



LOUISIANANS FOR PRISON ALTERNATIVES

Creating Smarter Parole in Louisiana Where Redemption is Possible

Overly long incarceration is counterproductive, expensive and inhumane. Most people age out of crime, research shows. Yet Louisiana continues to waste millions of taxpayer dollars on unnecessary incarceration.

Instead, Louisiana should let parole boards decide if it makes sense for people to remain in prison after they have been there for decades. The state has more than 8,800 incarcerated people who have been sentenced to 30 years or more. The cost of imprisoning people this long dramatically increases as their health declines.

In most states, these convictions would not yield such long sentences. Louisiana needs a new, evidence-based approach to keep its prisons and communities safer, and to save taxpayers millions of dollars.

THE PROBLEMS

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 no more effective than shorter ones at reducing the likelihood that people will reoffend.²
- Almost 4,700 (4,693) people are serving life sentences without the possibility of parole in Louisiana, representing 14 percent of the prison population. As of 2019, an additional 6,009 were serving sentences longer than 20 years without the possibility of parole.³
- It costs Louisiana over \$107 million a year to incarcerate people serving life sentences.

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.⁴
- The longer people stay in prison and the older they get, the more it costs to house and treat them. Prisons must provide health care to incarcerated individuals, including blood pressure medicine, dialysis and insulin, and cancer treatments.
- In addition to people with life sentences, as of 2019, more than 500 people who were ineligible for parole had spent more than 20 years in Louisiana prisons. It takes over \$11 million a year to incarcerate them, considering the average cost to incarcerate someone in Louisiana's prisons and local jails. This does not even consider the increased costs for age and medical care.
- Louisiana is being sued for its poor health care at prisons. If these lawsuits are successful, 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 awaiting a ruling.⁵

"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 age of 20, sentenced to life without parole.*

➤ The money Louisiana would save by cutting overly long prison sentences could go into education, transportation, economic development or back into taxpayers' pockets.

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

➤ Louisiana is one of only six states where adults who have received life sentences are never eligible for parole. Whenever someone is sentenced to life in prison in Louisiana, they will die in prison, regardless of whether they have been rehabilitated.⁶

➤ Louisiana and Mississippi are the only states that mandate life sentences without parole for people charged with second-degree murder.⁷

➤ In Texas, second-degree murder carries a sentence of five to 99 years, with parole eligibility after 30 years.⁸ In Arkansas, sentencing for that offense ranges from six to 30 years.⁹

➤ There are more people serving life sentences without parole in Louisiana than in Alabama, Arkansas, Mississippi, Tennessee and Texas combined.¹⁰

THE SOLUTION

Support HB 541 (Sponsored by state Rep. Royce Duplessis)

➤ This legislation would allow people serving life sentences to apply for parole after 30 years, and those serving long sentences to apply for parole after 20 years.

➤ The savings generated from this reform would be \$31,388,869.

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 it reviewed.¹¹

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 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>.

5 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.

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

7 MS Code § 97-3-21.

8 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.

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

10 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/>.

11 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>.