



Letter of Support for Senate Bill 942

Dear Members of the Pennsylvania Senate,

On behalf of Americans for Prosperity, we urge you to support Senate Bill 942, which would allow Pennsylvania to consider parole for inmates serving life sentences after a period of 15 years. Currently, life-sentenced inmates in the Commonwealth have no possibility of parole, regardless of their behavior, age, health, or risk to society.

Denying elderly, sick, or well-behaved inmates the possibility of parole is an injustice to individuals who pose little risk to the public and could be reunited with their families and contributing to society. SB 942 remedies this for future inmates and allows current life-serving prisoners the opportunity to seek parole if they have already served 15 years.

Needlessly imprisoning inmates is also costly. Pennsylvanians pay over \$42,000 per prisoner every year.¹ Despite posing dramatically less risk to the public on release,² elderly prisoners cost taxpayers an estimated three to nine times their younger counterparts.³ And of Pennsylvanians serving life sentences, over 40 percent are 50 or older.⁴

While Americans for Prosperity applauds the step in the right direction SB 942 represents and supports the bill in its current form, we would like to see the legislature push further to drive meaningful parole and sentencing reforms in Pennsylvania.

First, inmates serving life sentences who have shown evidence of rehabilitation or are sick or elderly should have more and earlier chances to appear before the Board of Probation and Parole.

Second, rather than merely offering inmates the chance to petition a board known for its delays and high rejection rates, Pennsylvania should join states like Michigan in adopting presumptive parole policies. Presuming an inmate's fitness for earlier release does not compromise the Board's ability to keep the public safe from offenders who still belong behind bars while increasing the likelihood that deserving prisoners can re-enter society earlier.

¹ Chris Mai and Ram Subramanian, *The Price of Prisons: Examining State Spending Trends, 2010-2015*. VERA INSTITUTE OF JUSTICE (May 2017) Available at: <https://www.vera.org/publications/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends/price-of-prisons-2015-state-spending-trends-prison-spending>

² Bell, et. al., *Recidivism Report*. PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (Feb. 2013) Available at: <https://www.cor.pa.gov/About%20Us/Statistics/Documents/Reports/2013%20PA%20DOC%20Recidivism%20Report.pdf>

³ Samantha Melamed, "More people than ever are dying in prison. Their caregivers? Other inmates." Philadelphia Inquirer (Sept. 2017) <http://www.philly.com/philly/living/more-people-than-ever-are-dying-in-prison-their-caregivers-other-inmates-20170927.html?arc404=true>

⁴ Krause, et. al., Annual Statistical Report. PENNSYLVANIA DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS (2016) Available at: <https://www.cor.pa.gov/About%20Us/Statistics/Documents/Reports/2016%20ASR%20Report.pdf>

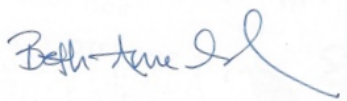
Third, SB 942 still leaves mandatory minimum sentencing for third strike offenses in place. Americans for Prosperity believes that a society operating under an effective rule of law should allow judges to impose punishments proportionate to the crime, taking into consideration the facts of the case and the nature and history of the defendant. Denying this key discretion through arbitrary and draconian sentencing laws compels judges to frequently impose overly harsh sentences, undermining justice, reducing respect for the law, and needlessly expanding the size and cost of our prisons.

Lastly, we encourage supporters of SB 942 to add language establishing re-entry assistance plans for released or paroled inmates, particularly the elderly. These programs improve the lives of former prisoners as they readjust to society, and reduce recidivism risks, keeping the public safer and saving taxpayer dollars.

Abolishing life without parole sentencing will strengthen the rule of law in Pennsylvania by advancing a fairer criminal justice system. Americans for Prosperity believes rehabilitated inmates deserve opportunities for second chances, and that sick and elderly prisoners deserve dignity in their final years.

We endorse this bill and strongly urge the legislature to take additional action to further improve Pennsylvania's parole, sentencing, and re-entry regimes.

For Freedom,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Beth Anne Mumford". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Beth Anne Mumford

State Director

Americans for Prosperity-Pennsylvania