



Press Information

For Immediate Release
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RI Department of Corrections engages in “Group Think” at Oversight Commission Meeting

Cranston: The Rhode Island General Assembly’s Study Commission on possible changes to the state’s Good Times law held its first meeting today. At the public meeting Department of Corrections Director, A.T. Wall, joined a panel of experts to review proposed changes in the law. That statute prescribes a formula for reducing the length of any state prison sentence in return for self improvement and good behavior while incarcerated. The Commission heard information on prison population projections, fiscal impact, operational issues, and more. The thrust of the DOC position was that no reduction or elimination of Good Times credit should be considered.

The sum of all the PowerPoint charts and graphs seemed to be to sell the DOC concept of cost effectiveness and better operational management of the ACI due to the availability of Good Times reductions in sentences served. The Department claimed low to moderate recidivism rates in RI and only moderate award of Good Times reductions to inmates here vs. other states. According to the DOC briefing officers Good Times is a panacea of all that ails a penal system. Victims such as the Foreman and Donnelly families were reminded of how little impact their concerns had during the sales pitch that took up most of the meeting. Finally victims were allowed to testify, at three minutes each. The Forman and Donnelly representatives were joined by concerned members of the Brotherhood of Correctional Officers.

The Foreman family appealed once more for “Truth in Sentencing” to somehow replace today’s system of wholesale reductions of time served and early release for even the most egregious of perpetrators.

The Donnelly family, choked with emotion and unable to testify, requested that the Alliance for Safe Communities speak on their behalf. Executive Director Carolyn Medeiros reminded the

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Study Commission of Mathew Komrowski the violent offender who brutally murdered Shirley Goon Donnelly less than 48 hours after his early release.

Medeiros also requested a thorough review of existing prison programs inmates can use to receive credits for early release. She questioned the value of certain programs such as "Hip-Hop" which earned inmates significant amounts of credit to reduce time served.

A representative from the Brotherhood of Corrections Officers presented a number of cases where Good Times reductions resulted in inadequate or unintended consequences. In each instance repeat offenses occurring shortly after release. The Brotherhood also showed that individual prisoners can earn as much as 25 days off their overall sentences in one month at the ACI. They contended that this roughly 83% reduction in time served for even the most violent crimes defied the DOC's suggestion that only moderate reductions result from the current stature.

The uproar surrounding the early release of Michael Woodmansee, murderer and cannibal of young Jason Forman, was followed by the public outrage over the beating death of Ms. Donnelly. The response of the Rhode Island General Assembly was to create the study commission which had its first meeting today, some six months after it was charged to make recommendations. One more meeting of the Commission is planned, although not scheduled. Its recommendations will be presented next year. Since the establishment of the Study Commission the RI DOC has closed the Donald Price Medium Security facility at the ACI, a move that makes it even more reliant on Good Times to manage prison population.

The Alliance for Safe Communities is concerned that the only result of all this will be to allow the initial outrage to fade from the public's memory. This will cloud the fact that nothing is to actually be done to revise the present statute. Beneficial as that course of action may be to the DOC Budget, ASC-RI believes that the safety of the Ocean State's neighborhoods is being overlooked.

More Coverage here: http://www.wpri.com/dpp/news/local_news/west_bay/ri%27s-%27good-time%27-policy-under-review

ASC-RI is a non-profit dedicated to assisting Communities to achieve the promise of a safe environment that is made to them by government.

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