



A safe and just approach to incarceration and second chances

Our faith teaches us that all people are of equal value, are redeemable, and that another person's misfortunes could easily be our own. Unfortunately, Michigan's criminal justice policies do not always reflect these shared values. For example, hundreds of people who have served their minimum sentences and present the lowest risk to public safety remain incarcerated based on the subjective judgments of some parole board members, even though the law requires that parole denials for this group can *only* be for "substantial and compelling reasons."

Not only is this counter to our values; it also wastes millions of taxpayer dollars annually on the incarceration of low-risk prisoners. It is also counterproductive. Longer prison stays weaken family connections and reduce employment opportunities by widening the gap between skills and available jobs, making reintegration to the community more difficult.

It is not just, moral or cost-effective to continue punishing individuals, families and taxpayers longer than necessary with no public safety benefit.

A second chance means meaningful access to jobs

Instead of extending prison stays and throwing up barriers to a successful reentry, we need to focus on helping people rejoin their families, their communities, and the workforce.

Every year 10,000 people return from prison to Michigan communities. Many are unable to find employment due to their criminal records. A number of Michigan employers face a shortage of available workers and would hire a person with a criminal record if given the chance.

For example, health care providers with residential beds are barred from employing someone with a felony record within ten years from the end of the person's sentence—regardless of the facts of the case or what the person has accomplished since. This arbitrary limitation should be removed. Employers already screen potential employees' criminal histories to make decisions about who they can safely hire, and the ban simply substitutes the government's judgment for theirs without any information about a person's fitness or potential role.

Our faith teaches us everyone is created in God's image, is redeemable, and deserves a second chance. Unnecessary bans on employment for people who have served their time does not serve either public safety or justice. It is counter to our deepest values as people of faith and wastes resources that could better be used to heal and strengthen our communities.

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We can be responsible stewards of taxpayer dollars while achieving community safety. We hope you will join us in working to support objective, smart parole policies and the removal of unnecessary barriers to employment.

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