

TWO ROADS

Volume 19



Part I

THE TRUTH IN SENTENCING ISSUE

The first of a two-part series that looks at an honest chronicle of the stories and service of the incarcerated men and women of the Illinois Department of Corrections

To All Readers

Our monthly newsletter focuses on three phases: *rehabilitation*, *restoration and re-entry*. These are the necessary phases of a successful incarceration and transition back into society..

Rehabilitation involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.

Restoration reflects the refined version of one's self that we've become and our restored self seeks service of self-worth to the world.

Finally, ***Re-Entry*** is the ultimate goal one accomplishes through class study, self-study or modification programs completed during one's incarceration.

We are TWO ROADS, and we want to be a viable resource for our readers. We serve you by sharing the honest chronicle of the stories and service of the incarcerated women and men of the Illinois Department of Corrections. Join our movement.

TWO ROADS Editorial Staff

****Please Note:** All letters, emails and photos will be reviewed by personnel **PRIOR** to being received by the TWO ROADS editorial staff. All information that is not pertaining to TWO ROADS will be discarded. Thank you for respecting the guidelines.

TWO ROADS

Our Mission Statement

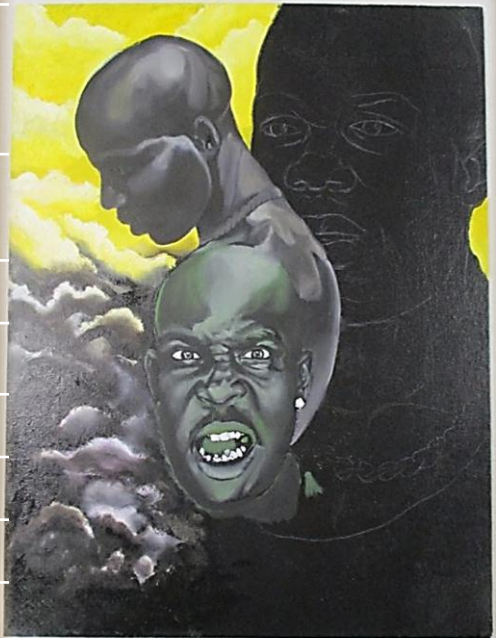
“We are committed to empowering those most impacted by harmful systems to become dynamic leaders and agents of change. Using the connecting, restorative power of these stories, we hope to do our part in bringing us all together to overcome societal ills, such as violence, poverty and mass incarceration.”



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Created by Charles Murray

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TWO ROADS
TRUTH IN SENTENCING ISSUE

DISCLAIMER

TWO ROADS is built for bringing integrity and honesty about the people who are submitting their stories. There are times where the editors are required to make changes due to spelling errors or grammatical structure. Please know that **we will never take away your voice**, however, understand that we take pride in our work and strive to be the best in our representation of your voice.

Thank you.

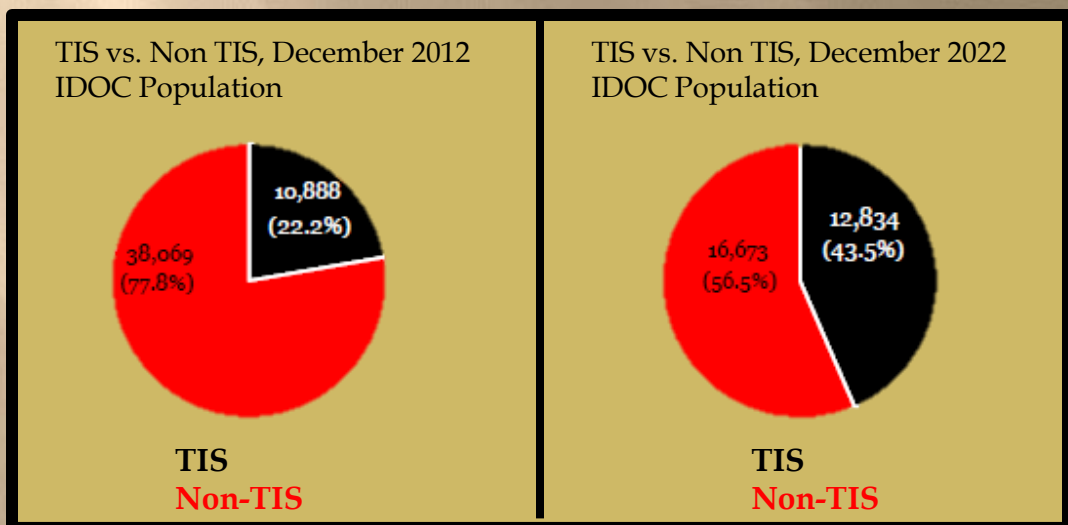


Guest Contributor

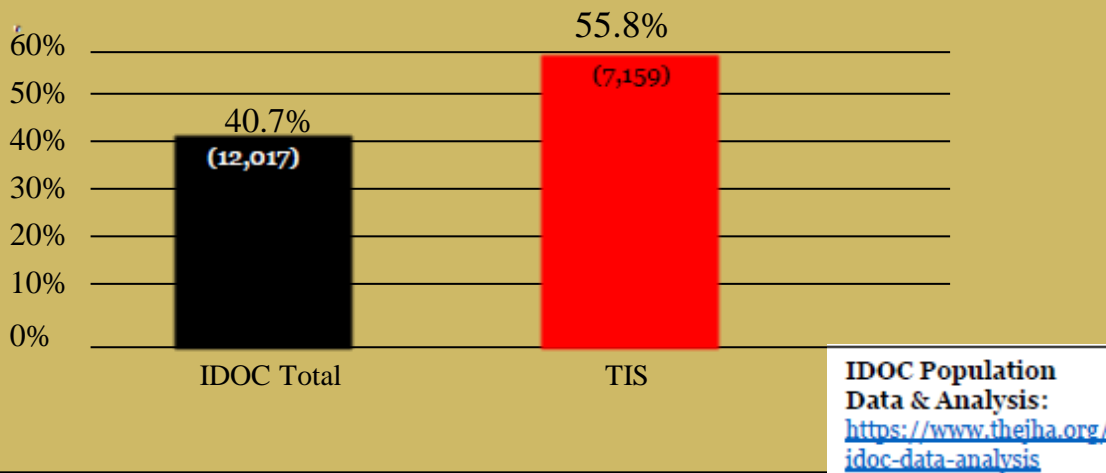
The John Howard Association

The John Howard Association (JHA) thanks the *Two Roads E-Zine* for the opportunity to contribute to the “Truth in Sentencing” (TIS) issue. TIS is a failed law that JHA has opposed since the 1990’s.

