

The United States has more prisoners than any other country in the world, the sentences are not only commonly longer than those of other first world European countries, but the imprisonment of inmates is modeled after the punishment system instead of a more effective and humane rehabilitation system. Unfortunately in our prisons there is a dramatic over representation of people that are poor, mentally ill, drug addicted, afflicted by mental disabilities or are minorities. If we agree that these population subgroups are not born as deficient or morally corrupt humans, we will have to agree too that something in our societies or criminal justice system selects these people. These populations are not over represented by accident, but by design. Additionally, we continue punishing these individuals by making sure that upon release they wont be able to rent a home, find a living wage job or be able to participate in common activities like volunteering in their children's school. Moreover, we blame them when they return back to prison. Unless they can count with the help of family and friends, many prisoners die an untimely death when they become homeless upon release. We need to do better, much better if we want to continue calling the criminal justice system by that name. We need to examine every step of this system and reform it if we want to be called a civilized country. Vulnerable populations find themselves in crises more often than those that have their basic needs met. Indeed, it is easier to be good when your needs are met. People can commit a crime while experiencing a crisis, perhaps the crime would have never been committed if circumstances had been different. Perhaps some persons need rehabilitation programs that fit their needs, not a generic unnecessary long sentence so "they can learn their lesson". Given the injustices in our criminal justice system, we could assume that many inmates are now rehabilitated and could be safely returned to their communities. A punishment system cannot identify who is rehabilitated and who is not. Measure 11 was designed as a punishment system, mandatory minimums that don't take into consideration the circumstances of the crime or whether the person is a first time offender experiencing a crisis should not have a place in a civilized society. Unfortunately many of our police officers, district attorneys, prosecutors and judges are now strong proponents of punishment models. I know it very well because a family member of mine who was a first time offender committed a crime while experiencing a mental health crisis, she was given an outrageously long sentence that even shocked the defense attorney. It was a 5 year sentence with no possibility of early release for a non measure 11 crime. This happened in spite of the fact that the judge in her settlement conference suggested an 18- 24 month sentence. I'm in favor of reforming Measure 11 and support SB 191, this bill will not solve all the wrongs with the criminal justice system, and sadly will not help my relative, who has already spent 3 years in prison and is fully rehabilitated. But this bill will allow judges that hopefully are wise an unbiased the opportunity to consider the why's and the how's before sentencing. This bill will allow inmates that are rehabilitated the opportunity to return to their communities earlier. Everyone should be allowed to earn good time and reduction in sentences for program participation, incentives are very important and give people hope, hopeless inmates take longer to rehabilitate. I support this measure but I just wish that this bill included allowing non Measure 11 inmates also the opportunity to earn early release, especially the first time offenders.