



Criminal Justice

Ethical Reflection

- Our criminal justice system needs to contribute to the wholeness of victims, offenders and the community.
- The majority of those in prison will eventually be released. The correctional system needs to prepare them to become productive members of society.

Mental Health

Current Situation.

Since the deinstitutionalization of mental health patients without appropriate community supports, many end up in correctional facilities – often in SHUs, This exacerbates problems.

What Will Help

- Implement the SHU bill by 2011.
- Do not confine the mentally ill in disciplinary cellblocks, but divert them to prison residential treatment programs.

Rockefeller Drug Laws

Current Situation

Even with some changes in drug laws, many are still in NY prisons on drug offences. In 1983 the percentage of non-violent drug offenders in prison was 30%, in 2008 it was 54.4% (NYS Dept. of Correctional Services). In NY the majority who buy/sell drugs are white, while non-whites make up 90% of drug offenders in prison (Correctional Association of NY).

What Will Help

- Sentence by transaction role not amount of drug a person possesses at time of arrest.

- Judges need sentencing discretion.
- Mandatory minimums need to end.
- Treatment programs reduce drug abuse, crime rates and save money.

Parole

Current Situation

The number of paroles granted dropped sharply in the mid-nineties. Hearings looked only at the original crime. What people did to improve themselves in prison was disregarded.

What Will Help

- Follow NYS law in determining factors for granting parole.
- Depend on research which shows factors that make a good parolee.
- Expand work release for long-term offenders.

Higher Education in Prison

Present Situation

Recidivism is related to a person's educational level (Department of Correctional Services). PELL grants augmented by NY TAP grants became unavailable in the mid-nineties for the incarcerated. Some colleges and consortiums of colleges stepped in with great programs but without public funding few could benefit.

What Will Help

- Public funding for higher education in prisons avoids recidivism and costs less than imprisonment.
- Restore opportunities for TAP grants to those in prison.

(3/2009)

Member Denominations

American Baptist Churches, Episcopal Church, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America, Presbyterian Church (USA), Reformed Church in America, Religious Society of Friends, United Church of Christ, The United Methodist Church.