Keeping people in prison for decades through extended sentences and TIS does incalculable harm to incarcerated people, families, and communities, with no proven societal benefit. TIS also creates harm by increasing the prison population and straining limited available resources.



Age at MSR Date Projected to be 50+, Total vs. TIS (%)



Shortening sentences is a critical and negligently underutilized way to meaningfully decrease the prison population, which could help with problems including lack of access to programming and vital services, such as healthcare. In fact, without addressing TIS, current problems of an aging and static prison population in Illinois will no doubt persist and worsen. As the State continues to work to reduce the harms of mass incarceration, the problems of TIS must be confronted.

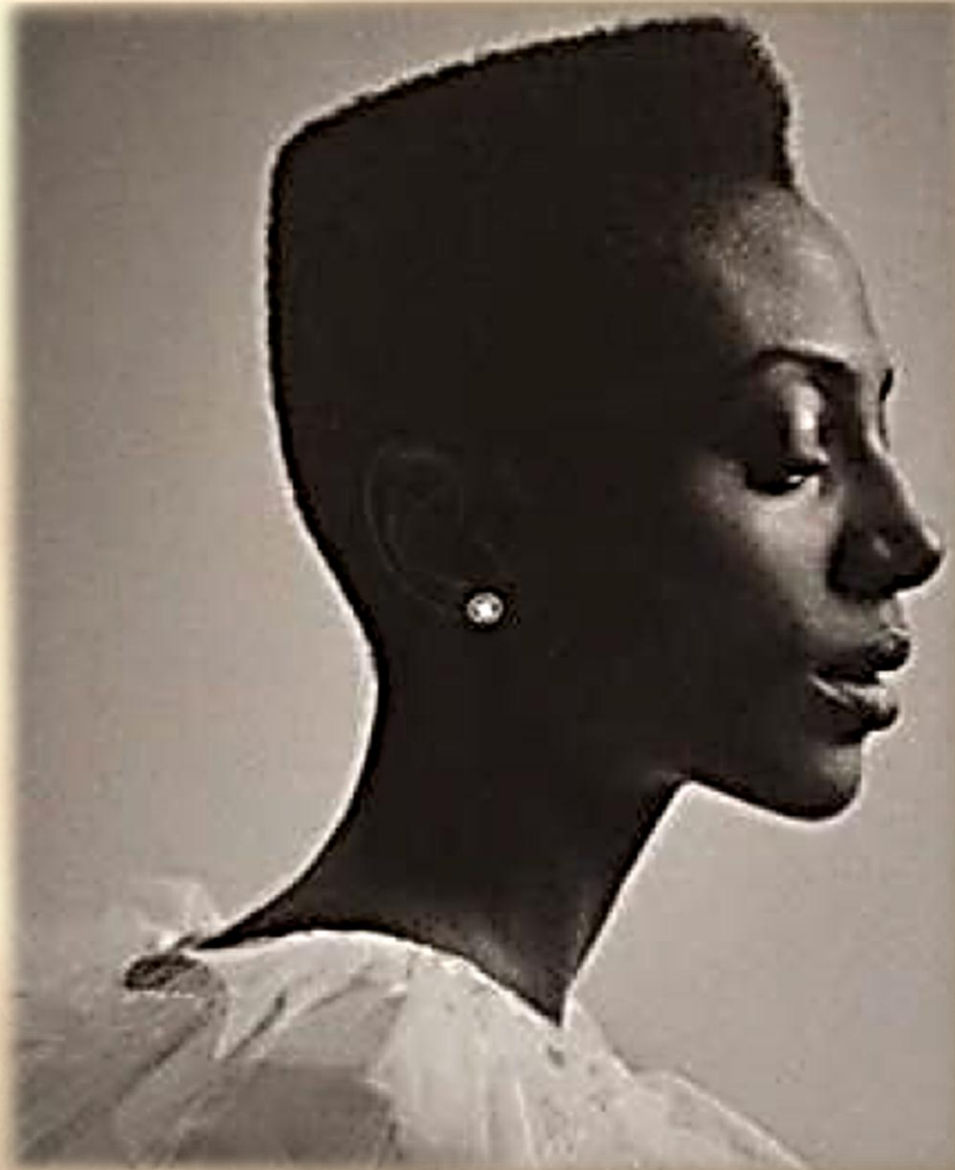
Legislative efforts to reduce the harm of TIS primarily work through two strategies. One strategy is to incrementally roll back TIS, for example, by lowering the percentages of time-served TIS requirements for many sentences (e.g. an offense of conviction currently requiring the person serve 100% of their sentence would go down to 85 or 75%). These changes would reduce the time in prison caused by TIS and could build momentum toward abolishing TIS altogether. The other primary legislative strategy to address TIS is an

indirect “second look” approach, wherein incarcerated people could apply for early release. Variations on this strategy include proposed laws to allow people to petition the original sentencing court, or the Prisoner Review Board, after a certain amount of time served and, in some cases, meeting other criteria. This approach would help people subject to TIS without directly addressing that law. As of early April, the bills attempting both strategies had not made it through committee review, making their prospects for passing during this legislative session uncertain.

Directly reducing TIS and addressing it indirectly through “second look” opportunities hold significant promise for alleviating the harms of excessive sentences. To move to a more humane legal system, Illinois must reform and eventually abolish TIS, and permit changes in law to benefit people retroactively, not just prospectively.



“The need of all individuals, especially those with 50-60 years, (needs) to be able **earn** their way to better opportunities...everyone should be encouraged and incentivized to take their future and rehabilitation into their own hands.” – Former IDOC Director Rob Jeffries (2019-2023)



"YOU are a story. Don't
become a word."

