



# News Release

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

Nov. 12, 2003

**CONTACT: BARBARA LEVINE**

517-482-7753

## **Data analysis of parole-eligible prisoners shows increased parole denials not cost-effective**

LANSING — Thousands of prisoners in the state's correctional system who have already served the minimum sentence required by law could safely be released now and save the state tens of millions of dollars in prison operating costs.

That is the major conclusion drawn from an analysis of prisoner data released today by the Citizens Alliance on Prisons and Public Spending (CAPPS). CAPPS members are organizations and individuals who believe that public resources now spent on unneeded prisons should be redirected to services that prevent crime and rehabilitate offenders.

"At a time when the state has had to cut \$900 million out of its current budget and is now being forced to absorb another \$925 million shortfall, a savings equivalent to operating seven prisons would give the state more choices," said CAPPS Executive Director Barbara Levine. "We must ask ourselves if keeping thousands of men and women in prison who have served their time and who present no significant risk to the community is cost-effective."

Levine said changes in parole policy over the past decade have contributed significantly to the skyrocketing prisoner population and corrections spending in Michigan.

"Changing the makeup of the parole board in 1992 from civil service corrections professionals to political appointees resulted in the parole grant rate dropping from 68 percent to 48 percent and is keeping 35 percent of the state's prison population behind bars after parole could have been ordered," she said.

The prisoner database was purchased by CAPPS from the Michigan Department of Corrections (MDOC). Results of the analysis are published in a report entitled: "*The high cost of denying parole: an analysis of prisoners eligible for release.*" (An executive summary of the report is attached to this release. The full report is available on the CAPPS' website: [www.capps-mi.org](http://www.capps-mi.org).)

The 17,129 state prisoners eligible for parole on May 6, 2003, were studied to identify patterns that might explain why they had not been released. The basic background factors examined were current age, age at offense, race, gender, sentencing county, type of offense, prior criminal record, security classification, institu-

(MORE)

## 2 of 2 -- CAPPS release on data report

tional misconduct history, parole guidelines score and length of time served.

Four groups were identified: Those who had been granted parole but had not yet left prison (1,428); those who had been returned to prison for technical parole violations (3,645); those who had been denied parole and were past their earliest release dates (11,223); and parolable lifers (834).

“Savings could be realized in each of the groups if only a percentage were paroled,” said Levine. “The data suggests that even by the parole board’s own guidelines, at least some of these prisoners could be released without undue risk to the public.”

“Over 950 prisoners have actually been granted parole but, inexplicably, their release dates have been set for months into the future. More than 3,600 have been paroled already and returned to prison for violating the terms of supervision, not committing new crimes. Hundreds of parolable lifers are being denied the meaningful review their sentencing judges expected. And it appears that in thousands of cases the parole board is not denying release based on post-sentencing conduct or actual risk assessment but on its own reaction to the offense. In these cases, the parole board is effectively engaged in resentencing,” she said.

Using conservative budget figures and data-driven analyses of each group of parole-eligible prisoners, CAPPS estimates that 7,200 of the eligible prisoners could be released now saving the state about \$145 million.

As a result of the findings, CAPPS recommends a number of changes in parole policy. They include:

- Establish a statutory presumption of parole at the judicially-imposed minimum unless the prisoner’s institutional conduct or current risk to the public warrants denial.
- Develop parole guidelines that complement the sentencing guidelines. This would decrease the weight given by the parole board to factors such as the crime and prior record that were already used by the sentencing judge to set the minimum sentence.
- Permit judicial review of parole decisions that depart from the parole guidelines or are based on factual errors.
- Limit the amount of additional time technical parole violators can be required to serve.

“The parole board’s task is a difficult one by any measure. It is also fraught with subjectivity. The controlling statute says the board must have reasonable assurance the prisoner will not become a menace to society if released. Thirteen years ago a different board believed it met that standard by granting parole 68 percent of the time. The current parole board’s 48 percent grant rate suggests a very different interpretation of what assurance is reasonable. Paroling less than half the prisoners currently eligible for release would arguably strike a fair and cost-effective balance between the two extremes,” Levine said.

#####

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.