



AMERICANS FOR PROSPERITY®

WEST VIRGINIA

February 5, 2020

Dear Lawmakers,

On behalf of Americans for Prosperity activists across West Virginia, I urge you to **support Senate Bill 620, establishing a non-violent offense parole program, as well as to consider improvements to make the legislation more effective. This vote may be recorded in our 2020 session legislative scorecard.**

Senate Bill 620 allows the Commissioner of Corrections to establish a nonviolent offense parole program for eligible inmates that would help accelerate low-risk prisoner's access to parole, prioritizing limited space in West Virginia's overcrowded correctional facilities for more serious offenders.

SB 620 would allow inmates convicted of non-violent offenses who have successfully completed a rehabilitation treatment program to be paroled without requiring action from the Parole Board, as long as they have already served their minimum term of their sentence, and are already eligible for parole under the pre-existing, slower process.

Prisoners should have an incentive to take steps to rehabilitate themselves so that they can more successfully return to their communities after release. Offering the opportunity for inmates convicted of less serious offenses to enter parole more quickly after participating in recidivism-reducing programming creates the right incentives while better prioritizing prison resources on higher risk inmates. This approach is better for turning lives around and for sparing West Virginia taxpayers from the burden of paying for unnecessarily high incarceration rates.

While we believe that SB 620 is a good step in the right direction, we encourage legislators to consider the following improvements to strengthen the bill:

- Expand scope: SB 620 has the right goals—allowing more people who have made concrete steps towards rehabilitation to start parole earlier, rather than later.
- Clarifying language on eligibility:
 - **Ensure exclusions reflect convictions for enhancements:** SB 620 restricts prisoners serving sentences for felonies for drug offenses involving the actual or threatened violence to a person or involving the use of a firearm. The bill should require that those excluded from both standard and non-violent offense parole on these grounds were actually convicted of these sentence enhancements by a judge and jury—not merely accused of them during trial.
 - **Clarifying language on program completion:** To ensure future consistency in standards for program completion that don't unnecessarily delay low-risk prisoners' eligibility for non-violent offense parole, supporters of SB 620 should statutorily outline completion criteria in its text, ideally after consultation with the Commissioner of Corrections.

Senate Bill 620 will improve West Virginia's parole system by ensuring that lower risk inmates already taking steps to rehabilitate themselves need not remain incarcerated longer than necessary to successfully reenter their communities. SB 620's approach will improve lives and ease taxpayer burdens in the process. We believe that additional improvements will make SB 620 more effective, but believe the bill is a step in the right direction. **For these reasons, Americans for Prosperity-West Virginia urges you to support Senate Bill 620.**

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jason Huffman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Jason Huffman
State Director
Americans for Prosperity-West Virginia