- Nayyirah Waheed

TWO ROADS is now ONLINE

We strongly encourage that your family and friends share the link below of this issue (and other informative issues) with lawmakers, advocacy groups and other power-wielding stakeholders in four easy steps:

- 1) Go to "**IDOC HOME PAGE**" (idoc.illinois.gov)
- 2) Click "**ABOUT**"
- 3) Click "**NEWS**"
- 4) Select "**TWO ROADS E-ZINE**"

Not only will you see our current issues, but this will allow you to see past issues and submissions from the many souls who have spoken.

Although your insightful analysis, strong feelings and creative policy suggestions are real and deserve to be considered, this humble opportunity is limited to just relating your story to other human beings, so that they may make courageous decisions with our humanity in mind.

Editors Take

Hello fellow brothers and sisters! This is my first editorial piece as the Editor-In-Chief for Two Roads and I hope that this message to you is informative, yet humbling. I accepted this task as Editor-In-Chief in hopes of giving you, the audience, a description of what this e-zine means and how it affects and influences you. At the same time, I am so driven with this project to give those who have been without a voice an opportunity to speak and share their experiences that they have endured, not only inside, but, the triumphs that have occurred outside. I would like for everyone to read these articles with a sense of purpose, and knowing that there is something in these words that can help get you through the road to success .

Following the Founders and the former Editors' footsteps, we are going to speak on things that will uplift you, give you a sense of purpose and hopefully, guide you towards the right path. When I spoke with the liaison as well as our TWO ROADS Advisor, Leondus Carter, one thing they said really stood out, “Why are we speaking to individuals in custody **only** to make them better individuals in custody”? “Where is the growth in that”? I agreed.

If we are truly living up to our Mission Statement, we must do so in a way that promotes change, not just for the inside, but the outside.

This issue is very important to the men and women of IDOC, as they reflect the conditions and situations that put them here, yet, the standard that the system created, the system has not tried to undo

TRUTH IN SENTENCING

It has been said that "*People behave by the rules we set for them*", and Truth-In-Sentencing has connected itself to excluding us from benefitting from the proper education and life skills that are necessary for us to grow. In addition, lawmakers have known for years the burden that T.I.S. has had on the taxpayers and now with inflation and unemployment, families can barely take care of themselves, let alone prisoners.

The impact by not being given an opportunity to receive credits for good time and EDSC becomes a detriment as those who are sentenced to 85% or 100% are at a mental impasse: Either do nothing and rot or make a change to get things in the right direction, REGARDLESS of the reward.

We must stand on our two feet and move forward, correcting ourselves from moving backwards and become leaders for our children, family and community. Motivational speaker Eric Thomas says it best: "*Every opportunity is your last opportunity.*" For many of us, we are on our mission towards home. For others we want to continue to encourage and know that you are always important to our mission.

I hope that you will continue to read our articles, submit your words and expressions, and never feel that you are alone. **TWO ROADS** will be a "*Content of Change*".

Kenji Haley

Kenji Haley
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF
TWO ROADS



Warehoused

Maurice Jones

Danville

Reflecting on my sentencing hearing in 2012, I'll never forget the State's Attorney closing arguments that resulted in the Judge finding "Truth-In-Sentencing", which meant that I'll have to serve 85% of the time given. I was 23 years of age and couldn't process exactly how I was sentenced to 25 years for Armed Violence, under the Accountability statute. After the judge acknowledged two priors (now vacated) priors, having a background kinda insinuated that I deserved this type of lengthy sentence.

My hearing was concluded with the thought that I'll be sent to the Illinois Department of Corrections, with the sole purpose of being "rehabilitated" like it was rewarding or something. After arriving at the North Reclassification Center (NRC) holding facility, I soon realized that "Truth-In-Sentencing" meant an extensive punishment with the intention of being "warehoused" beyond the time considered served.

After I received my sentence, my feelings were really hurt and I couldn't prepare myself to serve the next 21 years and three months in prison. The first thing I thought about was how old I would be in 2033, and then I began to reflect on all the elders in my family who I'll probably never see again.

I thought about my son, who was four years old at the time; I thought about all the relationships I had with people that would be lost forever. I was enduring so much trauma from being housed in Cell Block M in NRC; that 3-week stay wasn't conducive to my mental health at all. I had met people who done 6-months a straight at NRC, the conditions at that place set the pace for prison life...PERIOD!

When I first observed the prison infrastructure, I noticed that it resembled a "warehouse" with bars; it seemed that the prison was built, purposely to warehouse people for long periods of time. I met a guy who was a worker at Galesburg receiving and he had been incarcerated for 24 years and didn't have a GED. That made no sense to me; once I received my property, I began submitting request slips for programming and school immediately.

The following week, I received replies from the counselor and dean stating *"you have a 2033 outdate and offenders serving shorter sentences are priority, but you'll be put on the waitlist."* I literally filed grievances to enroll in school, despite the many denials of accessing programming the judge stated would be available during my sentencing hearing.

Today, I consider myself one of the lucky ones who were able to access programming while having a lengthy sentence to serve, because everybody is not as fortunate. I have been a peer educator in the Building Block program at Danville and have completed 25+ rehabilitative courses.

I recently obtained my second Associates Degree with Danville Community College (DACC) and will have my Bachelor's Degree this spring from Eastern Illinois University. I have hit the pinnacle of accomplishments I could achieve as an individual in custody. The only programming left is work release and Kewanee Re-entry, which I don't qualify for, because of the time left to serve (120 months).

It doesn't take 20 years for a person to rehabilitate. I have earned "educational and rehabilitative" skill sets, yet "Truth-In-Sentencing" laws withhold me from showcasing those skill sets.

The truth is "rehabilitation" was a choice I made for myself, I was given a sentence to serve and I.D.O.C. restricted programming that was supposed to be offered, which makes the whole sentencing procedure very flawed.

