

CURE-NY *Newsletter*

To Reduce Crime and Uplift Society

Winter, 2008

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Annual Meeting

The annual meeting of CURE-NY will be held on Saturday, December 6, 2008 at Family Partnership Center, 29 North Hamilton Street, Poughkeepsie, NY.

The meeting for business we will be followed by presentations and discussions on our actions for the upcoming year. The platform of the NYS Coalition for Rehabilitation and Re-entry has an even greater significance with the ongoing budget cuts. By supporting other organizations in their efforts we will be able to sustain a statewide movement than

Transportation to and from the Poughkeepsie train station can be arranged for anyone using Metro-north. A light lunch will be provided. Registration, coffee and socializing will be from 9:00-9:30 AM. The business meeting will begin promptly at 9:30.

Registration is requested by November 22. Registration fee is \$10.00. Formerly incarcerated and the families of the currently incarcerated are invited free of charge. To register, and for additional information you can :

- a) mail attached form to: CURE-NY, PO Box 1314, Wappingers Falls, NY 12590
- b) email: goluis52@yahoo.com
- c) call: (845) 298-7592

Yes, I will be there ____
Sorry, I can't make it, but I am enclosing a donation ____
Sorry, I can't make it. But keep me posted ____

NAME: _____

CONTACT INFORMATION: _____

REGISTRATION FEE INCLUDED: Yes ____ No ____

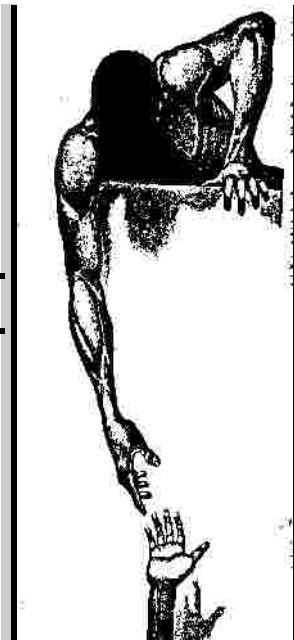
Division of Parole Terminates Treatment: Budget Cuts New York State Cannot Afford

Press Release/NY Association of Alcoholism & Substance Abuse Providers, Inc.

The NYS Division of Parole increased the likelihood that men and women they supervise will return to prison and all but ensured that the NYS deficit will grow when they recently cut virtually all of their contracts for chemical dependence treatment. Parole has contracts with community-based treatment programs to prevent relapse by addressing the alcohol and other drug addiction that is so pervasive among parolees. An April 22, 2008 press release issued by NYS stated: "72 percent of state parolees have a substance abuse problem and effective treatment is the best way to help them return to their communities and not to prison." Only six months later, on Friday, October 24th every treatment program that contracts with parole was informed that they had 30 days to close down their parolee services, a move that ignores "best" practice.

According to the Treatment Research Institute at the University of Pennsylvania, re-arrest rates drop from 75% to 27% with chemical dependence treatment. The popularity and proliferation of drug courts is testimony to the effectiveness of treatment. "These are cuts that NYS cannot afford," said Chris Wilkins, President of the NY Association of Alcoholism and Substance Abuse Providers (ASAP). Access to treatment will diminish or disappear altogether for the 2786 men and women that receive services from the programs that parole is shutting down. "These cuts increase the likelihood of relapse and a return to prison for each of these men and women when their connection with treatment is severed. It costs less than \$3,000 per year for the relapse prevention services they currently receive and it will cost ten times that amount if they relapse and have to be incarcerated," Wilkins added.

"Governor Paterson correctly stated that it was time for NYS to make the same kind of difficult choices citizens are making every day" reflected John Coppola, ASAP Executive



"He Ain't Heavy"
by Gilbert Young

Director. “Unfortunately, NYS is being penny wise and pound foolish. The \$8.14 million “savings” the Division of Parole hopes to achieve with this cut, will be dwarfed by the \$30 million NYS will have to pay if even a third of those who lose services relapse and return to prison. This is not the kind of belt tightening being done by NYS families, nor what they expect from the State,” Coppola maintained.

Parolees who receive treatment frequently never re-enter the criminal justice system. According to Richard Pruss, ASAP Public Policy Chair, “The vast majority of parolees who receive treatment become responsible citizens who work and contribute in a positive manner to their communities.”

