

Rodney Applington, M38962
2600 N Brinton Avenue
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September 2, 2015

The Honorable Bruce Rauner
Governor of Illinois
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Senator John J Cullerton
President of the Senate
327 Capital Building
Springfield, IL 62706

Representative Michael J. Madigan
Illinois Speaker of the House
300 State House
Springfield, IL 62706

Roger Heaton
Chairman, Illinois State Commission on Criminal
Justice and Sentencing Reform
300 West Adams Street, Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60606

Subject: Illinois Prison Reform

Dear Governor Rauner, President Cullerton, Speaker Madigan and Chairman Heaton:

Governor Rauner, you declared earlier this year in your state address that our prison system is broke. It is broken because:

- It comprises too much of our struggling budget
- Sentences are too easily and numerously issued instead of non-prison alternatives for first time or low-level offenders
- Very little programs are offered in Illinois prisons toward true reform
- The parole system is too employee-laden, expensive, and often bent toward violating some prisoners unnecessarily versus trying to make them succeed.

Since the prison system is broke, it is good a Commission has been appointed for its needed reform. This letter offers a simple yet perhaps a powerful transformative solution to prison reform for your consideration. It zeros in on the current mentality and everyday practices of IDOC from its top echelon of leaders to the everyday correctional officers, counselors and other workers of its employ. A solution offered among other needed solutions is.

All IDOC employees must become more virtuous role models and proactively inspire and inculcate prisoners with a hopeful vision that they can become better people who can contribute positively to society upon their release.

At present, can IDOC honestly say they are equally committed and even passionate about true prisoner reform as they are about bringing needed correction and security to daily living? How can prisoners possibly be more virtuous apart from virtuous IDOC models and their ongoing helpful instruction toward this end.

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This solution could easily be dismissed for a variety of reasons. One objection could be, “We need more employees to achieve this or added resource funding.” This however, is not essentially about more employees or funding, but about a mind-set and daily practice change toward prisoners.

To illustrate this point from another venue, consider two school teachers of the same grade who receive exactly the same amount of money, resources and quality of students. The first teacher has a detached, negative, non-inspiring approach to their students. Conversely, the second teacher is engaged, positive, and inspiring to their students. It is a no-brainer which class will wither and which will flourish. It has nothing to do with the amount of teachers or money or resources but their radically different mindsets and practices.

Though there are certainly differences between a non-prison school room and a prison context, the principle seen in the above illustration is still transferrable assuming its needed prison contextualizations. IDOC can tend toward teacher number one or teacher two. If IDOC becomes more engaged, positive and inspires true prisoner reform, reduction of recidivism, prison costs and a host of other positives can unfold toward prison reform.

How Can Such a Solution Practically Be Implemented?

1) Revised IDOC Mission Statement—IDOC can make prisoner reform equally prominent as correction and maintaining security.

2) IDOC must regularly equip its employees to be two-dimensional to fulfill its mission—Arguably, most IDOC employees approach prisoners in a one-dimensional manner (correction and security) only. Furthermore, while there are employees who are marked by solid virtue and encourage prisoners toward being better people, a great deal of IDOC employees are apathetic and think and relate to prisoners with a smug indifference. They are sadly the opposite of moral paragons not to be emulated by prisoners.

The leadership of IDOC should be urged to adopt a robust commitment to a two-dimensional approach (correction/security and true prisoner reform) and instill this as a shared responsibility for all its employees. What kind of employee training and concerted efforts can IDOC honestly say it regularly conducts? Is it a one or two-dimensional approach?

3) Key IDOC personnel must become constructively and regularly engaged with prisoners—Overall, constructive engagement between the leadership and employees of IDOC and its prisoners is largely non-existent. Could this be a missing vital link toward prison reform? Why cannot capable representatives of IDOC regularly engage prisoners to inspire and instruct them toward being better virtuous people and see the benefits thereof? Why cannot the IDOC offer a vision of hope even in the midst of necessary correction?

