

WHAT IS THE NORFOLK LIFERS GROUP?

The Norfolk Lifers Group is based at the Massachusetts Correctional Institution at Norfolk. Formed in the late 1960s, it has continuously operated for over 50 years.

The Norfolk Lifers Group is comprised of men serving life or long-term sentences. An elected Board of Directors coordinates the Group's activities which are dedicated to educating our members and outside citizens in the area of criminal justice reform.

CONCEPTS WE EMBRACE

The Norfolk Lifers Group embraces education, penal and parole reform, and programs which recognize that victims, victim survivors, and offenders must move toward healing in order to become whole. We also seek a justice system which avoids punishments which do not help to reintegrate prisoners into society nor address the underlying factors which promote crime.

We do not believe that anyone should be forever defined by their worst moment. We take responsibility for our actions and acknowledge that our worst moment resulted in the loss of life, pain, and suffering to victims, their families, and to the community. We are dedicated to atoning for our crimes.

The Norfolk Lifers Group believes that

we must contribute to public safety by embracing educational and rehabilitative programming for our members.

GOALS

The Norfolk Lifers Group has identified six major areas of concern to be addressed. Recent changes in the DOC's philosophy have dissipated roles by which, in the past, lifers were able to contribute to prison environments and to rehabilitation. In addition, the DOC has diminished resources previously available to lifers, even those eligible for parole and possible release. To counter these losses, the Norfolk Lifers Group strives to work in the following six areas:

EDUCATION & TRAINING

- 1) Developing innovative and effective ways to communicate our messages to supporters - inside and outside prison walls.
- 2) Bringing in guest speakers to address our members on current issues, e.g., re-entry programs, technological advances, and legal developments.
- 3) Providing information to prisoners concerning rehabilitation, programming, legal cases and resources, as well as other aspects of prison life.

PAROLE AND COMMUTATION

- 1) Assisting members to prepare parole

and/or commutation packages and to appear before the Parole Board at parole or commutation hearings.

- 2) Assisting members in understanding the parole and commutation process as well as communicating important developments regarding the Parole Board.
- 3) Assisting members who seek to challenge parole or commutation decisions.
- 4) Reporting annually on lifer parole decisions in the previous year.

LEGISLATION AND LITIGATION

- 1) Working for the passage of a bill for parole eligibility after 25 years for first degree lifers.
- 2) Challenging the current absence of commutations for lifers in MA.
- 3) Instituting efforts to develop and to maintain contacts in the Legislature to encourage passage of fair legislation affecting all prisoners.
- 4) Working for the passage of legislation for the release of aged, infirm, or terminally ill prisoners who pose no danger to society.
- 5) Working to restore voting rights for all prisoners.
- 6) Litigating the refusal of the DOC to respond to public records requests.

MEDICAL ISSUES

- 1) Working to improve programs for elderly and infirm prisoners, including hospice care and assisted daily living units.
- 2) Educating our membership on the importance of filling out and maintaining Health Care Proxies, Living Wills, and Last Wills and Testaments.

JOBS

- 1) Working to expand job opportunities for lifers and long-term prisoners.
- 2) Working to increase pay rates for skilled lifers and long-term prisoners who contribute to maintenance and educational needs at MCI-Norfolk.
- 3) Working to reintroduce avocation opportunities for lifers and long-term prisoners at MCI-Norfolk.

PROGRAM OPPORTUNITIES

- 1) Working to introduce new and more effective programs, including academic, computer, and vocational opportunities for lifers and long-term prisoners.
- 2) Working to reduce excessive program waiting lists and delays for lifers and long-term prisoners.
- 3) Working to restore Norfolk Lifers Group arts programs.

FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

- 1) Working to reintroduce Family and Friends events designed to maintain and to strengthen community bonds.
- 2) Working to introduce additional family relationship programs for lifers and long-term prisoners.

WHAT WE HAVE DONE RECENTLY

- 1) Produced reports on parole decisions for lifers from 2003 through 2014.
- 2) Submitted proposals for training lifers to care for elderly and infirm prisoners, for utilizing skilled lifers in work projects which would improve the structures and environment inside MCI-Norfolk.
- 3) Submitted an analysis of the needs of lifers and long-term prisoners at MCI-Norfolk, given that over two-thirds of the prisoners housed here are serving life or sentences of 15 years or more.
- 4) Hosted speakers on topics from mandatory minimums to prisoners' legal rights.
- 5) Produced reports on the costs of mass incarceration, recidivism, suicides, and changes in the Parole Board.

To review any of the above reports, go to
www.realcostofprisons.org.
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OUR MISSION STATEMENT

The Norfolk Lifers Group's mission is to:

- * Work for productive reforms designed to improve rehabilitation, self-respect, and the quality of life in prisons in MA. To that end, we strive to provide services for all men and women incarcerated in the Department of Correction (DOC), with an emphasis on those serving life or long-term sentences.
- * Study and eliminate barriers which limit collaboration between the community-at-large and prisoners.
- * Promote coordination and cooperation with any organization striving for similar goals in order to provide an effective use of penal and rehabilitative resources.
- * Provide an organization operating under sound ethical and democratic principles devoted to educating our members and those on the outside on penal and rehabilitative reform with the goals of reducing recidivism, improving public safety, and building peaceful and productive relationships with family members, fellow prisoners, supporters, and the community.