Pruss recommended investing more funds in treatment so that fewer people would commit drug-related crime and the demand for prison beds could continue to decline.

Advocates for treatment as an alternative to incarceration maintain that the Division of Parole cuts are bad policy from a public health, public safety, and economic perspective. “These cuts will not save money. They will increase New York State’s deficit and they will decrease the quality of life for our families and communities,” Coppola concluded.

We can't afford the State's drug laws

By Robert Gangi /*OP-ED in the Albany Times Union, Oct. 20, 2008 First published in print: Thursday, October 30, 2008*

With the stock market in free fall and expected tax receipts from Wall Street in steep decline, New York faces an even more serious financial crisis than other states. Gov. Paterson and legislative leaders have clashed over which steps to take to close a deficit that's now estimated at more than \$47 billion — a startling figure — for the next four years.

We know that spending cuts will come. History tells us that poor people, the group most dependent on government services, will bear the brunt. But thoughtful and strategic budget reductions can result in more fair and efficient government and even serve to protect the most vulnerable among us. And, sometimes, the need to scale back public spending can provide cover for officials to adopt measures they would ordinarily consider too risky.

The state's leaders should seriously consider repealing the harsh Rockefeller Drug Laws at the special legislative session that Gov. Paterson has called for next month. The governor has a long history of opposing the state's drug statutes, introducing

sweeping reform proposals while he was a state senator and getting arrested in a protest in 2002 that called on then-Gov. George Pataki to support drug law repeal.

These laws, passed in 1973 when Nelson Rockefeller was governor, have caused rather than solved problems and have been a major financial drain on New York. It costs New York more than \$500 million annually to confine more than 13,000 drug offenders, most of whom have no history of violent or predatory behavior. The price tag for building the prisons to confine them came to about \$1.5 billion. Even well-resourced alternatives to incarceration cost significantly less per participant than the \$36,835 the state spends to confine a single inmate for one year.

The drug laws' harshest provision requires that a judge impose a prison term of eight to 20 years for anyone convicted of selling 2 ounces or possessing 8 ounces of a narcotic substance. The penalties apply without regard to the circumstances of the offense or the individual's character or background.

The main criterion for guilt is not the offenders' role in narcotics transactions, but the amount of drugs in their possession at the time of arrest. The kingpins know enough not to carry drugs. It is the foot soldiers who get caught literally holding the bag and face long, hard prison time. This provision of the law actually provides an incentive to police and prosecutors to concentrate on low-level dealers and users, rather than on the drug trade's major profiteers.

Despite studies showing that the majority of the people who use and sell drugs are white, 90 percent of the inmates doing time in New York for the sale or possession of narcotics are people of color. The drug laws and other law enforcement policies that produce this disproportionate outcome have had a devastating impact on communities of color.

Yet New York 's politicians still have not removed the stain of the Rockefeller Drug Laws from the state's criminal code. Narrow economic and political concerns have blocked movement on this issue.

Since 1982, the state has opened 38 prisons, all in rural, mainly white, mainly depressed areas, all represented by Republican state senators. At the beginning of 2000, 93 percent of all New York prison inmates were confined in prisons situated in Republican Senate districts. Facilities in these areas receive more than \$1.1 billion annually to cover their operating.

expenses. They employ almost 30,000 people.

In addition, Albany policymakers have been unwilling to take on the state's district attorneys. The drug laws remove discretion from the judge's hands and concentrate it in the prosecutor's office.

Most New York prosecutors have aggressively opposed proposals to amend the drug laws because they are protecting their preserve. Many politicians fear speaking out against the self-interested posture of these law enforcement officials.

Countering these obstacles is the widely available evidence that alternatives are available that save money and cut crime. The Correctional Association of New York has performed an analysis demonstrating that the state could save over \$220 million annually by repealing the Rockefeller Drug Laws.

For a long time the truth about these laws has been all too evident: that they are unjust, ineffective, racially biased and extravagantly wasteful. It is a truth well known to David Paterson. He recently told a radio interviewer that his position on the drug laws has not changed "one iota" and that he will continue to promote reform.