As an example of how this might be applied, are prisons maximizing the utilization of their auditoriums for prison reform? Capable IDOC representatives could gather with prisoners for constructive venues oriented toward prison reform. If prisoners actually sensed a genuine concern from IDOC toward their self-betterment and future societal success, they will largely embrace such efforts. This kind of constructive engagement will surely be a win-win situation for both the state and prisoners.

It is an axiom that machines, systems and organizations will produce “exactly” what they are “designed” to produce. For far too long IDOC has been “designed” to be “one-dimensional”, producing a broken system of recidivism.

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Governor, Illinois Legislators and Prison Reform Commission, please embrace a two-dimensional approach and help IDOC to integrate it into its mission and everyday practices.

Sincerely,


Rodney Applington

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September 4, 2015

Illinois Criminal Justice Information Authority
300 W. Adams St., Suite 200
Chicago IL 60606

Re: Prison/Sentencing Reform

To the Honorable Members of the Criminal Justice Information Authority Board:

I'm sorry I was unable to attend the recent Public Hearing Meeting but I would still like to address the commission by writing this letter to voice my concerns and opinions in regard to prison and sentencing reform that is being reviewed by your committee. As a concerned citizen and mother of a young man who is incarcerated, I take great interest in this subject. I never really paid much attention to the prison system or sentencing laws until a tragedy hit me personally and a prison sentence was imposed upon my son.

My son was involved in a tragic accident and charged with an aggravated DUI/reckless homicide. My son is a first time offender and was given a 9 year sentence (of which he is to serve 85%). We all know (including my son) that he broke the law and deserves to be punished, but a first time offender with no criminal background to receive such a harsh sentence is beyond our understanding.

My son is a loving, caring young man and the father of a 4 year old boy. He made a very poor and tragic error in judgment when he decided to get behind the wheel after having a few beers while on the golf course with some friends. He did not go out to intentionally harm anyone. I am not minimizing his conduct, dismiss his poor judgment, or devalue the fact that a life was lost, but it was an accident. Yes, an accident that could have been prevented, but still an accident. He did not go out to purposely harm anyone. This was a horrible tragedy that he is sickened by and one he will pay for throughout the rest of his life.

I read that Governor Rauner stated that he would like to reduce the prison population causing him to form this committee to review the prison system with efforts toward the reduction of the prison population. I understand that much of the focus on prison/sentence reform is on non-violent drug offenses, but I ask that you also look at how some crimes, especially aggravated DUI, are categorized and the sentences that are determined for them.

Aggravated DUI is categorized as a **violent crime** because alcohol and/or drugs are involved. Reckless homicide is **not** categorized as a violent crime, although the results of the crime are basically the same; someone was driving recklessly and it cost someone their life. Those charged with reckless homicide are eligible to receive supplemental sentence credit if they participate in various educational classes and substance abuse programs. Those who are charged with aggravated DUI are again categorized as a violent crime and are not allowed to receive supplemental credit, no matter how many classes they take or how hard they work toward rehabilitation. They are to serve 85% with no reduction

in their prison sentence. How can a prisoner in this situation be motivated to rehabilitate themselves if the system doesn't work with them?

My son has been imprisoned for over 2 years now and has attended AA, NA, 12-Step Classes, and Redirection Classes in an effort to try to understand how he got to the place he is today and work to rehabilitate himself. Not all inmates have the attitude my son does, to change; but for those who do want to change and rehabilitate, why doesn't the system recognize this and offer sentence reduction credit to them? What incentive do they have to work toward recovery? Isn't this in part what the prison system is set up to do, rehabilitate? Even if supplemental sentence credit is offered to first time offenders – Give them an incentive to take the classes toward rehabilitation and earn sentence reductions. If they return to the penitentiary after being released, then they forfeit their ability to receive the supplemental sentence credit again.

