



Madam Chair Larson and Members of the Senate Judiciary Committee

My name is Curtiss Heidebrink, I am the program director of F5 Project's Akisni Warrior Lodge in James River Correctional Center (JRCC). A groundbreaking culturally rooted therapeutic community centered in the Indigenous culture. Akisni focuses on the intergenerational transmission of trauma, addiction recovery, healthy communication and revitalizing the Native cultures of the plains people. Like the many transformative programs F5 Project offers, the Akisni Warrior Lodge aims to reduce recidivism and promote change and hope.

I am writing to express my deep concerns and opposition to SB 2128, which I believe poses significant risks to the rehabilitation and reentry process for justice-involved individuals. As someone with firsthand experience of incarceration and the challenges faced during that time, I can speak to the importance of programs and opportunities that promote personal growth and community reentry. SB 2128 will reduce active and meaningful involvement in rehabilitative programs and disrupt crucial reentry processes such as parole and transitional housing, exacerbating the very issues it seeks to address. Programs like these are vital for successful reintegration, providing structure, support, and hope for a better future. Disrupting these pathways would add stress to an already overburdened and overcrowded prison system.

One of my greatest concerns with SB 2128 is that it removes judicial discretion and the ability for courts to make case-by-case decisions. By imposing rigid sentencing requirements, the bill eliminates incentives for individuals to pursue personal growth and positive change while incarcerated. This can lead to unintended consequences, including an increase in violent behavior among those serving long sentences with no hope of early release. Without the prospect of parole or other incentives, individuals may lose motivation to engage in rehabilitative efforts, potentially turning nonviolent offenders into violent ones during their incarceration.

My own story illustrates the profound impact that meaningful reentry opportunities can have on an individual's life. I was sentenced to serve an 18-month in the NDDOCR and was released on parole early. That opportunity marked the beginning of my journey toward personal transformation and community contribution. With support from reentry programs and a chance to rebuild my life, I have been able to make a positive impact in my community and even within the justice system itself, including at the James River Correctional Center (JRCC). Had SB 2128 been in effect during my time of incarceration, my trajectory might have been very different.

I urge you to consider the broader implications of SB 2128. Rather than fostering public safety, it risks creating a cycle of hopelessness and violence within our prison system. By taking away opportunities for rehabilitation and removing judicial discretion, this bill undermines the very principles of justice and fairness.

Thank you for your time and attention to this critical matter.

Curtiss Heidebrink, Akisni Program Director