

Early inmate release safe policy

Wed, 09/18/2013 By Salvador A. Godinez

As director of the Illinois Department of Corrections, I have a duty to protect the public while ensuring that people who are incarcerated, if eligible, have a successful re-entry into society.

I take great pride in the important steps we have taken in recent years, including the Supplemental Sentence Credit (SSC), which The News-Gazette recently editorialized about. Unfortunately, the editorial failed to include many key facts.

The editorial fails to mention that only nonviolent offenders are eligible for the SSC program. It also claims that the program exists to "clear out space" in Illinois prisons. The program is primarily intended for population management — it gives inmates added incentive for good behavior. And it works.

Population reduction is among the positive results of SSC, but not every offender who qualifies gets credit toward early release. In fact, more than 80 percent of eligible inmates have been denied SSC.

Most important, of 1,754 parolees (despite more than 9,000 eligible) with SSC, only approximately 1 percent have returned to prison. We find any death a tragedy, but the effectiveness of the program is clear.

Why is this recidivism so low? Because every individual is carefully reviewed by six experienced corrections professionals, including wardens as well as DOC's chief public safety officer. What you call "roll[s] of the dice" are meticulously examined decisions.

The General Assembly passed the program with very strong bipartisan support, and the bill was crafted with significant input by Judge David Erickson, prosecutors, advocates and the public. It is good criminal justice policy that makes nonviolent offenders less likely to commit crime in the future.

Your statement that "... there is no such thing as safe early release" is proven untrue by the approximately 99 percent of SSC recipients who are following the program's rules. No crime is a result of someone's freedom. It results from human choices during that freedom. To write "he surely won't be the last" is a wild assumption; again, no violent offender has been released under SSC.

Supplemental Sentence Credit should not be misrepresented by focusing on an unfortunate tragedy and failing to include critical facts and information.

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