

VOICES FROM THE INSIDE: RESTRUCTURING THE CONVERSATION ON TECHNICAL PAROLE VIOLATIONS

AFSC Edition

BREAKING NEWS



LOCKED AWAY ON TECHNICAL PAROLE VIOLATION

Person X, reimprisoned on count of couch surfing, sentenced 6 months. X, unable to find adequate housing to fulfill the address requirement, was left to sleep on friends' and families' couches to avoid freezing, sleepless nights on the streets. Just shy of 25 days since his release, X is being sent back into the system with no support in stabilizing his mental state, housing crisis, or familial recovery. With the lack of resources, X had been left with nothing to facilitate any psychological recovery, financial stability, and success on the road of reintegration.

MORE INFORMATION BELOW...

THE SCOOP ON MAXING SENTENCES



Rather than to serve the rest of his sentence on parole, he chooses to max out his sentence inside...

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL TOLL OF PAROLE



A REPORT BY THE AFSC PRISON WATCH PROGRAM
JUNE 2024



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This report is an effort between a student, people inside New Jersey prisons, and returning citizens. It was created by AFSC Prison Watch Program Director Bonnie Kerness (908-410-3978 / bkerness@afsc.org) and Intern Diane Kim, with further assistance from Ojore Lutalo. Diane Kim is a Leadership Scholar with the Institute for Women's Leadership at Rutgers University.

The American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) promotes a world free of violence, inequality, and oppression.

Guided by the Quaker belief in the divine light within each person, we nurture the seeds of change and the respect for human life to fundamentally transform our societies and institutions. We work with people and partners worldwide, of all faiths and backgrounds, to meet urgent community needs, challenge injustice, and build peace.



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Executive Summary

In the State of New Jersey, the enforcement of “technical parole violations” –violations by which individuals allegedly break a condition of parole that is not itself a criminal offense–accounts for a significant percentage of cases of reimprisonment.

New Jersey currently holds 1,700 technical parole violators within its facilities. These are individuals who have not been accused or convicted of a new crime. Instead, they are people who have violated a condition of their parole, like missing a meeting with their Parole Officer.

Re-incarcerating people for technical parole violations is both cruel and costly. The cost of housing a single person in a New Jersey prison is \$75,000 per year. It costs far less to offer that person support in their community.

If the state could provide the necessary support and guidance to individuals in the community, it could shut down facilities like the East Jersey State Prison–an old, dilapidated, and inhumane site. With a single prison closure, the state could alleviate staff shortages, reallocating officers to areas where their presence is urgently required.

Testimonies

This report documents the stories of formerly incarcerated individuals in New Jersey who were reincarcerated due to technical parole violations. They describe instances in which scheduling conflicts or lack of resources led to reimprisonment while attempting to meet the standards of their parole. These accounts show inconsistencies in the discretion used by parole officers, and the disproportionate consequences applied to circumstances which may be out of the parolees’ control.

Recommendations

The continued punishment of formerly incarcerated people through enforcement of technical parole violations 1) does not serve our communities, 2) costs state taxpayers millions of dollars, and 3) dehumanizes and desensitizes our society.

We urge the State of New Jersey to reconsider the costly and irrational practice of reincarcerating individuals who have already met the Parole Board’s standards for freedom. Instead, the Prison Watch Program of the American Friends Service Committee has issued the following recommendations:

1. Abolish the practice of sending parolees back to prison on the basis of technical parole violations.
2. Remain free while waiting for parole revocation hearing.
3. Divest the financial burden of reincarcerating parolees and reinvest it into direct aid, rehabilitations, and support programs.

4. Implement grants to support parolee reintegration, creating spaces of treatment and assistance rather than spaces of trauma.
5. Ensure the distribution of funds and resources to promote parolee reintegration into society.
6. Transition parole officers from supervisors to partners, aiding in the creation of short and long-term freedom maintenance strategies.
7. Guarantee the attainment of bank accounts, social security cards, birth certificates, and other necessary documents.

Introduction

In 2017, 27% of all prison admissions within the state of New Jersey were for parole violations¹. 6% of them were for new criminal offenses and 21% were for technical violations. This means that 21% of the entire state admissions population is sitting in prison for offenses such as couch surfing, homelessness, a failed drug test, a missed curfew, and the list goes on.

The Council of State Government states that on any given day, 2,698 individuals are incarcerated in New Jersey because of a supervision violation². Some of these individuals will linger behind bars awaiting their revocation hearings, many of whom will be sentenced to days, months, or years of confinement without committing any new crimes. What justification is there to lock up individuals who are in wait of a hearing? Where do we uphold the principle of innocent until proven guilty?

