

Today I am representing families of incarcerated people, but i have been an advocate since my husband was incarcerated, nearly ten years ago. I worked with Rep. Suzi Wizowaty when she began VCJR, and was on their board of directors up until Tom Dalton became executive director. I have been a volunteer with the Brattleboro Community Justice Center for three years, including working on COSA panels, which is a program for high-risk formerly incarcerated people.

My husband is one of the people that will lose earned good time if S.18 goes through. He has 7.5 years left to his sentence: he'd have the potential to shorten that by roughly a year and a half with good time. While incarcerated, he has done volunteer work as the head librarian, and is also working as a coach in the Open Ears program. When released, he would like to mentor formerly incarcerated people who may be at risk to reoffend. This is his way to make amends.

Crime victims prefer prevention over punishment Studies have shown that victims would rather resources go into prevention than long prison sentences. Funds that are saved from letting low-risk people in the categories that are being carved out earn good time can be spent on education, alcohol and drug addiction treatment, mental health, poverty -- all things that have been shown to be a factor in crime.

The Alliance for Safety and Justice published what it calls the first-ever national survey on crime victims' views on safety and justice. It is a wide-ranging report. On page 21, it states "The vast majority of crime survivors believe we rely too heavily on incarceration and want policymakers to invest in new safety priorities that better protect victims and help them recover from the crimes committed against them. Victims of property and violent crime alike share these views, and the nature of the crime incident matters less than one might expect.

Survivors of violent crime — including victims of the most serious crimes such as rape or murder of a family member — widely support reducing incarceration to invest in prevention and rehabilitation and strongly believe that prison does more harm than good."

<https://allianceforsafetyandjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Crime-Survivors-Speak-Report-1.pdf>

Leaving violent offenders out of criminal justice reforms limits its effectiveness. Nationwide, people locked up for violent offenses are, as in Vermont, by far the largest group. The goal of criminal justice reform is to limit the use of prison while at the same time keeping communities safe. The goal of the DOC is to support incarcerated people in rehabilitation and in becoming better citizens. Part of that support might be allowing those serving time for violent acts to prove themselves as good citizens while behind bars, and therefore worthy to join the rest of us again.

The passage of S.18 will hinder the DOC's ability to acheive its state-mandated purpose. Title 28 Section 1 states "The Department of Corrections... shall have the purpose of developing and administering a correctional program designed to protect persons and property against offenders of the criminal law and to render treatment to offenders with the goal of achieving their successful return and participation as citizens of the State and community, to foster their human dignity and to preserve the human resources of the community."

Good time is a tool for the DOC to prepare incarcerated people for their successful return as citizens, by showing them that their actions matter. Everyone who is currently earning good time will, in fact, be returned to the community eventually. I would suggest that by denying certain offenders of the possibility to earn time that is granted to their peers does nothing to foster their human dignity and is antithetical to preserving the human resources of the community.

Those incarcerated for murder and other violent crimes are the least likely to reoffend, and even less likely to be incarcerated for the same crime. I know this to be true of my husband, and there are exceptions to everything, but I believe it to be true for most of those incarcerated in Vermont. Telling them that they are not worthy to earn good time is to tell them that we believe them incapable of changing and bettering themselves.

I believe the Justice Reinvestment Committee, who worked for months to build Act 148, understood what they were doing when they recommended that all incarcerated people be eligible for good time. They knew that the small reduction of time spent in prison will have a variety of benefits: the ability to reinvest in crime prevention, a better culture inside the facilities, and overall a better outcome and a safer state.

Award-winning journalist Nancy Mullane said her research has taught her that there are some convicted killers who “are back out in society and have so much to teach us about rehabilitation, redemption and about really screwing up in your life - massively - and then what it takes to come back, what it takes to be a person again and give back to society.”

“People can change,” she said.

Mullane said she was able to determine that 988 convicted murderers were released from prisons in California over a 20 year period. Out of those 988, she said 1 percent were arrested for new crimes, and 10 percent were arrested for violating parole. She found none of the 988 were rearrested for murder, and none went back to prison over the 20 year period she examined.

Nancy Mullane's book: <http://www.lifeaftermurder.com/>

CBS news story about the book and the author <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/once-a-criminal-always-a-criminal/>

Each of these categories of crimes that S.18 seeks to carve out of good time represent human beings. It represents families. It is very possible that some of these people might not be ready to be released at their good time date (if they had one) and they might not be ready to be released at their minimum. But this is hardly true of all of them. Please consider letting the good time part of Act 148 continue as written.

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Meg McCarthy

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