



Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration
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Governor Rick Snyder

The Michigan Collaborative to End Mass Incarceration (MI-CEMI) is writing to you today to ask that you do all you can, as Governor, to reduce Michigan's prison population. You, and you alone, have the power to commute sentences, and we are asking you to exercise that power more often and more generously.

The Collaborative represents more than 40 member/supporting organizations as well as hundreds of individuals. Our goal is to promote policy and program changes that will substantially reduce Michigan's prison population by (1) reducing the number of people admitted to prison, (2) reducing the length of stay for those sentenced to prison, (3) improving conditions of confinement for those who are incarcerated, and (4) reducing the number of people who return to prison. We recognize that in order to achieve these goals, many people must play a role.

We share your desire for a safer, stronger Michigan. We commend you for your strong support of services to victims of crime, rehabilitative programming within our prisons, changes that will keep more of our young people out of prison, improvements in Michigan's indigent defense system, support for exonerates, and reform of probation violation sanctions. We are pleased that Director Heidi Washington, the legislature, and the Indigent Defense Commission are responding to those challenges and enacting positive changes.

There are hundreds of men and women who have been incarcerated in Michigan's prisons for decades. In some cases, they were incarcerated as teenagers or very young adults, and we all know that an immature mind is not a permanent condition. Many have completed a host of programs and some have even managed to earn postsecondary degrees. These are notable accomplishments since the department denies lifers and long termers access to most programs. There may have been mitigating circumstances related to some of these crimes, which were never given adequate consideration. In some cases, the convicted person may have been present when a crime was committed, but never participated in a violent act. People can and do change; it is unlikely that many of these men and women resemble who they were decades ago.

All of us have done things that we seriously regret. None of us deserves to have our entire life measured by the worst thing we have ever done.

We know that people convicted of serious crimes such as homicide and sex offenses have the lowest recidivism rates of any released prisoners. Someone whose sentence is commuted would automatically receive the support and supervision of a parole agent. We see no reason to wait until someone is terminally ill to consider his or her release.

Since the Parole Board plays a key role in the commutation process, it may be necessary to add members to the board, as has been done in the past, in order to handle the workload associated with a more robust commutation program. That would be a worthwhile investment.

As with all serious decisions, there is some risk associated with releasing a person from prison. We believe many of our long-incarcerated citizens are worth that risk and deserve a second chance. Leadership demands courage. We are asking you to demonstrate courage by giving these people a chance to become contributing members of their families and communities.

Sincerely,

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