



LOUISIANANS FOR PRISON ALTERNATIVES

Creating a Smarter Parole Eligibility System Where Redemption is Possible

Overly long incarceration is counterproductive, expensive and inhumane. Most people age out of crime, research shows. Yet in Louisiana, we ignore this research and reject best practices, including the recommendations made from the Justice Reinvestment Task Force, and we continue to spend millions each year on unnecessary incarceration.

The truth is that no one – not a judge; not a district attorney; not a jury; and not a victim’s family – can know who a person will become in 30 years. That’s why it is time to reform Louisiana’s parole system to create reasonable opportunities for a parole board that will determine whether prison still makes sense.

In Louisiana, there are more than 8,500 people sentenced to 30 years or more. The cost of housing people who have been incarcerated this long dramatically increases as their health declines. In most states, these convictions would not yield such long sentences. Our state needs a new, evidence-based approach that would keep our prisons and communities safer, and would save taxpayers’ money.

THE PROBLEM

Louisiana is not following data-driven or research-supported policies.

- Research shows that people routinely age out of crime.¹
- Longer sentences have not been proven to prevent crime. In fact, long prison terms are not more effective than shorter ones at reducing the likelihood that people will reoffend.²
- More than 4,700 people are serving life sentences without the possibility of parole in Louisiana, representing 14 percent of the prison population. As of 2017, an additional 1,931 were serving sentences longer than 30 years without the possibility of parole.³
- For comparison, 70 people were serving life sentences without the possibility of parole in all of the United Kingdom as of 2016.⁴

Taxpayers foot the bill for increased costs as incarcerated people grow older.

- It costs two to three times as much to incarcerate someone over the age of 55 as it does for a younger person.⁵
- The longer people stay in prison and the older they get, the more it costs the state and taxpayers to house and treat them. Prisons must provide health care to incarcerated individuals, ranging from blood pressure medicine, to dialysis and insulin, to cancer treatments.
- As of 2017, more than 1,500 people had spent more than 30 years in Louisiana prisons. It takes almost \$32 million each year to incarcerate them, considering the average cost to incarcerate someone in a Louisiana prison. This does not even factor in the increased costs caused for age and medical care.

“Parole eligibility for me would be like a light at the end of the tunnel because right now it’s just black.”

Aubry Sikes, incarcerated at the age of 20 with a sentence of life without parole sentence.

- With the most conservative estimates, taxpayers would save more than \$10.5 million dollars each year⁶ if Louisiana were to expand parole eligibility.
- The state of Louisiana is being sued for its poor health care at its prisons. If these lawsuits are successful, then Louisiana taxpayers will need to pay much more to adequately care for people in prison. One of these lawsuits has already gone to trial, and is only awaiting for a ruling.⁷
- The money Louisiana would could save by cutting overly long prison sentences could go to education, transportation, economic development or back into taxpayers' pockets.

Louisiana's sentencing laws are harsher than those of other states, and they eliminate any hope for redemption.

- Louisiana is one of only six states where adults who have received life sentences are never eligible for parole. This means that any time a person is sentenced to life imprisonment in Louisiana, that individual will die in prison, regardless of whether he or she has been rehabilitated.⁸
- Louisiana and Mississippi are the only two states that mandate life sentences without parole for people charged with second-degree murder.⁹
- In Texas, second-degree murder carries a sentence of five to 99 years, with parole eligibility after 30 years.¹⁰ In Arkansas, sentencing for that offense ranges from six to 30 years.¹¹
- There are more people serving life sentences without parole sentences in Louisiana than there are in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas – combined.¹²

THE SOLUTION

Provide individuals people who are serving life sentences with an with the opportunity to apply for parole after 30 years, and provide individuals who are serving long sentences the opportunity for a chance to apply for parole after 20 years in prison.

NOTE: Parole eligibility does not guarantee a reduced prison sentence. In 2016, the Louisiana Board of Pardons and Parole granted parole in just 33 percent of the cases that it reviewed.¹³

Join Louisianans for Prison Alternatives. LPA will send you information about ways to participate in local and statewide coalition efforts.

Sign up at
prisonreformla.com

1 Blokland, Arjan A.J., and Palmen, Hanneke "Criminal Career Patterns," in *Persists and Desisters in Crime From Adolescence Into Adulthood: Explanation, Prevention and Punishment*, eds. Rolf Loeber, Machteld Hoeve, N. Wim Slot, and Peter H. van der Laan, Aldershot, U.K.: Ashgate, 2012: 13-50; Piquero, Alex R., J. David Hawkins, and Lila Kazemian, "Criminal Career Patterns," in *From Juvenile Delinquency to Adult Crime: Criminal Careers, Justice Policy, and Prevention*, eds. Rolf Loeber and David P. Farrington, New York: Oxford University Press, 2012: 14-46.

2 Gendreau, Paul and Goggin, Claire, Centre for Criminal Justice Studies, University of New Brunswick, and Francis T. Cullen, Department of Criminal Justice, University of Cincinnati, "The Effects of Prison Sentences on Recidivism".

3 Department of Corrections data from 2017.

4 See <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2016/11/25/70-prisoners-serving-whole-life-sentences-uk>. The United Kingdom has 66 million people whereas Louisiana has less than 5 million.

5 Correctional Health Care, *Addressing the Needs of Elderly, Chronically Ill, and Terminally Ill Inmates (2004)*, available at <https://s3.amazonaws.com/static.nicic.gov/Library/018735.pdf>.

6 Assuming that 33% of 1,534 people who have served more than 30 years obtain parole, and that costs are static at the state average cost.

7 Gyan, Joe, "Angola prison's 'abysmal' medical care on trial in Baton Rouge federal court" Oct. 9, 2018, available at https://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/courts/article_703fce2a-c813-11e8-af1e-0fc04c7756fb.html.

8 DPIC "The Meaning of 'Life': Long Prison Sentences in Context" <https://deathpenaltyinfo.org/dpic-summary-meaning-life-long-prison-sentences-context>.

9 MS Code § 97-3-21.

10 Second degree murder is not a term used in Texas, but the equivalent of a second degree murder in Louisiana is called murder in Texas. See Texas Penal Code 19.02; 12.32; 12.33.

11 Arkansas AR Code 5-4-401; AR Code 5-10-103.

12 Nellis, Ashley Ph.D., "Still Life: America's Increasing Use of Life and Long-Term Sentences", May 3, 2017, available at <https://www.sentencingproject.org/publications/still-life-americas-increasing-use-life-long-term-sentences/>.

13 Report in response to Senate Concurrent Resolution No. 38 of the 2016 Regular Session of the Louisiana Legislature, available at <https://www.doc.la.gov/media/1/PardonParole%20Policies/2.15.17.2016.scr.38.report.pdf>