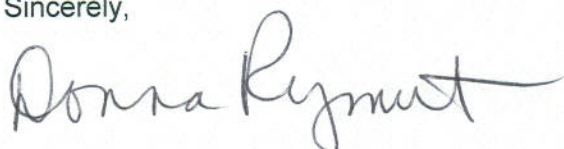
Secondly, I'm trying to understand why an aggravated DUI is categorized as a violent crime. I consider violent crime to be murder, rape, kidnapping, assault. These are intentional and most of the time premeditated violent acts. My son did not get in the car with the thought that he is going to go and intentionally kill someone. Unfortunately, he did not think, but it wasn't that he acting in a violent manner. In the most recent case in Illinois involving Police Officer Servin who shot and killed a woman by firing his gun into a crowd, the state charged him with Involuntary Manslaughter instead of Murder. It was indicated that the reason the state chose Involuntary Manslaughter over Murder was because they said Officer Servin "intentionally fired his weapon, but there was not an intent to kill. He was reckless in shooting into a crowd, firing his gun on purpose but in a reckless manner, but there was no intent to kill." My son too acted in a reckless manner, not in a violent manner in which he has been charged with a violent crime.

The government and judicial system is concerned with recidivism. Many of those charged with Aggravated DUI's may be afflicted by an addiction, not a violent personality. By charging them with a violent crime and imposing long, harsh sentences on people without allowing credit for them to reform is taking all their incentive and hope for a second chance away. If he's working to change his life around, it's because he doesn't want to be a prisoner any longer and he's working to fight his addiction and get out of prison. For those who don't care to take classes and rehabilitate themselves, it's probably because they are the ones that don't care and will reenter the system 2 – 3 years after they've been released because this is the type of life they have chosen to live. But for those who are working toward rehabilitation, shouldn't they receive some type of motivation, incentive or help?

I am asking to please consider my notions about removing an aggravated DUI from a violent crime category. It is still a felony charge which can be punishable by imprisonment, but it offers the offender a chance for rehabilitation and restitution. People who are charged with a crime of DUI, whether it is due to drugs or alcohol, should be required to attend AA and/or NA meetings and work toward rehabilitation. If they are working to fight their addiction, why couldn't they receive credit for this to give them the incentive to change their life. Isn't this part of the reason people are put into prison – for reform? And I ask that you consider expanding good time credit to those who have been or are working toward rehabilitation, and overturning the percentage of time served to reduce population and overcrowding of our prisons. I believed that the Department of Corrections is there not only to punish a criminal, but also to rehabilitate and 'Correct' the behavior of the accused, not destroy them or their families in the process.

Thank you for your time and I welcome your response to my views and your perspective.

Sincerely,



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September 9, 2015

The Honorable Bruce Rauner
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Senator John J Cullerton
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327 Capital Building
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Representative Michael J. Madigan
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Roger Heaton
Chairman, Illinois State Commission on Criminal
Justice and Sentencing Reform
300 West Adams Street, Suite 200
Chicago, IL 60606

Subject: Illinois Prison Reform

Dear Governor Rauner, President Culleton, Speaker Madigan and Chairman Heaton:

This letter builds upon the foundation of my first letter, which centered upon IDOC moving from being one-dimensional (focusing solely on correction) to becoming two-dimensional and equally focusing on restoration. The aim of this letter is to offer one more practical suggestion, which will ensure restoration, reduce recidivism, and thus reduce the cost of the prison system. The idea is very simple: IDOC should make one warden position in every prison a designated Warden of Restoration.

The Wardens of Restoration would be exclusively committed to inculcating a mentality of restoration among all prison employees, which will be a major task and paradigm shift. They would need the full support of the other wardens and key leaders of their respective prison. Working in such close partnership, the Wardens of Restoration will provide multiple venues for inmates to work on needed personal transformation toward restoration with their family and society.

