



Testimony submitted to the Joint Committee on the Judiciary
In Support of H.74 – An Act Implementing the Joint Recommendations of the Massachusetts
Criminal Justice Review
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The League of Women Voters of Massachusetts promotes “a sound corrections system which provides opportunities for the rehabilitation of the adult and juvenile offender” and supports “measures to promote the offender’s rehabilitation through individualized treatment” and “programs within the Department of Corrections that gradually allow the prisoner more freedom and more responsibility as merited” as well as “programs that provide supervision and support upon release from prison” and “access to an adequate range of reintegration services for female inmates.”

We appreciate that this bill,¹ sponsored by Governor Baker, was the result of a yearlong collaborative study² with input from many branches of the Massachusetts government, many of its agencies, and outside expert reviewers. Although the resulting bill is not comprehensive, we support reducing recidivism, enhancing program participation and focusing on what happens to individuals when they reenter society. It is laudable that this bill increases incentives to participate in work release or be out on parole, especially for individuals serving mandatory minimum sentences. Increasing good time and completion credit opportunities at state prisons and maintaining this system at county facilities is good policy. We support non-discretionary parole for state prisoners. Expanding programming at Community Corrections Centers and opening it up to some pretrial individuals will make a difference for those trying to become good members of our communities. It is important to collect data on the effectiveness of these programs to figure out the best ways to reduce pretrial incarceration.

Currently nearly two-thirds of individuals entering custody are re-offenders.³ By reducing sentences up to 35% for participating in rehabilitative programming and enhancing support systems to individuals so they get the support services they need, this rate is expected to decrease by 15% over six years. A recent Norwegian study using randomized methods shows that increasing participation in programs improving employability and reducing recidivism results in increasing employment and decreasing further criminal behavior.⁴

Not only will this bill have a positive impact on some incarcerated individuals (both those held pre-trial and post-conviction), it will also have a positive impact on their families and communities. Certain communities have higher concentrations of repeat offenders and bear disproportionate costs, so this bill will be of most benefit to these communities, which usually have fewer resources or connections to economic opportunity.⁵

Fully funding the programs, data collection, and evaluation is essential for this bill to make a difference in the recidivism rate, and in the employability and lives of the individuals who enter custody.

Thank you for your consideration. We hope that this bill is passed and that a more comprehensive criminal justice reform package is also passed this session.

¹ <https://www.documentcloud.org/documents/3469335-CSG-Section-by-Section.html>

² https://csgjusticecenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/JR-in-Massachusetts_Policy-Framework1.pdf

³ <http://massinc.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Reentry-Policy-Brief.pdf>

⁴ http://www.uib.no/sites/w3.uib.no/files/attachments/working_paper_07-16.pdf

⁵ <http://massinc.org/research/the-geography-of-incarceration/>