I always ponder on the thought that if I was able to earn good time credits (possibly), I could've made it home to see my Grandfather and Aunt one last time. If I was in position to earn good time credits (possibly), I could've been present to assist my Grandmothers with their medical issues.

When I received my first Associates Degree with Lakeland College in 2018, if I was able to receive good time credits (possibly), I could've been present to see my son graduate the 8th grade. Being in this predicament as a Father and has destroyed my family's structure.

"Truth-In-Sentencing" laws have held me in isolation so long, that the lack of guidance for the children in my family potentially puts them at risk for experiencing prison.

In conclusion, due to "Truth-In-Sentencing" laws, I'll be warehoused in prison for the next 10 years, despite my accomplishments as an individual in custody.

It doesn't take 20 years for a person to rehabilitate. I have earned "educational and rehabilitative" skill sets, yet "Truth-In-Sentencing" laws withholding me from showcasing those skill sets.

People are warehoused in prisons for years of their lived though “Truth-In-Sentencing” never deterred the crimes rates from rising since 1998.

So, what are the real intentions behind truth-in-sentencing laws? Who does it impacts and who benefits? For every individual in custody experiencing the impact of “Truth-In-Sentencing” laws, it sparks the questioning of the word “rehabilitation” and we know that’s not the truth behind sentencing.

"Never doubt that a small group of concerned,
thoughtful citizens can
change the world; indeed, it is the only thing
that ever has."

-Margaret Mead

TWO ROADS

FATHERS DAY

It's that time of the year for you to show your love to your father or the father figure in your life. Submissions are now accepted for the TWO ROADS Father's Day Issue. In addition, your family members can send stories about their Fathers that are on the inside and the uplifting stories they have. We encourage you to let them share their stories.

Mail submission, photo to:

Attn: TWO ROADS EDITOR

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

2021 Kentville Road

Kewanee IL 61443

Outsiders and Individuals-In-Custody
(WITH Staff Support)

Please send your submission and scanned photo to penny.rowan@illinois.gov
"ATTN: TWO ROADS Fathers Day"

Deadline is Friday, June 2nd

A Message From...

Vernon Watts

Hello world! First and foremost, I would like to thank you (Two Roads) for your time and energy as I convey what Truth-N-Sentencing has done to my life and for my life. Truth-N-Sentencing has taken 24 years of my life, with no opportunity to show if I am what the I.D.O.C. mission states: “*TO RETURN OFFENDERS BACK TO USEFUL CITIZENSHIP*”. I am not here to argue bills, or punishment because without order, there will be chaos; but I am against incarcerating people without a chance for them to show that they are not their crime; and people can redeem and rehabilitate. On the flipside, Truth-N-Sentencing has sat me down and afforded me the time to reflect on life and become what I am becoming. This wasn’t because of I.D.O.C. (Illinois Department of Corrections), but the conscious decision I made, I will not let one moment in time define my entire life. I can say I used to write letters of lies, deception and selfish agendas; but today I *write books, business plans, goals, synopses and theories* with the truth in my sentences to let the world know, it’s not how you start, but how you finish!

How Does Truth In Sentencing Affect Me, My Family, The Community

**Yahdai Ben Yoel
Hill**

First and foremost, I would like to begin by expressing that the victims of crime itself are most affected by Truth-In-Sentencing for as a deterrent to criminal behavior, it has utterly failed. This law has not prevented the robberies, rapes, kidnappings, assaults or murders from occurring. And because I truly desire peace for all men and women, this indisputable reality affects my heart.

HOPELESSNESS

The excessive sentences which come from Truth-In-Sentencing, strip people of hope – the motivation to become better, do better and contribute something positive into the lives of others and eventually society itself. When an individual feels that they are never going home, or will be an elder upon release, it breeds lethargy, depression, rebelliousness, violent and sometimes suicidal thoughts. If I did not have family support,

along with a sincere desire to become the best man I could be – to learn, grow and refine myself - I would have succumbed to the hopelessness caused by an excessive sentence.

My dysfunctional family, hostile environment, drugs, alcohol, and adolescence, pushed me into the lifestyle, which lead me to prison – not an incorrigible mind/heart. Truth-In-Sentencing precludes me from demonstrating my worth, my value, my self-evolution into the man I am today by denying me the opportunity to earn an early release through professional evaluation (Parole Board Hearings) and earned sentencing reduction credits (good time).

Knowing my worth, my value and what it brings to any relationship, business, community/social environment, etc. and not being able to contribute something positive, only creates a greater degree of suffering. My family/loved ones also continue to suffer from my absence, as they understand my value and what I can contribute to life. Everyone continues to suffer from this unnecessarily prolonged incarceration. Furthermore, the community is affected by my absence because I know how to uplift, support, and will contribute to what is good and right to all life wherever I am.

TRUTH IN SENTENCING

Truth-In-Sentencing denies this energy, creativity, intelligence, and determination from entering the communities to help

In conclusion, if the Truth-In-Sentencing law was created to be “tough on crime” (create more pain and suffering), it succeeded. But if it was created to protect life, people, children, and the community or to deter crime, it has utterly failed. As a man who revers the Spirit of Life itself, I humbly urge all of those with power to create change to find another idea...an idea that will incentivize the unification of all men/woman in peace and love.

In Humility



"I AM EVERYTHING AND I WILL MAKE MYSELF WITH WHAT I MUST" — ANONYMOUS

The Truth About Truth

Michael "Wally" Walls

In the book of life, "truth-in-sentencing" would prefer that it took the rest of my life to write a final chapter. Personally, I'm thinking about an alternative ending...

I am Wally Walls, and I am a Lifer. Thirteen days after 9/11, the worst terrorist event of my lifetime, I had a front-row seat to the second-worst terrorist event of my lifetime. That was the day that I stood in a Jefferson County courtroom, listening to Judge Terry Gaurber sentence me to a term of Mandatory Natural Life in the Illinois Department of Corrections.

I don't remember much about the sentencing itself. I remember the walk back to the county jail, in the courthouse basement. My escorting deputy was a friend of the family, and he mentioned how it saddened him that I had to be in the courtroom alone, with no family to support me. He said that it amazed him that I had stood firm, refusing to buckle, or shed a tear, as the judge pronounced his sentence. He said, "Wally, I don't think that I could have taken it like you did."