The implementation of parole within the United States, as stated by the Department of Justice, supposedly has a three-fold purpose: (1) to provide support for parolees in employment, housing, finances, and other personal issues concerning to the adjustment of life upon release; (2) to reduce the likelihood of reoffending by establishing parolees into the community and preventing situations in which they may reoffend; and (3) to prevent unnecessary imprisonment for individuals unlikely to commit further crimes and who meet the criteria for parole.¹ In our efforts to reintegrate parolees as productive members of society, there is simply no benefit in implementing intolerance and inhumanity within our approach.

So, what is a technical parole violation? Technical parole violations are violations by which individuals allegedly break a condition of parole that is not itself a criminal offense. If an individual fails to report for a scheduled officer visit, that is a technical parole violation. If an individual misses curfew, technical parole violation. If he or she forgets to notify their parole officer of a change in residence; if they have been couch surfing; if they can't afford to pay their dues—every single one—a technical parole violation.

But let's take a closer look into these violations. Say that your car stalls in the middle of a snowstorm and you're forced to walk home... you miss curfew that night. Should we send you back into the system? If your meeting is set for one o'clock in the afternoon and you can't get off work in time, suppose you miss an officer visit. Is that

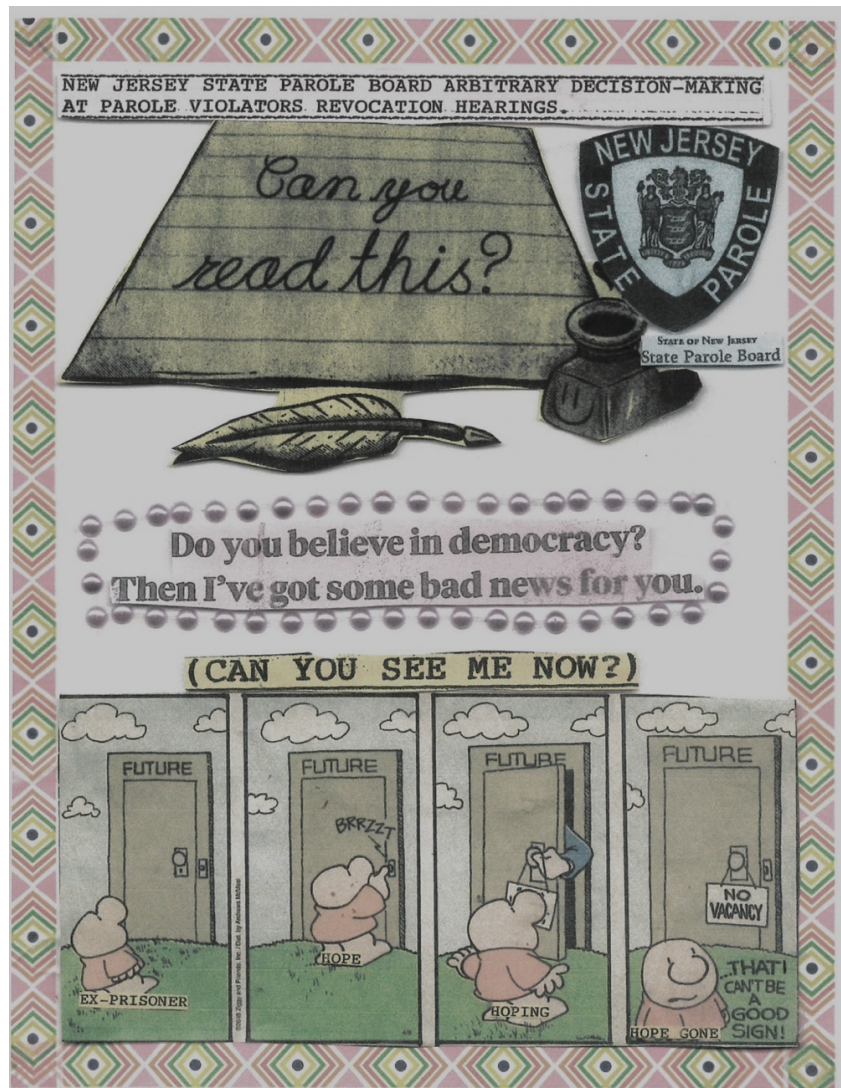
¹ "Confined and Costly," CSG Justice Center, accessed April 19, 2024, <https://csgjusticecenter.org/publications/confined-costly/>.

² "Confined and Costly."

worthy of re-entry? Parolees are still privy to the disadvantages and circumstantial changes of bad weather and uptight bosses.

So, what exactly happens next? The parole board reviews the officer's report of a violation in order to determine whether there is probable cause to revoke parole for the parolee. The optimal outcome would be that the parole board sees that the violation occurred under circumstances beyond the individual's control. As for the bleakest possibility, we will have sent a recently released individual back into the system over a technicality.

