

SAMPLE LETTER TO THE EDITOR

The Washington Post published an op-ed on The Second Chance Act now pending in both Houses of Congress on February 11 written by a California psychologist, David Farabee. As a provider of correctional services for a number of decades, I strongly concur with his observation that "justice delayed...is justice denied." For years, particularly in work within the juvenile justice system, we have lamented the disconnect in the offender's mind between the offense, the arrest and the much delayed justice sanction. Prompt administration of justice serves as both a deterrent and in helping errants understand the consequences of their crime.

However, on the broader subject of reentry, I assert that reentry is not about ideology, it is about practicality. There are 650,000 plus people coming out of prison this year. We need to deal with this first on a "hands on" basis. Inside the prisons, we need to encourage the teaching of vocational skills and adult basic education as a fact, not an ideal. As offenders come out of prison, we need to address the real needs of housing, clothing and food. We need to make sure that the resources are there and a plan is in place for the offender to access them, not just "hear" about them. If anyone thinks this is a "bleeding heart" approach, just consider the inevitable alternative of dealing instead with homeless, hungry felons on the street. Would this be a "smart thing?"

The writer is correct that there is a lot of program "garbage" out there. We are in an increasing era of evaluation of those programs. Some of those approaches that have been evaluated have been shown to be basically "ineffective." Some have been shown to actually increase harm and recidivism. But there are programs that have been shown to have had a positive effect. We need to encourage the proper assessment of offenders in institutions and upon their return to our communities so that they receive the proper program match to their specific issues. I am sure that the author would join us in our efforts to encourage jurisdictions to fund proven, legitimate, evidence based practices in treatment programs.

The issue before us is not the old rehabilitation vs. punishment argument. Our concern is entirely based the reality of 650,000 felons coming back to our neighborhoods and communities. Our goal is quite simple in concept but complex in execution. We increase the public's safety by the expediting the provision of those services critical in the first months of reentry to our society.

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