

July 3, 2011

Mr. Michael Rezendes  
c/o The Boston Globe  
P.O. Box 55819  
Boston, MA 02205-5819

RE: Paroled lifers pose high risk of new crimes

Dear Mr. Rezendes,

I am writing regarding the above-entitled article authored by you in the June 11, 2011 Boston Sunday Globe.

You asserted that you studied 201 lifers who had been paroled from 2006 through 2010. Of those 201, 34.3% were reported by you to have been returned to prison - 14.9% for being accused of new crimes and 19.4% for technical violations. I suspect that your source was the Parole Board.

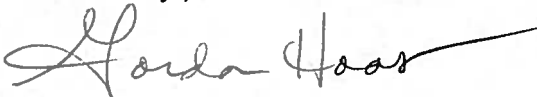
I am wondering why you did not include the Parole Board's study of 161 lifers who had been released from 2000 through 2006 which the Parole Board had conducted at the behest of the Criminal Justice Policy Coalition? Of those 161 lifers, 6 (3.7%) had been returned for new convictions: 2 for trafficking, and 1 each for drug possession, domestic assault & battery, possession of a firearm, and breaking & entering; 16 (9.9%) were returned for new arrests: 6 for assault & battery, 3 for possession of drugs, 2 for driving under the influence, and one each for gun possession, breaking & entering, assault, armed robbery, and trafficking; and 23 (14.3%) for technical violations: 7 for not following rules, 11 for possession or use of drugs, 2 for domestic disturbances and 3 for alcohol use.

No one supports the commission of serious crimes which endanger public safety. But, the return of lifers, or any parolee, for minor crimes such as use of drugs or alcohol or for technical violations such as breaking rules is counterproductive and very expensive. You noted that Josh Wall, chairman of the Parole Board, believes that such behavior can be the precursor to "more serious violent crimes." But, where is the empirical evidence for that? I suggest you read a report of over 70,000 released prisoners in Michigan entitled: Denying parole at first eligibility: How much public safety does it actually buy? published by CAPPS [Citizens Alliance on Prisons & Public Spending - August 2009 ([www.capps-mi.org](http://www.capps-mi.org).)] Over-incarceration not only failed to protect the public, it was found to have contributed to a higher recidivism rate.

The cost differential between one year on parole and one year of incarceration in prison is \$44,900 in Massachusetts, according to the Pew Center On The States (One in 31, March 2009). That translates to over \$1,700,000 spent to incarcerate just the 39 lifers you cited who were returned for technical violations from 2006 through 2010. Do you honestly believe that was money well spent? In these days of continual budget shortfalls, should the taxpayers pay nearly \$45,000 per year for each lifer returned for breaking a rule, or using drugs or alcohol? I am not arguing there should not be penalties for technical violations or violations of minor crimes, but reincarceration should be the last resort, not the first.

There is a wealth of information regarding paroling lifers which did not find its way into your article. It is far too easy to just scratch the surface and then walk away. I hope you will delve more deeply into the issue of paroling lifers. The changes in the Parole Board, starting with the chairman, will have far-reaching and negative impacts due to the actions of one or two lifers who obviously went far astray. The intense scrutiny of the past few months is testimony to how abnormal those actions were. But, it serves no one's best interests to assume that they were or are representative of all lifers who have rebuilt their lives into productive citizens and all those who have proven themselves ready to do the same, if given the chance. The present Parole Board has neither the disposition nor the experience to make reasonable judgments about who is ready for parole. It is easy to talk tough when you don't have to pay the bill. The taxpayers of Massachusetts will find Josh Wall's tough guy routine costing them dearly when it comes to pay the taxman.

Sincerely,



Gordon Haas  
Chairman - Norfolk Lifers Group  
MCI-Norfolk  
P.O. Box 43  
Norfolk, MA 02056