If parolees get sent back to prison on a technical parole violation, where they have not reoffended, how is it that we are serving these so-called purposes of parole? It may be that we are not effectively distributing the public investment in parole.



Artwork by Ojore Nuru Lutalo



Every Story Has a Story.



Testimonies

In order for us to fully understand the extent to which parole officers can utilize personal discretion to their advantage, especially in cases of technical parole violations, it is necessary to explore real-life testimonies. Not only are these real people with real stories to tell, but it is also important to note the ways in which power, dehumanization, and haste play into these experiences.

For the purposes of anonymity and privacy for those who have entrusted us with their stories, we have chosen to protect their identities.

DW, released after eight-and-a-half years in prison, was set to spend the next five years under parole supervision. As a full-time student at Rutgers University (Newark), he was granted the opportunity to live on campus with another justice-impacted individual. Due to campus rules and regulations, he was required to move out of his on-campus apartment after the fall semester had finished. In the craze of moving out of his apartment, attempting to secure temporary housing, and then moving in with a family member also located in Newark, he had forgotten to notify and update his address with his parole officer. Two days after he had finished moving in, his parole officer called to summon him into his office. On arrival, he was swiftly notified of his technical parole violation and was sent back to prison to await a revocation hearing.

DW will spend 30 months inside before being released on parole, again. 30 months because he had forgotten to update his address. He wasn't a flight risk, did not commit any new crimes. He just moved, within the same city, and failed to notify his parole officer.

MM, released on parole after 11 years and five months, was to immediately report in person to the District Parole Supervisor or his designated representative upon his release. On the day of his release, Governor Chris Christie had suddenly declared a state of emergency in New Jersey. He called his parole officer to explain the situation

and his inability to reach the office immediately after his release due to the declaration. His parole officer would respond in the upcoming days by sending him back to prison two days after being released. When the state of emergency had been lifted, MM showed up at his parole officer's office to be notified that he would be sent back for his technical parole violation.

Though MM had spoken to his parole officer immediately upon release, there had not been a written document that stated the agreement between the two individuals. MM would spend 90 days in custody as a result of this "miscommunication" and then is subsequently released on parole, again.

IC, who spent four years and six months in prison, does not make the same mistake—he goes straight to his parole officer's office in Newark upon release. IC's parole officer visits him in his approved residency for the second time for a routine visit. When the officer demands to speak with him in his private bedroom, IC questions the validity of the request without a basis of probable cause. The officer responds by telling him to report to her officer later that day. Before she leaves the premises, the parole officer taunts IC by imploring him to "read the conditions of his parole," and he responds by affirming his understanding of these conditions—that there is no obligation to move within his own home unless there is probable cause for a search.

Before he even has a chance to report to the office, the parole officer comes back to his place of residence with two other officers. The officers and their supervisor, who later arrives at the scene, escalate the situation and create a false narrative. IC is subsequently handcuffed and demanded to take off his shoes, qualifying as a strip search. He was then given papers to sign that would indicate that he was not cooperating with a home visit and would have to participate in a residential community program for 90 days. IC refuses on the basis that he had simply asked for clarification on the request to talk in his private bedroom.

His parole officer attempts to charge IC with a technical parole violation that will fit the situation, dictating that he had refused a search. Her story, fabricated and contradictory, still overrides IC's freedom and sends him back to prison.

The system of parole is infested by the limitations of its power dynamic... if officers are able to exploit their personal discretion as a method of control, parolees will never escape the cycle of incarceration.

Cofounder of the Returning Citizens Support Group **Al Tariq Witcher** calls out the difficulties of making parole “work” for a returning citizens schedule. Returning citizens are expected to hold a nine-to-five job, tend to the requests of their parole officers, and balance the wishes of their superiors. He offers the example of an officer who might ask of their parolee to come in on a Wednesday at 1:30 PM, obstructing their work schedules. Officers can oftentimes show up at returning citizens’ workplaces unannounced, creating challenges in maneuvering their social and professional lives.

Another cofounder of the support group, **Edwin “Chino” Ortiz**, sheds light on the resistance to parole within the justice system. He speaks of many individuals who chose to max out their sentences because they simply do not wish to live a life under the oppressive power dynamic of a parole officer. Those who attempt to rebuild their lives outside the prison walls are still shackled by the abundance of obstacles and the lack of resources to overcome them.

Members of the **Returning Citizens Support Group**, while staying anonymous, deliberate on the intentions and motives of parole officers while recounting personal experiences. Of the group, one member speaks on the lack of emotional investment in the job of his parole officer. He notes the officer had no interest in assisting him in overcoming any mental or emotional challenges that had surfaced while re-entering society.