The question remains. Will the state's dire financial straits and the need to cut government costs lead him to follow through on his past promises? And will he be able to bring along other state leaders to do the right thing and eliminate the state's drug statutes?

Merit Time Merits a Closer Look Now

By Betty and Rudy Cypser

Merit time represents a concrete incentive to encourage prisoners to undertake long and difficult rehabilitation programs. Participation in meaningful programs ultimately increases public safety and could reduce unnecessary prison cost for incarcerated people who have earned early release by demonstrated rehabilitation. CURE-NY supports an

expanded use of merit time to include a greater number of incarcerated men and women, including qualified people once convicted of a violent offense, and a

greater incentive for completion of specific rehabilitative accomplishments.

Modern risk assessment tools should be used to safely open merit time eligibility to qualified individuals who long ago were convicted as 'violent offenders'.

Prior to 1967 incarcerated individuals were eligible to receive ten days per month off the minimum of an indeterminate sentence or off the amount of a definite sentence. A return to this standard would provide a very meaningful incentive to these eligible individuals.

Completion of this "rehabilitation contract" does not guarantee early release. It should, however, guarantee an earlier comprehensive review, and consideration for early release, by a parole board or other review body. Most of those incarcerated, including many of those once violent, will return to the community and most are capable of redemption; meaningful programming could prepare them for a crime-free life.

The early comprehensive review and consideration of release should carry with it a reasonable presumption of release. If, however, early release is denied, the earned merit time should be applied to the maximum sentence.

The social and economic cost to society for an incarcerated person who, after many years behind bars, gets out still addicted, uneducated, angry, sick, and disoriented is much greater than if attempts were made to create viable rehabilitative programs and activities with a genuine system of "merit time" rewards for adjustment and progress.

With earned rehabilitation incentives, the incarcerated, his family and society, all benefit. Reduction of 15-30% of sentences translates directly into diverse cost savings. Prison costs are reduced by both shorter periods of current incarceration and less costs of recidivism. There are fewer future crimes and fewer future victims.

More effective and less costly prison management and control of the incarcerated, with less pressure on corrections officers are corollary benefits of good rehabilitation programs and genuine earned rehabilitation incentives.

In New York State, we release about 20,000 people back into society from prison each year, of whom about half are labeled as "violent offenders." If only one-third of these once "violent offenders" earned such merit time, and if that reduced each sentence by only one year, then at \$32,000 per year, the savings from that alone would be about \$105 million per year.

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More on Education

By Rudy and Betty Cypser

Obviously, the advent of dozens of universities putting free college courses on the internet raises the question of using them to educate the incarcerated. Seeing is believing, so CURE-NY has produced a 16 minute DVD which enables one to experience brief visits to actual classrooms in Stanford, Berkeley, MIT, CCNY and others. We'll see that video at the CURE-NY Annual Meeting, and seek your ideas on promoting this concept.

A Message From MIT

OCW (OpenCourseWare) makes available the course materials from almost all MIT undergraduate and graduate subjects on the web, free of charge, to any user, anywhere in the world. There is no registration because OCW does not offer degrees or certificates.

We welcome anyone to use, share, and modify these materials so long as there is no commercial use of the materials, proper attribution is given to the original author, and any resulting materials are distributed in the same

spirit. OCW hosts a mirror site program that offers free copies of the entire OCW website to institutions that face internet connectivity barriers. The copies include all course content and video and audio lectures that are currently available on the web site. Our role in this program is to offer the MIT content on an external hard drive and provide content updates twice a year. This program works well with institutions that, at the minimum, have a computer lab with an on-site technical staff person.

If you believe the prison system would be open to hosting OCW content, then we would be pleased to send you the hard drive, which contains detailed installation instructions. Please do let me know if you have any questions and would be interested in receiving a hard drive of OCW content.

Ms. Yvonne Ng,
External Outreach Manager
OpenCourseWare, Massachusetts Institute of Technology

...and lastly,

John Jay College of Criminal Justice, in association with Rehabilitation Through the Arts (RTA) is pleased to announce a free continuing education class for formerly incarcerated men: "Ritual as a Pathway for Successful Reentry". Spring Semester, 2009. Registration is open exclusively to men who have served time in the New York State Prison System. For more information contact instructor Kevin Bott (347) 415-7691, kevinbott@nyu.edu