentencing guidelines used by judges to sentence convicted criminals and propose minor reforms to the community corrections system. Both those bills passed the Michigan Senate handily Friday morning.

However, reforms to the parole and probation systems in HB [5930](#) and [5931](#) — reforms that Haveman, R-Holland, said [were gutted when they passed the House](#) — failed to pass on the Senate floor.

In an interview with [MLive published Friday](#), Haveman had some parting shots for Attorney General Bill Schuette, saying he bullies those who disagree with him on policy.

"There are some dinosaurs in Lansing ... and we all know what happens to dinosaurs," Haveman said.

The package of four bills was introduced in November and Haveman said at the time they would help Michigan spend less on corrections, the biggest part of the state budget. The package of bills together represented a set of reforms to the criminal justice system that would have allowed certain offenders to leave prison on parole earlier and lessen the amount of time people would spend on probation.

When the bills left the House, Haveman said the reforms to parole and probation “were so watered down no one should be worried about them.”

However, it appeared Schuette was still worried about them. He penned a guest column on MLive that published Thursday that echoed a letter he sent to lawmakers in November, asking them not to pass the bills.

Despite Haveman and other supporters’ contention that the bills have been in the works for years, Schuette continued to say the reforms were being rushed through in the lame-duck session and needed more consideration.

“It is a victory for the safety of Michigan families that the most controversial parts of this package were not rushed though at the last minute, while reasonable legislation, like a new review panel to carefully and publicly look at future prison reforms, was approved,” Schuette said in a statement released Friday morning.

“We will always stand on guard for public safety and will continue to monitor the final language in lame duck legislation for anything which would endanger Michigan residents.”

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