Another member, referred to as **S**, recounts an experience with a parole officer who had barged into his home at seven in the morning, waking up his family members in the process. He touches upon the invasiveness of certain visits and mannerisms that can undermine the respect and trust necessary to create a system of support within the parolee-parole officer relationship. S recalls a moment with his parole officer years prior, where he had requested that the visits occur after a certain hour of the morning so that his mother and sister could have enough time to leave the house. The officer blatantly ignored his request, and upon receiving a complaint, threatened to send S back to prison.

D, also a member, states that “They need sensitivity training. They done gave them these badges, vests, and guns so they got a cop mentality. They do not know how to interact with the guys coming out.” He vocalizes the lack of empathy and compassion from parole officers who may suffer from job dissatisfaction and inadequate training.

MD, former paralegal at Edna Mahan Correctional Facilities, speaks on the clear lack of care and resources available for parolees. She expresses that oftentimes, individuals on parole will have no access to transportation and are unable to safely report to the parole office. While one or two individuals may receive bus cards, the available funds are not distributed with generosity. Parolees are similarly unable to find adequate housing, falling into homelessness or being vacated out of their shelters. The requirement of having an “address on file” to avoid a technical parole violation does not approve of couch surfing, shelters, or losing one’s source of income. It is outrageous to send parolees back to prison on technical violations due to their lack of access to housing, transportation, or income. They need assistance of substance, not reimprisonment³.

MM, at Edna Mahan, offers alternatives for the imprisonment of parolees on technical parole violations that would serve both the interests of the Parole Board and the parolees. She emphasizes the preventative steps and measures that should be taken to avoid the revocation of parole. She suggests that if a parolee “requires assistance for addiction issues then they should be diverted to a program for drug addiction and treatment.” The same would go for mental health crises, difficulties in securing housing, financial distress, and a wide variety of obstacles parolees may face. Many of the issues that arise in a parolee’s transition into society can be thwarted by safeguards put in place to assist them. The success of parole does not lie with the reincarceration of individuals, instead, with initiatives of assistance⁴.

NW, having been incarcerated for over 15 years, has been privy to the personal stories of parolees who have since then been “reverted” back to prison. These so-called reversals can occur simply because a parole officer does not like his or her parolee⁵.

NW sheds light on the inadequacy of programs of “assistance” in place at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility. She expresses the uselessness of the transitional aid provided just six to nine months before the release of an individual. In this, the program does not offer assistance in financial literacy of any kind, how to secure employment, how to create résumés, how to find housing, or even how to “sell themselves” at interviews. Women who have spent upwards of 25 years in prison do not have the means or resources to truly succeed in civil society without this knowledge.

³ Full testimonial attached, See Attachment 2

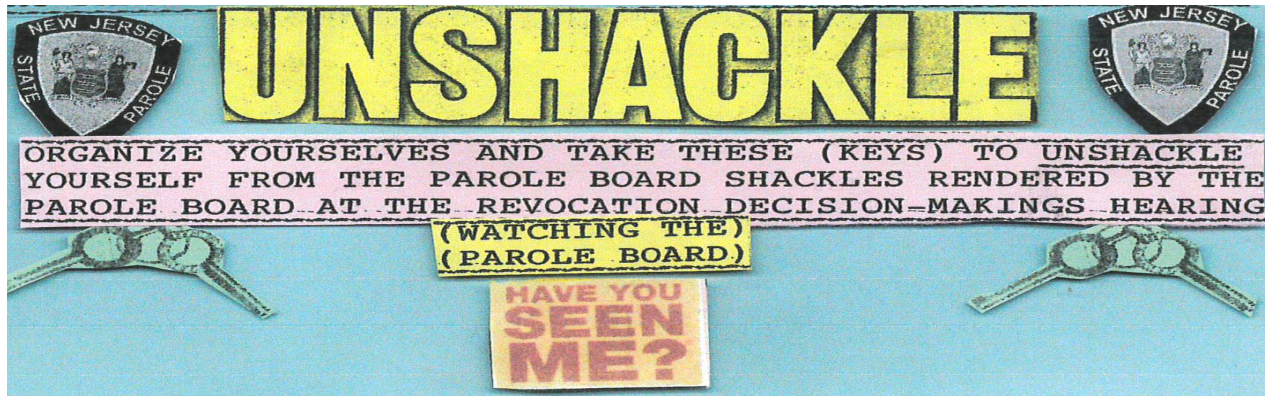
⁴ Full testimonial attached, See Attachment 1

⁵ Full testimonial attached, See Attachment 3

NW talks about her own experiences in coming home after over 15 years and having minimal preparation for her release. Despite taking every group, graduating with an associate and bachelor's degree through NJ-STEP⁶, and receiving an apprenticeship in Office Management through a Business Administration class, NW has no means of transferring her skills and strengths into the real world.

