



LOUISIANANS FOR PRISON ALTERNATIVES

Ensuring Effective Community Corrections in Louisiana

After prisoners complete their sentences, probation and community supervision can either provide the structure for a successful transition into the community, or create insurmountable hurdles that encourage recidivism.

Louisiana's current re-entry programming and probation system are inefficient and ineffective.

THE PROBLEM

Inconsistent parole practices lead to inconsistent results. The consequences of violating parole are unpredictable and vary widely across the state. A consistent system with predictable, graduated consequences would more effectively address problem behavior.

No programming. Nearly two-thirds of newly released prisoners leave a facility where there is little – if any – access to programming proven to reduce recidivism. Individuals leaving these facilities generally do not receive treatment for underlying ailments, such as mental illness or substance abuse. They re-enter society without participating in work programs that could provide skills and money for their new start.

Excessive fines and fees set people up for failure. Many people released into community supervision, such as probation, parole and community groups with re-entry services, have agreements that burden them with hefty financial obligations, such as supervision fees and court costs. Louisiana, however, does not determine whether the individual can pay these debts.

People released with higher debt obligations have a greater likelihood of reoffending. Nearly 60 percent of people entering prison have had their community supervision revoked for technical violations such as failure to pay.

Probation officers are overwhelmed. Individuals who successfully fulfill probation obligations should receive credit off of their probation sentence as an incentive to continue the behavior. About 36 percent of probation supervisees in Louisiana are considered low-risk,

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as determined by the state's risk and needs assessment tool. At the same time, the average probation officer's caseload is too large to manage. Providing credit and fast-tracking release from probation incentivizes compliance and allows probation officers the time and resources to focus on those deemed to be at a higher risk of reoffending.

SOLUTIONS

The Louisiana Legislature can ensure effective community corrections by passing the following legislation:

SB 139 (Martiny) – This bill implements what are recognized as the best practices in release and community supervision – practices that can ensure prison cells are reserved only for people convicted of severe offenses. The reform also includes expanding alternatives to incarceration and providing substance abuse and mental health treatment to individuals convicted of a crime.

HB 177 (Moreno) and HB 426 (Marino) – The collateral consequences of felony convictions are mitigated by these bills, which eliminate restrictions for newly released individuals to receive food stamps during their first year and suspends child support while an individual is incarcerated, respectively. They ensure recently released prisoners receive resources and support they need for success and reduce the likelihood of an individual accumulating insurmountable debt during incarceration.

HB 249 (Magee) – This bill ensures an individual's ability to pay is considered when determining his or her financial obligations during community supervision.

HB 519 (Emerson) – This legislation reduces restrictions on occupational licenses and employment that can prevent successful re-entry to society after a person has paid his or her debt to society.

Louisianans for Prison Alternatives (LPA) is a diverse statewide coalition of organizations committed to reducing Louisiana's imprisonment rate. LPA sees an urgent need for the Louisiana State Legislature to pass comprehensive criminal justice reform legislation to make our system more just, accountable and transparent to all Louisianans.