Thankfully, he didn't have to look at how I was feeling inside; that grinding, twisting feeling, in the pit of my stomach. The new blank space that has opened in my mind, like my brain was trying to tell me that life as I knew it had just been erased from existence.

“Mandatory Natural Life”, the judge said as he pronounced my sentence. Discretion was out of the window. There was no alternative, no choice, and no other sentence that was available. Mandatory Natural Life. Did I kill someone? No. did I walk into a Post Office with a loaded submachine gun? No. Did I rob a bank without leaving a “thank you” note? Nope. I was sentence to life because I was a convicted of a sex offence. I committed a sex offence when I was 19. I did 8½ years inside, and got out on MSR in 1993. Seven years later, I was accused and convicted of a second sex offence. That made it Mandatory.

During the “tough on crime” political climate of the mid 1990's, a bill was brought forth in the state legislature. It created a Mandatory Life sentence for any person convicted of a second or subsequent sex offense...If the offence was committed within ten years of the first offense; or, within ten years after the offenders release from custody for the first offense.

The bill also included a provision that made a Mandatory Natural Life for the first offense...if the offender was convicted of having two or more alleged victims.

At the time, there was a little known legislator from Chicago who supported the bill. Some young fellow by the name of Barack Obama. The bill was adopted and went into effect as of January 1, 2000. One would think that given the “Mandatory” natural of the new sentence, more of an effort would have been taken to ensure more of a conviction would be legitimately obtained. Instead, there was more of a focus on getting the conviction, regardless of what the prosecutor had to get it. From 2002-2021, I knocked on the door of the Illinois Supreme Court three times, preaching what I honestly thought were reversible issues. The Supreme Court disagreed.

A little over twenty years ago, State’s Attorneys were not allowed to use the appellate prosecutors to help them prosecute local cases. But, since my public defender failed to ‘properly’ object to the use of the appellate prosecutor, it was somehow my fault. It was also my fault that neither my public defender nor any appellate defender, failed to “properly” object to the use of a 50,000 volt stun device on my leg during trial.

In the appellate court eyes, it was “no harm, no foul.” Negative DNA results? Sorry, but there was an alleged stipulation. Could your jury possibly be tainted through the introduction of your prior conviction?

It didn't matter...although two jury members said in an interview “*if it wasn't for his prior conviction, we'd have never found him guilty.*”

Truth-In-Sentencing? I would have preferred that the legislature required at least a minimum of truth in the prosecution of these offenses that got the maximum sentences that might be a whole new concept.

“Truth-In-Prosecution...”

It has now been 22½ years since Judge Garber pronounced his sentence on me. I shared my story with the members on the State's Legislator Prison Reform Committee in late 2021. I included a draft that I called “Basic Cost of Incarceration.” That page broke down the basic cost of my incarceration by category. I calculated yearly cost of living; every state pay; the open heart surgery that saved my life in 2019

I personally cost Mr., Ms. and Mrs. Illinois taxpayer \$1,200,000.00 in my incarceration thus far. Now, if you factor in the cost of my direct appeal, two post-convictions and their appeals and all the ancillary legal cost, I am probably well worth \$2,000,000.00.

Compare that to the average person in Illinois that has a job paying minimum wage. That person earned roughly \$400,000.00 during that same 22 year period. Mind you that this person still must pay taxes, rent, food, healthcare, utilities, etc...that person is one who shoulders the mandatory burden of us having to stay here.

Even with two decades of prison drama, one thing that I have refused to do is to allow my circumstances to affect, or alter the individual that I am. I have worked the same job assignment for the last 15½ years and I mind my own. I spend a lot of time with a pen in my hand and a lot of folks think that I have some kind of weird attachment with my CL-20's.

One of the things that I am proudest of is that I have had only 6 IDR's in the 22 years. I spent the early part of last year crafting a Petition for Executive Clemency.

I included educational achievements; job experience; my health issues; an awesome recommendation from my now-retired bosses and even managed to include my original fire department application from 40 years ago. After a July postponement of the PRB, I was granted a hearing on October 6, 2022.

I would like to say that everything went well at that PRB hearing and *I was recommended for Executive Clemency*. But the truth is that I have no idea how I did and there is no provision in the state law to let you know, either.

Well, I couldn't let myself sit in limbo, keeping my fingers crossed. I sat down and reviewed what was contained in law regarding Executive Clemencies...and then I started brainstorming ways to help improve on the current system. About a month ago, I drafted a proposal that I submitted to the Illinois Prison Project, and State Senator Villanueva, seeking to improve the system for granting Executive Clemencies in Illinois. We'll see what happens.

I know that I've still got a lot to offer in this life. I've got the willingness to make some positive changes, and with all these gray hairs that I'll readily deny having,

I've got maybe a little wisdom to impart those who are willing to listen. If you are sitting around, waiting patiently for change to happen, all that you're going to do is get older. A change can only happen if you are willing to put in the work to make it happen. It doesn't matter if you are seeking a change in your personal life; a change in your finances or a change in your life circumstances. A change can happen if you put in the effort.

"Truth-In-Sentencing", as it stands, was a whole political ideology that lasted for nearly three decades.

Now that people are starting to see the damage that it has done, the veneer of "truth" is starting to crack. As it does, there are plenty of people that would love nothing better than to patch it up and just maintain the status quo. A new coat of paint, however, doesn't make the crack disappear. It might just be time to build something better. So, let's get up...roll up our sleeves...and get to work.

A Message From..

Andre Jackson
Mount Sterling

Truth-In-Sentencing has taken a toll on my life and my family's lives. I was sentenced to 21 years at 85%, for accountability of a drive-by shooting, where the victim was struck twice in the leg. It is the first time ever going to jail and they sentenced me to 21 years. I have 2 kids; my son was 5 and my daughter was 7 when I went away and that became a strain the relationship with them.