She exclaims that “There is no real help for us, we’re just being housed.”

⁶ NJ-STEP is a prison education initiative established in 2012 in New Jersey that seeks to provide education and rehabilitation to incarcerated people.



Arguments

In recognizing the deficits within the parole system, there is a definitive and demanding argument that needs to be heard. The punishment of revocation and imprisonment for technical parole violations is both unproductive and inefficient in sustaining the goals of the parole system. It does nothing to serve our communities, simply basks in the dehumanization of parolees, and is coming straight out of public pockets.

(1) It does not serve our communities.

In sending parolees back into prison without exhausting all efforts to assist their reintegration within society, where are we serving the interests of our communities? As outlined in the introduction, the goals of the parole system are set to provide support and assistance for parolees, reduce their likelihood of reoffending, and prevent unnecessary imprisonment for individuals unlikely to commit further crimes.

However, the reimprisonment of parolees for technical parole violations has neither equipped parolees with aid nor prevented unnecessary incarceration for individuals unlikely to commit further crimes. In fact, it has done the exact opposite. Why should parolees who are facing difficulties securing housing or a stable source of income be sent back into the system? Why should parolees who are awaiting revocation hearings sit behind bars? It seems like only the quickest and least cost-effective solutions that are being employed in response to issues that are arising within the parole system.

If we divest the money that it takes to send an individual back to prison and reallocate those funds into housing assistance programs, we can break the cycle of

reincarceration and homelessness. The same goes for parolees struggling with mental health concerns or substance abuse. It is resources and aid that they need, not confinement.

(2) It costs us millions of dollars.

The relentless cycle of reentry and release for parolees has created steep costs for New Jersey taxpayers. According to a recent Council of State Governments study, 2,698 people are sitting in New Jersey prisons as a result of a parole or probation violation on any given day. The study *Confined and Costly: How Supervision Violations are Filling Prisons* explores and exposes the statistics behind parole violations. The 14% of the 2018 New Jersey prison population was made up of parole violators had cost the state \$183 million dollars. The Federal Bureau of Justice Statistics states that from the years of 2014 to 2017, prison admissions totaled 35,733 people.

Of this 30,000, it is likely that as many as 7,000 men and women, 21%, were returned to prison “not for breaking any law but for violating their parole and probation rules.”

The financial burden of reincarcerating individuals for technical parole violations in the costs of days, months, and years of confinement can be reinvested into programs of aid for these individuals. These can manifest in ways that balance against rent costs, transportation costs (getting to and from their jobs or for parole office visits), or even in the form of mental health relief programs.

(3) It dehumanizes and desensitizes our society.

If individuals released on parole have served their time and are attempting to reintegrate into society as productive members, there is significant harm done in holding onto past dispositions and perceptions. The value of human life within the criminal justice system is diminished the second you are labeled a criminal, guilty or not. The dehumanization within prison walls extends to the outside world in respect to our parolees, who are constantly degraded, humiliated, and ignored. With the continuous cycle of reincarceration, individuals caught in this pattern will struggle intensely to develop an identity separate from their past.

The devaluation of one’s identity and self-worth in the form of societal stigma, discrimination, and marginalization from the outside world can hinder a parolee’s ability to rebuild their life after their release. Parolees face formidable challenges in their efforts to reintegrate into their communities without the support of their parole

officers or the system set in place. Grappling with mental and physical health concerns, psychological strains, and oftentimes, unfavorable relationships with their parole officers, they are left with few resources to guide them.

Recommendations

It is simply not enough to outline the injustices that are present within the systems by which we live... a call to action is oftentimes necessary in creating the change that we wish to see.

The **Prison Watch Program** of **American Friends Service Committee (AFSC)** has curated a list of recommendations to change the conditions of parole from surveillance to partnership and emphasize the humanity of its constituents:

1. **Abolish the practice of sending parolees back to prison on the basis of technical parole violations.**
2. **Remain free while waiting for parole revocation hearing.**
3. **Divest the financial burden of reincarcerating parolees and reinvest it into direct aid, rehabilitations, and support programs.**
4. **Implement grants to support parolee reintegration, creating spaces of treatment and assistance rather than spaces of trauma.**
5. **Ensure the distribution of funds and resources to promote parolee reintegration into society.**
6. **Transition parole officers from supervisors to partners, aiding in the creation of short and long-term freedom maintenance strategies.**
7. **Guarantee the attainment of bank accounts, social security cards, birth certificates, and other necessary documents.**

SPEAK MIND

Conclusion

In the scrutinization of the inherent flaws within the parole system, we have shifted our focus away from systemized “care,” which has failed the members of our society immensely. The harsh repercussions of revocation and imprisonment for technical parole violations are both ineffective and harmful to our society. They drain our resources and public pockets, stripping away the humanity of those seeking aid and support in re-entering our communities. The trauma that follows a release on parole, from the conditions within the prison system or the dehumanization of a conviction record, is seldom recognized nor acknowledged.

