

From: Stacy [REDACTED]
Sent: Saturday, January 25, 2014 9:34 PM
To: JKoury@NYSenate.gov; Mujahid Farid
Subject: Please Fix the Parole Problem!

26 January 2014

Dear Sirs:

I witnessed the irrational machinations of the New York State Division of Parole firsthand during the four and a half years I spent in the New York State prison system. There were the denials based on the COMPAS screening tools submitted to the Board by overworked corrections counselors who ceased to care their paperwork was riddled with errors; the rubber stamped appeal denials that took over a year to be “decided” and; the NYSDOCCS staff so committed to the status quo that responsibility was shucked to the court system.

I was fortunate; despite a disciplinary record riddled with Tier III infractions and multiple stints in solitary confinement, I was granted parole at my initial Board hearing. This is illogical when plenty of women with no disciplinary record or even a previous arrest, are denied release. Many women worked hard to make it to Beacon when it was still open, believing that a minimum security inmate working in the community was better prepared for release. The demoralizing truth was this: Winning release at a parole hearing is a crapshoot.

The broken parole system and its inherent lack of fairness disrupts the inmate population. When due process is paid lip service on a grand scale, no one is fooled. I am proof that institutional adjustment doesn't matter. My willingness to take chances only increased the longer I was locked up – there is no incentive to follow rules if my willingness to reform doesn't earn a fair shot at gaining my freedom.

Prison long termers recognize the look of hope in wide-eyed new arrivals. Their zest to prove they are not their crime is evident in every conversation – “I am doing every program!” “Do you think I will have time to finish DWI before my Board?” “How long will it take to get into ASAT?” The truth is none of it matters. On that 1-3 year prison term, we know that person is likely to leave on her CR date after serving about 2 ½ years.

This is particularly harsh to families at home. Our defense attorneys strike deals looking at the law, and what is in the best interest of his client. We are always sold on the bottom number, assured that we will spend less than ten months behind bars when we accept a 1-3. Our families make plans, filling the gaps our absence will provide with a variety of stop gap measures so kids can have daycare, rents and mortgages can be paid. There is a world of difference between waiting ten months for someone to come home, and two and a half years.

In over four years, I did not see a single person receive a parole decision within the 120 days stipulated by law – it takes a lawsuit to get a decision. This is wrong. It sends the message that corrections – the very entity charged with making us better people, fit for the community – is not bound by law. This flagrant abuse of its powers promotes the sense that there is no justice. That sentiment leeches through bars and into communities, where law-abiding taxpayers shake their head at the needless waste.

Please adjust the law to make parole decisions more transparent. Streamline the process. Allow more offender input. Provide a meaningful appeal process. I was lucky – I (inexplicably) won the crapshoot. Let the next offender KNOW that her hard work and ability to follow the rules has meaningful rewards. Those lessons are brought back home upon release.

Sincerely,

Stacy Lyn Burnett

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