It went from them being with me every day of their lives to nothing at all. I am a "hands on" dad; take them to school, pick them up and sit with them to do homework. I was there not only for my kids, but for my 3 step kids, making sure they had someone to depend on.

I was big on encouraging them to excel in school. I was the glue that held things together and since, my 2 oldest step kids didn't graduate from high school and one dropped out of school. The stress and fear of my kids not finishing school or falling into the wrong hands.

You know, you try to talk to them over the phone, but kids need that every day to lay into them.

I have a 15-year gun enhancement for driving a car that I had no idea the passenger I was giving a ride had a gun; let alone was going to shoot out of my car.

My mother and father are older. She is 67 and he is 74 and he's in and out of the hospital. I could be out there helping out and doing things for them like taking care of their needs with what they needed. I believe my parents and kids are suffering because I'm suffering and doing time for a crime I didn't commit, but was present for.

Truth-In-Sentencing is overkill in every way no matter which part you get. I'm just hoping I make it out soon to be there for my family, because they need me.

Words From Earl Milton Centralia

Wisdom and power must accompany one another. Power without wisdom is dangerous. Wisdom itself is powerful indeed. Heed what is learned and do so as well.

To heed wisdom and to do wisely will help one prevail. They who heeds wisdom will prevail and not fail because, if the wise one seems to fail in that seeming failure comes the correction, learning and lessons needed to make the wise one "wiser".

Wisdom is what you will find if you seek it with your whole heart and mind. Seek to understand and in time you will; and know you must always grow or wither and shrivel. The choice is up to you!

From Earl Milton's Poetry: "*Wisdom and Power*"

A Message From..

Irene Romaniuk
Logan

The Truth-In-Sentencing has taken such a toll on me and my family that it's broken us. To be hit with a "whatever time the judge wants to put on you," and then be hit by 100% Truth-In-Sentencing, is a death sentence for me and my family and friends. By the time I leave prison, I'll be in my 70's, will have lost my parents, my older brother and my two older sisters, and have no one left to go home to, leaving me out on the streets.

I basically have received a death sentence that mentally, the rest of what's left of my family remaining can't endure. The probability of me dying in prison is very high because of my age and my sentence and also my medical issues. I was given 45 years at 100% with no priors whatsoever, without the judge taking into consideration my non-existent criminal history.

My family is devastated and is basically waiting to bury me because of the time given with Truth-In-Sentencing. I've done 23 years and have 22 years left to do and I'm 53 years old with many medical problems. Please, I have absolutely no violent history. This is my first and only offense. This is a double whammy; the amount of time 45 years at 100%. **Please, help me!!**

Good Time DENIED

Brian Lehnert

Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry

America's prison system was founded on rehabilitation and getting released early if you showed good behavior. But since 1998, that hasn't been the case in Illinois. Offenders, who commit violent crimes, can spend 20 years doing right and never even get 1 day off their sentences. That is the situation I am in, I've spent a total of 20 years in prison, and in that time, I got my G.E.D., 4 vocational certificates, an Associate's Degree, and numerous other programs. Also I've worked just about every job you can think of, and someone who pushes a broom for 15 minutes today, earned more good time, then I did in 20 years, even with all my accomplishments.

Now I did all that knowing good time wasn't possible, but I did it for myself, to benefit me. The more you learn the less chance you have of coming back to prison, and having a good life. Earning good time should not be issued or denied based on your holding offense. The fact that this person committed a violent crime and this person didn't, that's the punishment, violent offenders serve 85%-100% of their sentences, but once in prison, we all live under the same conditions,

do the same schooling, and work the same jobs, but this person is making 100x's more than this person. How much is a day off your sentence worth? To be home with your family even a day early? To me it's priceless!

So the fact that some have to serve 85%-100% AND NOT RECEIVE GOOD TIME THEY EARNED,(no matter what they do), is a double punishment, and that is discrimination.

The definition of "Discrimination" is:

The process by which 2 stimuli differing in some aspect are responded to differently.

The Quality or Power of finely distinguishing.

- a) The act, practice, or an instance of discriminating categorically rather than individually.
- b) Prejudice or Prejudicial outlook, action, or treatment.

THE TRUTH-IN-SENTENCING LAW

(BY DEFINITION) IS "DISCRIMINATION"



A Short Story

Rory Cook

East Moline

Dear Two Roads

I am writing to share a short story. The “Truth-In-Sentencing” law is killing young men and old men, mentally and physically, and on top of that ; if you decide to work or go to school, you can’t even get even get you EDSC (good time). The “Truth” sentencing wants to tell you that you get the time, BUT, it goes into your “Master File” that is mentally disturbing to work and earn good time and a sentence at 100 percent.

I myself am a witness to this story. Furthermore, I was sentenced at 100 percent, serving 30 years. I have been working for 21 years and I can’t earn any good time credit?? Why?? I am 62 years old and served 24 years of my sentence, something must be done. Thank you for your time.

Waiting for Change

DeMarcus Hillsman

Centralia

It is with the universal word of peace that I greet the sisters and brothers who are still in the struggle of pursuing their freedom as well as all of the readers who tune in to this platform. My name is DeMarcus Hillsman and I just celebrated another year on this Earth, which is truly a blessing and not only am I thankful for the gift of life, but also for still being in great spirits, health and in my right state of mind, having started my 23rd calendar.

I was asked by a family member “when are you coming home, and why does the Parole Board keep denying you?” I explained that on paper, I still have 9 years left, but I will be out of prison sooner than this. And as for a Parole Board, I told them I have never been in front of a Parole Board. *Illinois doesn't have a Parole Board.* The Parole Board hasn't existed for all individuals in custody since 1977. (In 1974, when a life sentence equated to 20 years, everyone became eligible for parole at some point during their incarceration.)

My family member expressed further concern: “But you were a juvenile when this happened. How are you not allowed to go in front of a Parole Board during your incarceration?”

My family member expressed further concern: “But you were a juvenile when this happened. How are you not allowed to go in front of a Parole Board during your incarceration?” there are many of our family members who have these same questions, and the answers lie somewhere in between “Tough-On-Crime” stance and the “Truth-In-Sentencing” Act (T.I.S.).