It is necessary that this recognition of the pitfalls of parole generate changes that can be implemented in the form of a new system. This may take form in the retraining of parole officers to expand their aptitude in trauma recognition and extensions of care. This may result in the divestment, reinvestment, or the redirection from supervision to assistance.

A reallocation of funds in support of the personal health and well-being of parolees in their pursuit of success in life after imprisonment would be better utilized rather than to hold parolees in a cell. The divestment of the resources in our current system into a specialized, aid-focused network will safeguard our commitment to our communities.

There is no merit in a system that reincarcerates individuals on their insufficiency to receive support and resources. Especially when those can be distributed through the system itself.

Acknowledgements

Having only gotten a glimpse of the reformist work needed within the criminal justice system, I am fueled with such intense gratitude and appreciation for everyone who has contributed to this publication. My name is Diane Kim, I am currently an undergraduate studying Psychology, Criminology, and Sociology at Rutgers University. In partnership with the Institute for Women's Leadership at Rutgers, I have spent the past 15 weeks working on this paper for the Prison Watch Program of the American Friends Service Committee.

I have had the greatest opportunity to work under Bonnie Kerness, who has committed over 50 years to human rights advocacy work, and whom I've admired from the second I met her. The work that is being done, the stories that are being shared, and the effort that is being put to create change have been unbelievably inspiring, yet heartbreaking all the same. I want to dedicate this next page to expressing my truest gratitude to each and every person who has demonstrated such courage in affecting positive change. I would like to first address the anonymous testimonies presented in this paper that have played a vital role in laying the groundwork for change to be implemented.

To the women at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility, Maria, Myrna, and Natasha, your testimonies and voices are the grit and soul of change, and this publication would be meritless without them.

To the Returning Citizens Support Group and their co-founders, Chino and Tariq, your contributions to ensuring the health, wellness, and community of returning citizens are remarkable and have pioneered the path to a better society. I can't thank you all enough for your insights and necessary perspectives.

To Professor Ramirez's Justice class at Princeton University, your 50+ page collective paper was extraordinarily written and articulated. I thank you for its detail-oriented nature and our ability to draw from it.

To Efren Mercado, a huge congratulations on receiving your bachelor's degree from Rutgers-Newark, that is a truly amazing feat. Thank you for providing some of the strongest testimonials submitted for this publication.

And to Anthony Hill: for our bi-weekly calls and correspondence despite your jam-packed schedule. The insights and advice you've offered me through this process will

stick with me for years to come.

This has been an incredible process of honesty, empathy, and curiosity in which I have learned and grown tremendously. Thank you again to everyone involved.

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Attachments

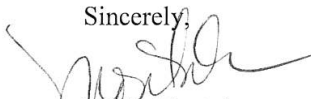
(1)

To: Bonnie Kerness, American Friends Service Committee
From: Maria Montalvo # 935234B/North Hall
Date: March 19, 2024
Subject: Technical Parole Violations

Dear Ms. Kerness:

I am writing in response to your request for an article on the topic of Technical Parole violations (TPV). Please find a short article attached. It is my hope that this is the type of article you were seeking, I was only advised last night.

Thank you for your time, attention and undying interest in the best for all of the women in EMCF.

Sincerely,

Maria Montalvo

Technicalities Support Revocations

Technical violations of parole are not insignificant, they do not rise to the severity of a parolee committing a crime upon release and the parole authorities have great discretion to reinstate an inmate to parole after a revocation hearing. Since part of the Parole Board's responsibility is to assist parolees in obtaining housing and other programs, see N.J.S.A. 30:4-123.59e ("Parole officers shall provide assistance to the parolee in obtaining employment, education, or vocational training or in meeting other obligations to assure the parolees compliance with meeting legal requirements related to sex offender notification, address changes and participation in rehabilitation programs as directed by the assigned parole officer"). Moreover, it is in the best interests of both the Parole Board and the parolee that such assistance be provided since it helps to ensure problem-free parole. Rather than revocation of parole and imprisonment there should be more steps taken to prevent revocation of parole. If a parolee requires assistance for addiction issues then they should be diverted to a program for drug addiction and treatment. If the parolee has mental health challenges they too should be diverted. These factors are challenges, but that does not mean that they cannot be overcome with assistance. Another issue that is frequently raised concerning technical violations is the issue of housing. Often times a recently released parolees may have temporary housing or be placed on placement which is a huge downfall for them. Not having secure housing does not provide stability for a parolee transitioning for reentry to society. This is an issue that should not really come into play for those recently released because of safeguards that are in place to assist them. See NJAC 10A:71-2.12 (setting forth requirement for reentry preparation for inmates about to be paroled). Technical violations which do not involve any allegation of criminal activity, for sure

should be a factor held in favor to mitigate against imprisonment. Parolees should be held responsible to secure employment and attend skill-building programming or continuing their education.

