

Opinion: Views & commentary from around the community

Change Is Coming, Part 2



By Matthew Hattley

If personal safety is really a primary concern of DOCCS, there are much better ways to approach this than eliminating hooded sweatshirts and canned food. First, they should acknowledge that there is corruption and mismanagement within every facility, not excluding the DOCCS's Internal Affairs or Inspector General's office. (See *State*

Prisons: Albany Times Union, Feb 5, 2016). This problem must be addressed from the top down, not vice versa. Any employee who willingly abuses their authority, specifically on how they interact with the prison population, MUST be removed and prosecuted to the fullest extent of the law.

New York is currently in a position to set the precedent regarding genuine prison reform. Today's society is more concerned with rehabilitation as opposed to punishment — the mentality of the citizens is no longer that of the 1960s or 1970s. People are obviously tired of seeing tax dollars being wasted on a system that falls short of producing any solid results with the exception of warehousing thousands of men and women for decades after they have completed their minimum sentences at enormous annual cost. Thanks to the internet, people can now access information pretty much instantly.

Of course, while I work with a computer every day, I have never seen the internet. We have no access to the modern cyber-world at all. Still, actual prison statistics are just a few clicks away for those of you outside these walls. Everything from the average age and race of the prison population, the percentage of people sentenced for specific crimes, the length of sentences, how many violent acts occurred in New York prisons over a specific period of time, the number of incidents where a weapon was used, to the recidivism rate of both non-violent and violent individuals released on parole. I think a glance at that information would open many eyes that have been deceived for far too long.

Change does not have to mean just taking something away, like hooded sweatshirts. Change can also mean modifying, usually with an eye to making things better. The more informed the general public becomes, the greater the chance that sound decisions regarding changes in the prison system will actually occur. Specifically, regulating the Board of Parole, then implementing programs to show inmates how to operate a computer or a cell phone, how to prepare for a job interview, how to budget and save money, how to get and improve a credit rating, and finally, putting an end to the unnecessary brutality that occurs in every facility, usually to those suffering from a mental or medical condition.

The focus should not be on "what" we could utilize as a weapon — the options are far too numerous to list here, but rather on "how" to remove these negative thoughts from our minds. Replacing our idle time with something more productive, like training for re-entry, would be a great starting point.

Another possible solution to alleviating violence inside prisons would be to offer earned good time as an initiative. This is a system where the individual would have to maintain good behavior and participate and complete all of their mandatory programs in order to be eligible for a limited amount of time off their current sentences, usually in terms of months. This would allow us to focus more on proper rehabilitation and returning to our families and loved ones early as opposed to getting caught up in all of the unnecessary prison drama. Earned good time incentive also has the benefit of teaching the individual to be goal oriented, how to stay focused, and how to work with a system that most of us believe has failed us.

Furthermore, not only is it more cost efficient to rehabilitate incarcerated individuals, but those individuals can then become law-abiding taxpayers. I'd say that's a "win-win" situation for the state. I don't claim to have all the answers. I'm just giving you a perspective from inside the box. What I do know is that whether we like it or not — and that includes you, too — change is definitely coming.

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