



News Release

CONTACT:

Sen. Bishop's Office: Dennis Darnoi

515-373-2417

Barbara Levine

or Gail R. Light

(517) 482-7753

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 20, 2005

CAPPSS/AFSC report on Assaultive Offender Program spurs action

Sen. Bishop's bill to save money by making prisoner treatment available before parole decision

LANSING – A bill designed to reduce prison spending by making treatment programs available before prisoners complete their minimum sentences has been introduced by Sen. Michael Bishop, R-Rochester.

Bishop's bill follows a report released today by the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPSS) and the American Friends Service Committee, Criminal Justice Program (AFSC). The report highlights problems with the Michigan Department of Corrections' (MDOC) year-long group therapy program for assaultive offenders that cause paroles to be delayed.

Senate Bill 2066 would prohibit the parole board from denying release to a prisoner solely for failure to complete a program if the program was not available in time or if the prisoner did not meet the criteria for participation. The proposed legislation also requires the state to maintain a statewide roster of prisoners waiting for entrance into various programs and transfer them to prisons where the programming is available in time to complete the therapy before parole eligibility.

"My proposed legislation will reduce wasteful spending and help ease the crowded conditions in Michigan prisons by bringing uniformity and consistency to a process lacking in both categories," said Bishop. "As highlighted in the report, administrative reforms to the assaultive offender program can save Michigan taxpayers up to \$17 million in prison costs."

(MORE)

The proposed law would also allow the board to defer a parole decision up to three months to permit a prisoner to complete the program in which he or she is already enrolled, and to allow completion of the program in the community to be made a condition of parole.

The CAPPs/AFSC study, called *Penny-Wise and Pound-Foolish: Assaultive offender programming and Michigan's prison costs*, is available at the CAPPs website: www.capps-mi.org.

Among the findings:

- Prisoners are frequently denied parole for failing to complete a treatment program they could not access.
- The parole board estimates that 1,440 prisoners enrolled in the program will have their release decisions deferred in 2005, many for six, seven or eight months, until therapy termination reports are available.
- Prisoners nearing their release dates are commonly housed at facilities where the treatment is not even provided.
- There are 2,256 prisoners on waiting lists who have already passed or are within one year of reaching their first parole dates.

Further, the report said, 1,500 prisoners who have completed the program have been denied parole. The parole board's decisions are contrary to positive assessments from MDOC therapists, but without a process for reviewing parole board decisions, it is impossible to determine the extent to which parole-eligible prisoners remain incarcerated unnecessarily. Bishop's bill would also create an administrative review process when the parole board's decision is inconsistent with a therapy termination report or other psychological evaluations.

Finally, the report noted that higher security level prisoners are not offered the therapy. Many are required to finish their maximum sentences and then leave prison without having received treatment and without parole supervision in the community. The report recommends providing assaultive offender programming to all prisoners who need it.

"The problem is not new," said CAPPs Executive Director Barbara Levine. "A 2000 Auditor General's Performance Audit examined the waiting list in 1998 and cited the Department of Corrections for not providing all eligible prisoners with an opportunity to participate in AOP. The audit also noted the correlation between completing the program and the potential for parole. It pointed out the cost-efficiency of parole over incarceration. Clearly, the increasing urgency of resolving the state's financial crisis has now brought this issue back to the forefront."

#####

Because policy choices, not public safety, have caused our prison population to explode, CAPPs advocates re-examining those policies and shifting our resources to public services that prevent crime, rehabilitate offenders, and address the needs of all our citizens in a cost-effective manner.