Rather than revocation of parole and imprisonment, the Parole Board should initiate programming for both those returning to society and the parole officers who are monitoring their progress. Perhaps the placement of an ankle GPS monitor would assist the assigned parole officer to monitor parolees who are in danger of revocation because of not having permanent housing. Given the nature of technical parole violations, parolees should be given another chance, immediate imprisonment does not seem to be the answer. This should be of greater concern because of the term of three or five year's parole that is statutorily mandated by the "No Early Release Act" and cannot be reduced or administratively terminated.

When a parolee has to appear for a Revocation hearing, they should not decline the assistance of an attorney. The Office of the Public Defender has been charged to provide their expertise and assistance for Parole Revocation Hearings. The Parole Board will advise the parolee of this right. For all those who are parole eligible and parolees ask questions and read all parole documents. These are helpful hints that may help you to be successful on parole.

(2)

Myrna Diaz
#701449D
EMCF – NH
PO Box 4004
Clinton, NJ 08809

Bonnie Kerness
Re: Technical Parole Violation

March 19, 2024

Dear Bonnie:

At one time I was working as a paralegal at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility. I was in the office for five years and I was granted the opportunity to occasionally work on parole appeals. I can advise you that the most frequent complaint that I witnessed was the inability of the women to be able to reach the reporting office for parole. They had zero access to transportation. Though one or two had bus cards, the funds on the card quickly deteriorated since they also needed to use the card to search for work.

The second violation that I encountered on the parole appeals was the "housing" situation. The issue of homelessness or being vacated out of a shelter and not having the "address on file", equal to the address the person was staying at for a day or two (friend's place, different shelter) was a problem.

My suggestion would be to offer the parolee a network that would allow them to report in either closer to the designated parole office or an account with a transportation provider (Uber?) that can strictly be used to reach the parole office.

Attentively,

Myrna Diaz

(3)

Natasha White

Helped or Housed?

When discussing alternatives to Technical Parole Violations, we first need to review the circumstances surrounding parole, prior to an Incarcerated Persons being released on parole. Having been incarcerated for over 15 years, I have seen many women get "reverted" for a number of reasons. Anywhere from address discrepancies to the parole officer just simply does not like the parolee, and was looking for any reason to send her back to prison. The problem with Technical Parole Violations (TPV), however, does not occur once a person is released, but while the person is still incarcerated.

For some apparent reason, the DOC believes that 6 to 9 months prior to being released is the appropriate amount of time to "help" incarcerated persons succeed in civil society (This is usually around the time the "exiting" process begins). Not only that, in all due fairness and respect, what does the DOC &/or Edna Mahan Correctional Facility really do for us while incarcerated to prepare us to succeed in the free world once released? If we take an alternative to Technical Parole Violations like "giving each person released a grant of a specific amount of money coming out the door." What has (or does) the DOC &/or Edna Mahan Correctional Facility taught (or teaches) us about financial literacy & money management that will help us know how to effectively spend the grant money given to us to "start living" and not violate parole? A lot of young women lived at home with parents or someone else who was the head of household, managing all of the finances prior to their incarceration. So, when they have spent 10 to 25 years in prison and get released, she has learned **what really!?** in regards to taking care of herself in order to know how to succeed in civil society? What has the DOC &/or Edna Mahan Correctional Facility **really** done to help us reacclimatize?

My suggestions on alternatives to Technical Parole Violations is that reentry organizations really need to facilitate programs inside to assist every level of Incarcerated Persons. They need to come into the facilities for a much longer time than 6-9 months before we are released, and teach financial literacy and money management courses/workshops. They need to teach us how to look and apply for jobs, how to successful "sell" ourselves during an interview for those jobs, and how to overcome the

