Parole Reform: Senate Bill 761/Assembly Bill 1986

New Jersey’s parole system is broken. Parole release decisions are often arbitrary and too many individuals are needlessly incarcerated after they have served their basic sentence. Senate Bill 761/Assembly Bill 1986 will fix the parole system by rewarding good behavior and encouraging rehabilitation. It will insure that parole decisions are not unfair or arbitrary. It will save taxpayer money, promote public safety and strengthen communities by encouraging successful reentry and reintegration into the community.

Senate Bill 761/Assembly Bill 1986 allows for the release of low-risk individuals from prison after they have completed their basic sentence, provided that they commit no serious disciplinary infractions while incarcerated and participate in rehabilitation programs. Incarcerating low-risk individuals beyond their basic sentence is wasteful and ineffective.

- Low-risk offenders who spend more time in prison are more likely to re-offend than those who serve less time.
- Recidivism rates are lower for those released on community supervision than for those who remain incarcerated longer and are released with no supervision.
- Treatment is more effective in the community than in prison.

More than 40 percent of New Jersey inmates “max out,” that is, serve their full prison sentence without a period of support and supervision in the community. This is twice the national rate. Those who “max out” have almost a 40 percent chance of returning to prison for a new crime verses only a 25 percent chance for those who receive some parole supervision in the community.

These unfair and ineffective policies disproportionately impact New Jersey’s most vulnerable communities. While African Americans and Latinos make up less than 30 percent of the state’s population, they account for more than 80 percent of those who are incarcerated. And racial disparities in New Jersey prisons are the highest in the nation.

New Jersey’s parole system is broken and serves neither the interests of justice or public safety. The system is economically unsustainable, ineffective and counterproductive. Individuals often remain needlessly warehoused in prisons after they completed their basic sentence—at a cost of around $50,000 a year to taxpayers. The increased amount of time individuals spend incarcerated actually increases the chance that they will commit another crime and reduces the chance that they will successfully reintegrate into the community.

It is time to learn from our mistakes and build on our successes. Over the last decade, New Jersey has decreased its prison population, reduced crime and cut recidivism. By encouraging rehabilitation and saving taxpayers money, Senate Bill 761/Assembly Bill 1986 will build on these successes and ensure a fairer and more effective system.