

Prison system needs overhauled

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To the Editor:

With \$85 billion in unfunded pension liabilities and over \$8 billion in unpaid bills, the credit rating agencies could no longer ignore Illinois' fiscal mess. What's worse is our state continues to perpetuate flawed policies that make no sense — the Illinois Department of Correction's Earned Good Conduct Credit being the perfect example. It is riddled with flaws, such as its eligibility requirements that leave many first-time, nonviolent offenders unable to earn the same good-time credits second-degree murderers routinely receive. And I could tell you of more, just not within 350 words.

Full disclosure: I am currently serving a 30-year prison sentence for cannabis convictions, and in no way do I approve of my prior mistakes. However, being in prison does not make my proposals any less valid. Democratic State Senator Michael Frerichs thought the research was commendable, and House Republican Leader Tom Cross stated that expanding the EGC Credit to include more nonviolent offenders “merits serious discussion.” The nonpartisan Real Cost of Prisons Project supports such changes and has published the proposal. (See www.realcostofprisons.org/writing/, then locate Spyles: “Letter to Quinn.”)

Governor Quinn signed Senate Bill 2621, which should return IDOC's population back to 2009 levels, but that still translates to a billion-plus budget. With a record-high prison population creating serious overcrowding conditions, we need to address the systematic issues — such as if it is worth spending hundreds of thousands of dollars to have any nonviolent offender serve multiple decades in prison — and we also need to start implementing common-sense reforms, like expanding the EGC Credit requirements. Please, look into the EGC proposal and ask your lawmakers, and Governor Quinn, why is it a bad idea? And if they cannot answer, then ask when they will be implemented.

— Jason Spyles
Taylorville, Ill.