objections that come with having been incarcerated (When was the last time a "STARS" program was facilitated?) There are women who have been incarcerated for over 20 years. When they were home applying for jobs, they typed their resumes on a typewriter and faxed it. Now, everything is done online. They have no idea how to go onto websites and look and apply for jobs, or how to put their resumes online in order to apply for a job. We here at Edna Mahan Correctional Facility used to have a Business Administration class. We learned the basic computer skills: typing and navigating your way around the computer, and utilizing the Microsoft Office Suites. But that is not available to us anymore, nor do we know if we will ever have another teacher to come in and pick up that class dynamic, again. Nothing in that class, however, allowed us to know what online searching, or applying for jobs, or doing any type of research looks like. How do we learn how to be successful in the free world, if we cannot even be introduced to it, even fundamentally? Parole and reentry organizations working closely together, need to also work closely with housing management offices, employers, and therapists (yeah, this is definitely needed), to guarantee housing, jobs, and mental health stability for returning citizens, giving us confidence in, and support on our release from prison. We are aware that there are millions of reentry organizations and programs waiting to assist us upon release. Yet, having spoken with several returning citizens over the years, they are not as "helpful" as advertised. In fairness, that is really not completely their fault. They may expect more from us, knowledge-wise, then what we actually have been exposed to.

From someone on their way home after doing over 15 years, if I am being honest DOC, nor Edna Mahan Correctional Facility has done **anything** to prepare me for release. I have taken every group there is (and now, I am scrambling to find groups and programs to take), graduated with my AA & BA degrees through NJ-STEP at the top of my classes, and received an apprenticeship in Office Management through the Business Administration class I aforementioned. And now there is what for me to do? I cannot do anything here with the tools and skills I acquired from the apprenticeship I received. The job I now have is a downgrade from the job I had. And why? Because the Education Department will not allow the Business Administration classroom, with working computer access, to become a computer lab for students to type their college papers,

letters to the courts, to attorneys, or the newsroom members to utilize for the newsletter that is so highly recommended we do; creating a job for 3 women who work for the Education Department, but do not really have jobs to actually work. Thus, we who have received our apprenticeships and worked in the classroom, cannot utilize the skills we have learned by managing the classroom for other Incarcerated Persons. If not for the support of family and friends to help me reacclimatize and maneuver the free world upon release, I would feel as if I just robotically roamed around prison, taking programs because they were something to do, then thrown to the wolves. More programs, education and jobs have been taken from us, than given. There are no teachers, no vocational classes, no.....nothing. The most we have is a drug program that everyone does not need. Most women here are more worried about being moved to an uncomfortable location due to some form of punishment or retaliation, then the ability to prepare themselves for release. No wonder they recidivate.

There is an entrepreneurship course that is only available to women who are leaving within the next 6 months. And that is understandable, right? I mean, what would be the purpose of giving someone who has 20 to 30 more years left to serve an entrepreneurship class? Yet, the women who are offered this opportunity, who has done 10 years (less or more), have they expressed that they wanted to own their own business? Is that the first thing they are looking to do upon release? They barely have a place to live, but there is an entrepreneurship class for them to take? Some of the women in the course will not even be here long enough for them to complete it. So, an option is for them to forfeit their chance of going to the halfway house, stay in Edna Mahan Correctional Facility until the class is completed, and their bed(s) will be on hold for them at the halfway house. Is this really what is happening? Women have been sitting for years, and have years left to do, and have nothing to do, scrambling for something, **anything** to do, but that is who gets offered the class? Most women want to get out of here and live their lives, especially those who have done at least 10 years, and they have 6 to 9 months left before they leave. They need workshops and courses that will help them successfully transition back into civil society, and that will help them succeed once they are there.

Schooling, programming, and job availability in DOC &/or Edna Mahan Correctional Facility is not set up for us to succeed. It is set up for

us to continue to struggle, even while expected to not violate parole. Understandably, an entrepreneurship program is an excellent idea for any prison facility. It will not be easy for returning citizens to get a job, so owning your own business would seem appropriate upon release. But, even with all of the tools that we may acquire from an entrepreneurship course, what else do we have in order to be able to make those skills work for us by way of owning and running a successful business? Why can't money, resources, and time be spent and put into programs that we could actually use once released, to not have to violate parole in some way, and get reverted back to prison? And, put money towards a viable boarding house, or some place for women to live upon release. Family and loved ones die while we are incarcerated fighting for our freedoms. The same family and loved ones who we may have planned to live with once released. If they die while incarcerated (which many have), where do people who depended on them for support and housing live? Where do they tell parole they will stay? People change. Some family members will not allow women to come back to live with them, or once they do stay with them for a little while, they make them leave for a number of reasons. How can parole help them find a secure place to stay so they are not reverted for something as simple as an address change? Some women have no family because everyone has died while they were incarcerated. Thus, they have no way of researching options to help them with finding some place to live. An parole expects.....**what?**....in these circumstances? If everyone is dead that would have helped, where can we live now?

There is no **real** help for us, we're just being **housed**.