The “Truth-In-Sentencing” Act was the bill that came after the Tough-On-Crime (T.O.C.) bill. To make matter worse, this bill was championed by then congressional Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Senator Joe Robinette Biden, now known as President Joe Biden, and signed by Former President Bill Clinton. All of them have been on record, saying how the bill was *a mistake*, and once in office, they would change it.

He ran on the platform of “change” and his Attorney General was told to start the process of “Justice Reform”. With the Tough-On-Crime bill being a mistake, what about “Truth-In-Sentencing?”

Under the Truth-In-Sentencing Act, an individual has to serve his/her entire sentence **without** the possibility of parole or getting any time knocked off of their sentence for good behavior, work assignments or any educational/program or completion of them.

TRUTH IN SENTENCING

Prior to July 1998, if you were sentence to 20 years, you would serve 50% of your sentence. Under T.I.S., you have to serve the entire 20 years, plus 3 years of Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR), which is “unconstitutional”.

As a juvenile who gets sentenced under T.I.S., if the bill is not changed, I will have to serve 32 years straight without the possibility of parole. At no time during my incarceration will I ever be able to see the Parole Board, which undermines the ruling in the trilogy of **Miller**, **Roper**, and **Graham**, which says that all juvenile **MUST** be allowed to see the Parole Board.

Not only am I speaking for all the juveniles sentenced under the T.I.S., but also for all the men and women sentenced under the “Truth-In-Sentencing”. We need help either getting the “Truth-In-Sentencing” act overturned/repealed, or at the least getting the bill modified to allow those who are doing school and work to get good time that reduces their sentence.

There has been a lot of talk about some changes in the Truth-In-Sentencing since the early 2000’s. It is now 2023. So, to the powers that be and all who can help bring about change; this *“lock ‘em up and throw away the key”* approach is outdated, and it is time to change. Starting with the Truth-In-Sentencing” Act.



A Message From...

Samuel Miller

Pinckneyville

“Truth-In-Sentencing” has affected me in a few different ways. One being the Department of Corrections has sent me five hours away from home; so it’s hard for my family to drive all that time on the road to come and see me. Where if I was 50%, I would be closer to my family.

Another way it has affected me is I can’t get programs and education that would have been awarded to me if I were at 50%. I have been incarcerated seven years and I’m not able to get any programs or school good time cause of my MSR, which is only because of Truth-In-Sentencing.

How can I become a better me? How can I become educated if Truth-In-Sentencing won’t allow me to? Also, I am not awarded certain jobs because of Truth-In-Sentencing. I have been and will continue to be a model individual in custody, and have not been awarded any good conduct credit for it. If we did away with Truth-In-Sentencing, it will give us hope, where some of us have lost all hope.

A Message From...

Marcel White

Pinckneyville

The Truth-In-Sentencing affected me a lot. I have been locked up going on 21 years, fighting my case through the Court system after all these years takes a toll on your mental state.

The governor nor congress understands that the Truth In Sentencing affect the innocent people that is been wrong by the legal system. During my time locked up, I had two children brought into this world that I have never physically seen, only in pictures and through the phone.

I lost my father since my time in prison and I have lost a few friends that were enduring the time with me. Over the years, I went into depression and I have ever since, but I never said anything until now. I was feeling in my mind that I was dead but my body was alive. I have never properly grieved for the people that I have lost.

My mother became my rock, communicating with her has helped me overcome some of these things that I am suffering from. She didn't know that she has been helping me the whole time during my struggles.

Now I live my life one day at a time because this is what truth in sentencing has done to me and others that are locked up.

“The Lost Decades”

Mishunda Brown-Davis

Logan

There is a generation of youth that were sent away to prison in Illinois during what I call “The Lost Decades”, who came in at the ages of 21 and under. Many were first-time violent offenders. They have now served over 20-plus years, have matured, and taken the necessary steps to rehabilitate themselves. Yet they are still doing long term sentences with no hope of relief.

Those sent to prison during The Lost Decades came during the years of 1998-2019, when the Truth-In-Sentencing laws ruled the legal landscape. These laws required that even kids, 21 years and under, serve 85-100% of their sentences without a chance for parole. Before TIS laws, they would have served 50% of their sentence and receive earned credit, and they had an opportunity for parole. To some that I’ve served time with, TIS has been a death sentence.

Truth-In-Sentencing was a “tough on crime” law enacted to protect public safety and the integrity of the justice system. However, it hasn’t stopped crime. It has instead crowded the penal system, costing taxpayers millions of dollars. What good is it to continue to house those sent away during “The Lost Decades” who are now elders and no longer a threat?

Laws are now changing after more than two decades, and many are receiving a second chance, thanks to the Honorable J.B. Pritzker. These new laws are: EDSC; The Resentencing Initiative Law (SB2129), which became available January 1, 2022, given violent offenders a chance to be resentenced after serving a decade or more of their lengthy sentence; and The Youthful Parole Bill, which was signed in 2019, giving the kids and opportunity for parole after serving a decade of their time.

Yet, NONE of these laws are retroactive - they do not apply to those from “The Lost Decades”, who were also kids when they were sentenced and already served a decade or more of their lengthy sentence. Ask me how I know? Well, because I am one of them from “The Lost Decades”, trapped in the system without a chance because the laws continue to pass us by.

Don't get me wrong, I am happy for everyone given a second chance, but my heart cries out for us who are still serving time without relief. Does anyone hear us trapped for two decades crying out as the Israelites cried out to God?

How can the Youthful Parole Law only apply to the kids of 2019 and forward when us kids from 1998-2019 had the same undeveloped brain at the time of our offense?

What makes the others after 2019 more acceptable? This law should be retroactive for ALL KIDS who were under 21 at the time of their offenses.

I came to prison for murder at the age of 18. I was seven months pregnant, and had a one-year old child at the time of my offense. Both of my kids are grown, I missed their birthdays and graduations. I am now a grandmother and have a chance to be present for my grandchildren in a way I never got to be with my own children. I believe there is hope for those from “The Lost Decades”. When will the lost be found..