Imagine the following scenario of a newly appointed Warden of Restoration addressing inmates in person for the first time saying the following:

"We want you to know that IDOC is equally committed to your correction, but also your restoration. We want to proactively help you become better men and women. You, however, have to decide if you want to sink or swim. But it is our responsibility to throw you a life preserver. It is our responsibility to society to say we have sought to send you back to them better than you were when you came to prison. We realize IDOC has not been functioning with this restorative mentality largely for a longtime. It is time for a needed change to begin. We hope you will actively partner with us toward your restoration.

How would inmates respond to such a personal presentation filled with a hopeful vision? The shock would likely be tremendous, as it is largely a foreign approach from which they have known in IDOC. But it would be welcomed and instill an immediate sense of hope and motivation to work toward self-development for many inmates.

Virtue Based Instruction for Restoration

The reason why inmates are incarcerated is precisely because they violated a moral or societal norm. At the heart of restoration, then, must be a developmental virtue. The Wardens of Restoration must be at the helm modeling and instilling such virtue.

For far too long virtue is relegated only to the religious sphere by IDOC. But this is not enough on its own. Confucius is widely known not for establishing a religion, but an ethical system rooted in vital societal virtues. China in his day, was embroiled in endless brutal feudal warfare. Crime and chaos reigned supreme. But Confucius realized bad men could not change without becoming good men. Over time, it was the force of his virtuous system that overcame China's corrupted leaders and their citizens, not physical force. Ideas and virtues continue to be the most powerful weapons for changing society for good if utilized effectively.

While the Confucian ethical system is not being advocated for IDOC, it serves as a powerful example of the power and necessity for virtuous development and practice. Virtues such as honesty, respect, selflessness, forgiveness, diligence, etc., are the kinds of virtues that IDOC must learn to model and inculcate. The Wardens of Restoration can truly be a catalyst for inmate self-development toward restoration through the propagation of vital virtues.

How can such virtues be taught practically? At present, there is largely zero interaction between the wardens and inmates in both formal and informal settings. The Wardens of Restoration will need to have an active purposeful presence in both settings routinely. Using the auditorium, the Wardens of Restoration can have a monthly formal gathering with all the inmates (though broken down to groups of 150-300 depending on prison population and other factors) and focus on a given virtue. Such talks must be inspirational, thought provoking and practical. If so, they will engender self-reflection and action steps for inmates to process into their life practices.

Virtue-based transformation toward restoration can also be self-guided. The Wardens of Restoration can develop materials that inmates can process toward their betterment. Resources that inmates can purchase on their own for self-development can also be provided.

These are but a couple of examples of how vital virtues can be taught. There are manifold additional ways or venues by which this can be achieved with some strategic thinking.

Restoration-Based Performance Reviews

Like every job, areas evaluated in job performance reviews indicate the true priorities and expectations of the organization. In order for restoration to become an equal value as IDOC's commitment to correction, aspects of restoration will need to be part of job evaluations. This will likely include broad aspects for everyone and particularized one based upon the kind of employee. The Wardens of Restoration will play a vital role in establishing meaningful and achievable criteria for the employees of IDOC to annually carry out toward restoring inmates. This of course assumes they will nurture and equip employees accordingly.

Pilot Program Proposal

If the value for establishing a Warden of Restoration for every Illinois prison is embraced conceptually, why not institute a pilot program among three to four men and women prisons! Representatives from these prisons can form a consortium and learn from each other's successes and failures and encourage one another. Upon completion of a pilot program, the consortium can bring a formal report of accomplishments and if there is strong merit for IDOC to institute a Warden of Restoration in every prison.

Conclusion

A Warden of Restoration is a simple, concrete idea, which will provide a significant step toward a needed balance between (correction) and (restoration) for IDOC. It can be a win-win-win for IDOC, its inmates and society.

There are plenty of questions that an idea like this can raise. We are happy to offer further practical ideas for the implementing of this proposal. Furthermore, any objections or concerns are welcomed and hopefully are answerable in satisfactory ways.

Trusting you will give due consideration to this proposal and even find it helpful in how to bring needed reform to our prison system.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Rod Applington". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Rod Applington