

## **A Cost-Effective, Ethical Alternative to the Joseph Gomm Bill** *Just Release & Reinvestment So Everyone Can Come Home Safe*

Violence in Minnesota's prisons is a real issue, if often exaggerated and misdiagnosed. However, there is a better solution than the "Joseph Gomm Bill" which adds 327 staff, creating a (3.9):1 prisoner to staff ratio<sup>1</sup>.

### **The most cost-effective and ethical way to achieve a higher staff to prisoner ratio is through decarceration and justice reinvestment, not an increased burden on taxpayers**

- Decarceration would mean a *15% reduction in prison population*, saving the public \$53,000,000 each year from now on to improve rehabilitation, reentry, and public goods
- There are plenty of common sense prisoners for release - those in for crimeless parole violations (6-10%), lifers past parole dates (2.5%), or the estimated 9% reduction achieved by making the *Drug Sentencing Act* retroactive. We should also look at those in for aiding/abetting (9%), nonviolent (40%) crimes, those convicted as juveniles (3%) receiving services for mental illness (66%), having major addictions (40%), or being elderly (7.5%), or hearing or vision impaired (2%)<sup>2</sup>.

### **Creating safety in prisons is directly correlated to respect and accountability, not staffing levels.**

- According to a current prisoner human rights abuse occurs daily in Minnesota prisons: "C.O.s ignoring or mistreating prisoners without accountability does result in death - but usually for prisoners. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics 147 prisoners died behind walls in Minnesota between 2005-2014."<sup>3</sup>
- According to Theatrice Williams, former Ombudsman for Corrections: "Safety in our prisons is not determined by the ratio of correctional officers to prisoners. It's related more to whether prisoners believe they can get satisfactory resolutions to their grievances...The security of the staff is directly connected with the safety and security of the prisoners."

### **Minnesota has a low staff ratio of 4:5 prisoners per staff<sup>4</sup>, well below the national average of 6:4, and has struggled to fill all its current positions<sup>5</sup>**

- If supervisors are included in that ratio, Minnesota's prisoner to staff ratio is (4.1):1 prisoners per staff, nearly the (3.9):1 ratio the bill proposes<sup>6</sup>. If one staff can't safely supervise 4.5 prisoners, one staff per 3.9 prisoners isn't enough either.
- If there aren't people who want to be prison guards, putting more money to staffing won't increase safety

### **There are proven ways to address violence in Minnesota prisons with money saved from decarceration - quality programming and an Ombudsman**

- a 2017 DOC sponsored report shows existing prison programming has a return of \$2-\$30 for every \$1 spent, and reduces recidivism and in-prison "misconduct"<sup>7</sup>.
- Both 2002 and 2007 legislative commissions stated an Ombudsman increases security within prisons by creating oversight prisoners can trust, and functioning as an early warning system. The 2002 report that led to the ending of the program actually recommend an expansion.<sup>8</sup>

2019 should be a year for a just transition for prisoners and staff alike, not more cages or cagers.

<sup>1</sup> Based on DOC 2019 Adult Prisoner Population Summary (2019) and 2,100 uniformed staff reported by [Commissioner Schnell to KSTP on Jan 23rd](#)

<sup>2</sup> Based on three DOC reports: 2016 Performance Report, 2017 Annual Report, and 2019 Adult Prisoner Population Summary, and emails from DOC

<sup>3</sup> Mortality in State Prisons, 2001-2014 Statistical Tables (2016), *Bureau of Justice Statistics*, [www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/msp0114st.pdf](http://www.bjs.gov/content/pub/pdf/msp0114st.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> Based on DOC 2019 Adult Prisoner Population Summary (2019) and 2,100 uniformed staff reported by [Commissioner Schnell to KSTP on Jan 23rd](#)

<sup>5</sup> New DOC Commissioner, lawmakers agree on prison security, KSTP, 1-23-2019

<sup>6</sup> Staff to Inmate Ratio Survey (2010), ASCA (*Association of State Correctional Administrators*), on [prisonlegalnews.org](http://prisonlegalnews.org).

<sup>7</sup> The Use and Impact of Correctional Programming for Inmates on Pre- and Post-Release Outcomes (2017), National Institute of Justice

<sup>8</sup> Report to the Minnesota Legislature (2002), Admin Minnesota; Report to the Legislature (2008), Ombudsman for Corrections Working Group