

January 20, 2025

Senator Larson and the Judiciary Committee/SB 2128

I am the mother of a long-term resident of the North Dakota State Penitentiary. Over the past 20+ years we have seen so many positive changes in the Department of Corrections, many started by the former warden and now director of the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation, Colby Braun.

Realizing that the percentage of residents being released and becoming a neighbor of mine or yours is quite high. As a resident of Minot and the State of North Dakota I would definitely prefer that person to have gone through rehabilitation programs, incentive programs along with classes to improve themselves while they have been incarcerated. Hopefully, by NOT having mandatory sentences it would allow the Department of Corrections to make decisions on a case by case basis as they work with each individual on a daily basis. By having the mandatory sentences with no incentives to improve themselves seems to me to be a detriment to releasing good, productive citizens rather than bitter, angry people that will be my neighbor. It would seem to me that treating the residents like a human being rather than just an inmate number would produce decent releasees.

During the last Legislative Session there were committee hearings held at NDSP where the legislators could see all the positive programs for the residents. We heard several positive comments at that time. We've talked to other parents who are seeing the results of a positive atmosphere rather than a negative place.

I don't know all the statistics regarding recidivism but throughout the years we've been visiting there, we've seen very little return of guys that have been able to participate in transitional housing or at the Missouri River Correctional Center. My belief is that is the result of positive programs at NDSP and the re-entry training in the transitional housing or MRCC. Please do NOT pass this bill on mandatory sentences. People change and can be rehabilitated but those decisions should be made by the ones most closely working with the residents on a daily basis.

My son would not be affected by this decision either way but I would hate to see mandatory sentencing without regard for changes in someone who knows they need to repay society and many times would be better doing that as a tax paying, productive citizen in my neighborhood. I trust that DOCR would be making good decisions and not allow someone to be released who is not fit to be part of society.

Thank you for your consideration.

Rhonda Schmidkuntz