

STATEVILLE SPEAKS

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE • SPRING 2016

By Jean Snyder

“The 15/50 Initiative,” is the name that Project I-11 has given to our proposal that aims to shorten the lengthy sentences of prisoners who can show that they deserve to be released early. The 15/50 Initiative allows prisoners to petition for earned release if they have served at least 15 consecutive years and are at least 50 years old.

Now Project I-11 may have an unexpected ally: a high-powered group that Governor Bruce Rauner tapped to

SEE ALLY , PAGE 2

Welcome to the Spring 2016 edition of Stateville Speaks. It is with cautious optimism that we lead with hope for elder relief. While there have been tremendous efforts put forth in WKH SDVW ZLWK ¿QGLQJ VROXWLRQV WR WKH RYHUFURZG-ing of Illinois prisons, especially by those with the slightest risk of ever re-offending-the older inmate, it has still been a slow go.

In my short time with Stateville Speaks I have seen 3 other bills drafted and presented for elder release, only to have them die or sit stagnant. While the efforts for elder release, compassionate release and second chances are slow to materialize, there are many people, on the outside, that are still very much dedicated to making it a reality. Many of the best legal minds, scholars and activists are extremely FRPPLWWHG WR ¿QGLQJ D ZD\ WR DPHQG VRPH RI the pointless, Draconian laws that would embar rass other “free” nations. Many legislators are also on board.

So while I urge caution in putting too much hope in any one piece of legislation, I also urge you not to give up hope. Since change never happens on its own I strongly encourage you (and your friends and family) to be heard. Write (or call) your legislator and express support of HB6579.

While we are a little behind in some pretty big updates, a settlement for increased mental healthcare, lawsuit on the use of solitary, increase of help, such as medical care upon release and many more, we have so many great submissions that we needed to share. So we will pick up where we left off in the next edition. In the meantime, thank you for all of your thoughtful work, keep it coming. Additionally, thank you for your kind letters, cards and for opening

By Dawn Larsen

As you may recall Stateville Speaks (Fall, 2015) reported on past efforts made in Illinois to decriminalize someone caught with small amounts of marijuana and instead be charged of such a change, House Bill 218 was vetoed by Governor Rauner last August. Along with that veto, the governor did give Congress special consideration with regards to passing such a law in Illinois.

As we previously reported “Rauner said while he supports the “fundamental purposes” of keeping people out of jail and cutting court costs, any change “must be made carefully and incrementally.” Even though House Bill 218 formally died in

DQG ÷ QHG FLYLOO\ +RZHYHU WKH PDLQ SURSRQHGW
FL ÷ F UHFRPPHQGDWLRQV DV WR ZKDW WKH JRYHUQRU

FRVWV VXFK D VLJQL ÷ FDQW FKDQJH LQ GUXJ ODZV



“ALL PENALTIES SHALL BE DETERMINED ...WITH THE OBJECTIVE OF RESTORING THE OFFENDER TO USEFUL CITIZENSHIP .”

- ILLINOIS CONSTITUTION , ARTICLE 1, SECTION 11, BILL OF RIGHTS

Dear Readers,

As a resident of this state, that is currently longer place their own needs above that of society. One must also keep in mind that it has been an offender, serving a life without the possibility of parole sentence – I write to inquire upon you noted the recidivism rate for offenders who have belief system with regard to the above caption served over 25 years consecutively is approximately which clearly states... the “objective” in themately .02% nationwide.

determination of sentencing is to be able to return the offender

EDFN WR VRFLHW \ GRHV LW QRW "

Well – it would appear that somewhere along the way, the legislature has either overlooked or completely ignored this part of (our) State Constitution, which makes one ponder the question – was it purposely pushed aside out of fear and cynicism (due to the “get tougher on crime” phase) rather than

WR VWDQG ¿ UP LQ IDLUQHVV DQG LQ-
tegrity to the constitutional prin-
FLSOHV "

Illinois may have taken a step forward and became a national leader Of personal note...what many people are in abolishing the death sentence – but it took unaware of is that only offenders with deter 2 steps backward when it replaced it with the in appropriate sentences are able to earn “good credit with deter HT “other death penalty” known as life (without the possibility of parole) sentence. We now must

DVN WKH TXHVWLRQV ± LV LW MXVWL¿HG QRW WR HYHQ
consider the possibility of restoring those who have been incarcerated for at least a quarter of a century (25 years or longer) that have at least reformed themselves, and no longer pose any

WKUHDW WR VRFLHW \ "
According to (our) state constitution, I’d have to say NO – it’s time for legislature to return to upholding the principles set forth within LW :KDW GR \RX VD \ " & RPPXWH DOO OLIH ZLWKRXW
parole) sentences to “25 years to life” and legislature will once again be in compliance and conformity of the state constitutional principles of returning its citizens back to society, at any time after serving a minimum of 25 years.

