

I will begin by stating the obvious. Since all correspondence, except those of a legal nature are scrutinised, you should expect, on some issues, responses may be muted. For this reason, I will keep my observations and suggestions targeted to larger thematic areas. I am sure that you will receive many letters addressing issues with guards, the medical system and so on. As such, I am bringing other ideas forward.

Imprisonment is a business, and as such, those towns, cities, and municipalities which derive a net benefit from the proceeds of incarceration are more interested in their benefit rather than rehabilitation. This then turns our justice system into political football. There is hardly a politician out there who would stand up and try to find ways to reduce our prison population by fifty to seventy percent. Yet, that is what we should be looking at doing, particularly when a good number of prisoners are people with addictions and psychological issues. These issues are dealt with primarily through medicating prisoners. What we need are holistic rehabilitation centres, rather than penitentiaries. Those centres would revolve around addressing addictions (i.e. alcohol, drugs, psychological, etc.), and preparing prisoners through education and vocational training to reintegrate into society. Those centres should be considered for any prisoner, especially for those where violence is not considered to be a concern and for anyone returning to the community within five years.

The parole system is broken. Far too much power rests in the hands of Parole Board Canada (PBC), and its dependence on the bias and prejudices of its officials.¹ PBC should either be removed or its power diminished greatly (i.e. to issues related to those serving lengthy sentences), so that parole officers and psychologists who are professionals, and spend their time directly with prisoners are empowered to release them conditionally. As it stands now, a prisoner who has positive reports from all members of their CMT (Case Management Teams) can be denied parole after a thirty-minute parole board assessment. Considering that little professional training exists for PBC members, it hardly seems appropriate to empower them as much as we do. Another area where the PBC could be utilised is to act as a review where a prisoner feels that an error has been rendered by their CMT who would, under my proposal, have more responsibility with respect to the granting of parole.

I am also troubled by the number of restrictions placed on those who are granted parole. Often people wind-up coming back into the penitentiary

system for breaching their conditions. I can understand the desire to keep prisoners away from environments that may cause them to re-offend, but when conditions are arbitrarily applied several years after release the likelihood of breaching one's conditions goes up. Perhaps a change in thinking is required. My suggestion would be that one's conditions can only include restrictions that are directly related to the offense. For example, if alcohol was not attributed as a cause of an offence then why put a restriction on a parolee that they cannot consume alcohol?

We as a society must understand how fast technology is moving and how it affects each of its segments. Consider that in today's world any criminal record against someone will live on forever. There is no 'pulling up stakes and restarting' somewhere else as you could have in the pre-internet age. In my case, the police tweeted my arrest and the charges within eighteen hours of being charged. Part of rehabilitation must allow a person the opportunity to not have their worst actions follow them forever. For this reason, I am advocating that on a first offence that does not include violence and is punished with a sentence of less than five years that no record can be accessed by the media once the warrant has been completed. These records should be frozen, that is to say that no one can access those records unless they are related to another offence and are required for sentencing. Essentially, the first offence is a non-recordable if it meets the parameters noted above.

The penal system places far too much emphasis on punishment, choosing to spend its resources on warehousing prisoners, rather than rehabilitating them. A change in philosophy is required directed to exiting prisoners slated to re-enter society capable of finding jobs and understanding how to deal with stress. We need to consider a simple overhaul. The longer we keep an individual in prison the less chance that we have of reintegrating them functionally into society. Everyone in prison has some level of depression, anxiety and stress. It is not only the confinement, it is the treatment. Guards have a master-slave view of their position. As such their own psyche can make for adversarial conditions. For example, after 9:30pm stand up count the guards come around every two hours. On paper, these rounds are to ensure that prisoners who are sleeping are not in need of immediate health care. So, as you are sleeping, it is not unusual for a guard to shine their flashlights into your face and kick the door. They say that this is necessary in order to apply CPR if necessary. This is ludicrous of course since they would actually have to arrive at the exact moment that you expired in order

to have any realistic chance of applying CPR and saving you. What this policy does is wake people up every two hours, thus depriving them of a good night's sleep. At the same time as the penitentiary claims this as a safety protocol, they would not equip each housing unit with an AED unit.

At this point, it may be best to continue with this letter in an abbreviated fashion, otherwise I would fill pages upon pages. Here, then, are the points to consider:

- A “different” type of prison situation is required for dealing with gangs. Mixing these prisoners within the general population needs to be reconsidered.
- Rather than mandatory minimum sentences, our justice system needs to consider alternative options. Persons who have not committed violent crime would be better off being referred to mental health, addiction or similar services as required. Prisons offer little in terms of correcting behaviour related to these issues.
- I suggest that, as part of the review, you should focus on looking at other penal systems that treat prisoners with a level of dignity (e.g. Norway).
- Guards should be required to undergo a psychological assessment at least once a year. Honestly, I have seen too many guards who are bullies who enjoy berating and belittling prisoners. I cannot imagine any other workplace that would tolerate such behaviour. Regardless of my current imprisonment, I am a citizen and deserve to be treated as a human being, not as a punching bag or a whipping post.
- I will end with a broad statement in regard to health care and mental health care. Both are in serious need of overhauling. There are insufficient psychologists available to handle the needs of prisoners. They seem to exist only for the purpose of serving the institutions requirements, not ours or those of the communities to which most of us will return.

I trust you will find my observations useful. I do not believe that much, if anything, will change. However, I have honestly added my thoughts in the hope that other voices have spoken as well.

ENDNOTES

- ¹ According to the 2014/2015 performance monitoring report for the Parole Board of Canada, parole grant rates for the various regions are as follows: In 2014/15, all regions reported increases in their federal conditional release offender populations: the Atlantic (+5%), Quebec (+4%), Pacific (+4%), Prairie (+2%) and Ontario (+1%) regions. However, in the Quebec region, the federal day parole offender population decreased in 2014/15 (-5%), the federal full parole population remained relatively unchanged (0.3%), while the statutory release population increased significantly (+16%) compared to the year before. In 2014/15, the highest proportion of Aboriginal offenders was in the Prairie region: 47% of federal male prisoners and 64% of federal female prisoners in the Prairie region were Indigenous. By comparison, 33% of federal male prisoners on conditional release and 42% of federal female prisoners on conditional release in the Prairie region were Indigenous (Parole Board Canada, 2015). Parole Board of Canada (2015) *Performance Monitoring Report 2014/2015*, Ottawa. Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/content/dam/canada/parole-board/migration/005/009/093/005009-3000-2015-en.pdf>