

Dear Senators, my name is David Boehnke, I've been working with people in prison for the last 8 years as a volunteer basis as part of the Twin Cities Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee, and many other related projects. I also work with youth to keep them out of prison in the first place, as an alternative high school teacher and resident in North Minneapolis.

*I'm writing you in support of the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRA). This bill, if done well, will be remembered as the most important prison reform passed by your committee this year on the path towards long-term, practical, dramatic, and safety-driven change of our prison system.*

There are two essential and important components of this bill that I want to highlight, and three questions that I'd ask you to address via amendment or oversight to ensure the right impact of this bill as a law.

Essential components:

**1. Allowing those in prison to earn a reduced sentence for doing programming and other work to improve themselves**, tying what people do to getting them out of prison early. According to the MN DOC this is already the case in a majority of states and has the potential (with improvements below) of dramatically transforming the culture in Minnesota prisons for the better. Confronting people with hope, real hope, as they arrive to prison cannot be understated. I hope you hear from those who have been there to feel and know just how crucial this is.

**2. Reinvesting savings to shift systems behavior**, such that multiple systems -- counties, victim services, DOC, and general fund -- have an incentive to see people succeed in and coming out of prison. Just as we should incentivize individuals towards rehabilitation we need to create systems that incentivize our systems to improve themselves. Our blatant failures to do so over the last decades is part of why we have such a huge criminal justice system that does so poorly at keeping us safe. This is a significant start in that direction. If we want safety, changing incentives is essential, and something we must look at seriously and carefully -- and figure out how to generalize as much as possible moving forward.

There are still three questions I have about this bill that could succeed or fail it's implementation. I'd ask that you apply all your commitment to safety to passing this bill, via amendment and oversight.

**1. What happens if people in prison are unable to access the required programming for their individualized plans?** As you know, current staffing and capacity crises are making our prisons a mental health and human rights catastrophe. Moreover, staff discretion in the DOC is incredibly powerful and can easily be used as a weapon against individuals and incarcerated people as a whole in the current situation where there is no independent oversight with teeth. If people do all they can but do not have their time reduced, or if that is done in a highly selective manner, that is likely to poison the well from which this bill comes. This is also why reducing prison population through things like work release, CIP, medical release, etc, are so important to the success of this bill: so programming and staffing are available.

**2. Equally important, excluding lifers from this bill is a tired political choice that will have large negative consequences for public safety.** By nature of how human relationships work, lifers are the backbone of our prison culture. If we don't involve and incentivize them we reject our greatest potential leaders from creating a safer society. Many of the people who have made restore the vote possible are lifers, people who today might have gotten life without parole, and who have made so many key contributions inside and out -- some that we are aware of and many remain invisible to most of us. There are vast safety benefits to this unrecognized work that should be invested in. It is also simply common sense that if you offer everyone an incentive they will all work for it, the more you divide who it applies to the harder it is to be successful. This is also but one reason why it's essential that we end Life Without Parole next session.

**3. Will this bill be retroactive?** The vast majority of people in prison have done over half their time already, and shown, or not, their commitment to self-improvement in a setting not designed to facilitate that. If we don't reward those who have put in the work for what they have done, over years and decades, we undermine the impact needed to show those in prison this is real and not just another.

Please pass this bill and please make changes necessary to ensure forward movement for safety in this state. Thank you.