While it is important that we remember that most lifers are incarcerated for violent crimes, it is also essential to remember that the majority were also in their early twenties and now are seniors between 50 – 60 years of age, thus no longer pose a threat to anyone, and no



By Steven L. Zirko

The jurisprudence system is dedicated to making a mistake (usually unknowingly) he ruins promoting a state of fear in the population – peoples lives or kills them, and rightfully gets under the guise of promoting safety. Thereof, and criminal charges may or may not be revolutionary reform must occur within the preferred. This M.D. carries medical malpractice jurisprudence system in the State of Illinois insurance, which is remarkably expensive. Whereas the current conditions that exist in Why so expensive – because it is utilized often. no way resemble any portion of the illustrious Therefore, an M.D. makes a mistake, ruins a work promulgated by the founding fathers, in person's life and is held accountable. A prosecutor, any part of Article III and the Bill of Rights, and a judge make a mistake, ruin a person's of Rights of the United States Constitution. In life, and zero accountability exists. How is this point of fact, the current criminal and civil laws rendered in the State of Illinois are antithetical. What the readers and Northeastern students and in contravention of the framers intent of students and all students may or may not be aware fairness and equality.

Thereof, right now in the State of Illinois convictions are handed down daily. No way... there exists prosecutorial immunity and judicial immunity. This has been in place for over forty years, therein a prosecutor and a judge can, and do, surreptitiously convict someone they suspect or know to be innocent and absolutely nothing can be done to them upon such proof of actual innocence and/or proof of foreknowledge of such exculpatory exonerative evidence, i.e. DNA – forensic conclusions that prove innocence. There is zero accountability.

Prosecutors cannot be sued in civil court for malicious and wrongful prosecution or what is called prosecutorial aggrandizement, and zero criminal charges can ever be sought against them. Now when a medical doctor botches it...

FDQ \RX" 7KH DXWKRU

TEENAGE (FIRST TIME) VIOLENT OFFENDERS

By Kwayera Kasiya

In light of the conversation being had ever having taken themselves through that men with time, which isn't to say that this should amongst the legislature on criminal justice retail and emotional gauntlet from within that's EH DQ DXWRPDWLF MXVWL ¿ FD form, I fear there's a segment of prisoners with imperative to any substantive revisions. The from prison. I am saying that far too many teen viable arguments for being worthy of a second result: more recidivism. Meanwhile, those of DJH DQG RWKHU ¿ UVW WLPH Y chance at life, who is without representation. As who truly rue the negative effect our poobeen shown an ingenious proclivity to right it stands currently, talks are primarily focused choices had on others, those who have paid their wrongs. We've tried all we know 4[(with aytua on affording only non-violent offenders with JUHDW SHQDQFH E \ VHUYL Called Violent Offenders DW DPRXQWV RI avenues through which they can integrate back years behind bars, we will continue to be passed into society. But to concentrate solely on that over due to the stigma attached to releasing so-section of offenders without also considering called violent offenders from prison.

others who may have a violent offense attached If allowed, it can be shown that teenage to their names – but haven't demonstrated pa DQG RWKHU ¿ UVW WLPH YLROHQW RIIHQGHUV ZKR YH thology in violence, nor have they led violent been imprisoned for extended periods of time lifestyles – is to ignore, what should be, the aren't the proverbial dangers society needs to purpose for providing prisoners with second be invariably protected from. Many of us are FKDQFHV LQ WKH ¿ UVW SO With but a background that's marred by a his-

A second chance at life should not be cortory of violence; there wasn't this pathology of tingent exclusively on whether or not someone destructive behavior where we went around ter has committed a violent offense. It should also orizing our communities. For whatever poor account for those who exhibit traits best suited choices we made that lead to our incarceration, for constructive citizenship once released. E we are settling our debt by being locked away ther we are a nation who believes in second for decades. But should we be cast away for chances or we're not. By limiting these chances H YHU " (YHQ WKR VH RI XV ZKR ZHUH FKLOGUHQ DW to only non-violent offenders it eliminates the the time of our offense (and yes an 18 year old mechanism that gauges whether a person has still a child in spite of the partition lawmakers actually learned from their poor choices, wheth use to separate juveniles from adults), whatever er he or she has actually gone through the ps y destructive behavior we may've exhibited in chological reconstruction involved with consti-youth can be attributed to our precocious minds. tutional changes.

And after years of incarceration, studies

And offenders can be released without have shown these behavioral issues subside

By Tammy Englerth

I am just an ordinary woman like every-one else; a woman sitting in a cell looking out the window wondering what happened, trying my best to make everyday a better one. People think that since you're locked up your voice isn't heard. I have so much determination to help others; no walls will stop my voice. We're human, just because we made a mistake doesn't mean you give up. It makes you stronger.

I wake up each day wondering who I can write to to have my voice heard. People come and go out of prison every day. Some of us are waiting to have that chance to make a difference. Even though you're locked up doesn't mean you can't make a difference. Programs, schooling, groups, etc... I am determined to be a domestic violence motivational speaker so what happened to me won't happen to others, so I joined a club called Toastmasters. It helps



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