EDITORS NOTE: *Mishunda Brown-Davis Article that was originally written for "Stateville Speaks" (WINTER 2023),.*

A Message From "Vinny"

Joseph Naseef

Mt. Sterling

Hello. My name is Joe, but everyone calls me "Vinny". I've had a pretty cool life up until about 5 years ago since being incarcerated on this 1st degree murder charge. People always, well maybe not always, but it seems like mostly people convicted of crimes are deserving the sentence they got and write them off. Truth-In-Sentencing perpetuates this stigma! Severe crimes are the eligible ones that receive this qualification for this hopeless sentencing. However, some fail to realize the act of these choices which led to these severe crimes are the ones who need intervention and rehabilitation because we've experienced immense amounts of pain and challenges which led us to our choices. Truth-In-Sentencing is a death sentence for many and doesn't leave any room for self-improvement. It depresses you and, in some cases, leads individuals to say "f*** it" and even murder or commit more crimes while incarcerated since they're in the mindset of "I'm dead already anyway." I've even had someone I thought would never leave my side say that it's like "I'm dead anyway" with the 27 years I received. So, she dipped. People can learn how to be good, just as they learned to be criminals. The Constitution states we should be incarcerated until we can be successfully integrated back into society. I know my heart and mind is different and I know many others who've had this transformation as well. It's the Department of Corrections' mission to Fix Us, not Store Us!!!

Bridge Builder

Ramiro Chavez

Illinois River

The impact the bill and what had on me and my family can't be easily described on paper. I will give it a try, but also I will keep the victim's family in mind.

In 2002, I was charged with eight counts of First Degree Murder. As an 18 year old, it was hard to find out why I had taken a young man's life. I tried to commit suicide as a way out to my actions, but, as I sat in darkness at the police station, I was made aware what I had done and that crumbled me.

In 2005, I was found guilty of the counts against me after 3 hours of a bench trial. My lawyer had talked to me about it (bench) and with the lack of knowledge with the law and being still a kid; I was in a 'no-win' position. I had no problem with saying I was guilty, because I was. I have always taken full responsibility for my actions and by God's grace, I'm here telling my story.

I was willing to face justice. The Judge sentenced me to 58 years in prison at 100%. I will be 76 years old upon my release in 2060.

In 2005, I was sent to Menard, one of the worst prisons in Illinois (Next to Tamms), and as a 21 year old first time offender, I learned a lot. The problem was people never tell you that your family would have to drive 6½ hours to visit you or that because your life came to a stop that theirs did too, because it didn't. I'm speaking to those who stayed after hearing the amount of time people like me face.

Mi madre (My mother) has been there since day one. From 2005 to 2016, she would travel with other family members twice a month. She did this for 11 years only to see me for 2-2½ hours. Tell me that's not love.

In 2016, I received a medical transfer to Stateville, for my mother's ailing medical condition. She almost lost her life three times and I don't want to think twice how life is going to be without her. I will tell you this; I don't know who I would be or what I would have become if it was not for my mother's love. I do know that God has a plan and as long as he gives me life, I will keep walking this journey as painful as it has been.

Last year, I was transferred to Illinois River and I didn't understand why. I was working a job while in Stateville, but it must have been for the best because I was given a job 2 months after being there. Although I am not getting credit (yet), I am able to do programs after 21 years of not having that opportunity.

Before, they looked at me as if I was never going home, but the laws are changing.

My heart believes that my coming home is soon down the road. To all my brothers and sisters who were lied to, we have to build bridges to help each other and our families. We can do better. Thanks to two roads for sharing our stories.



My name is Ms. Diaz De Chavez and I am 69 years of age. I want to say that due to my son imprisonment, my health has been affected. I understand that he hurt others and he takes full responsibility for this. I have been on dialysis for the last 6 years (when he was transferred) and it would had been great joy to have had my youngest son here to help me. Since his transfer , I have not been able to see him as I would like to.

Real Love

A message from the Outside

He has always been very close to me and shows me that regardless of his struggles, he has changed. I miss him and pray for him and all of the parents that are struggling like I am for their child. These Laws MUST CHANGE!!!



The Disparities of T.I.S.

Jason Samuels

Hill

My name is Jason Samuels and I am currently in Hill. I am serving time on a First Degree Murder charge. I was incarcerated in 2008 and sentenced to 30 years under the Illinois truth in sentencing guidelines.

Though I am writing in regard to the law, First, I would like to say, in way am I seeking to down play the seriousness of the crime, nor am I apologetic or non-sympathetic to the victims of crimes, or the family members of the victims of crimes.

Truth-In-sentencing laws weight heavily on me from a psychological standpoint. Due to the 1998 TIS law which states: *“Offenders of violent crimes must serve 100% of their prison sentence.”*

People like me that are practically partaking in self-help classes, education courses, and working job details **CANNOT** earn time off of their sentence. But with the good-time bill that was passed in 2017-2018 for people under the truth-in-sentence before the 1998 TIS law and the sentence under 50% were allowed. Here is an example of the difference between the two guidelines:

TRUTH IN SENTENCING

A person with a sentence of 75 years at 50% for murder (before 1998) would be eligible to get good time, which would get them home a little after 32 years of incarceration, whereas a person such as myself, receiving 30 years, would be force to serve the ENTIRE TIME, without the opportunity to get good-time.

Also, being incarcerated for the last 15 years, and based on the rehabilitation I have shown, I am a person that the prison system defines as “*warehoused*”, meaning that the system understands that I am rehabilitated and no longer needs to be imprisoned, but yet is kept in prison. It is symbolic to be placed in a box, placed on a shelf, inside a warehouse.

While here, I have completed multiple self-help courses, enrolled in Lakeland College and maintain a 3.625GPA. I have also worked in multiple positions and self-published a book. Though I continue to rehabilitate myself daily, mentally it hurts to know that no matter the good I do, or how well I behave, none of it goes towards my early release.

I will be 56 years old and at this age, I will not be able to gain the necessary funds to retire, because I will be in retirement age within 10 years after my release. However, if they were to allow goodtime to me, I could get out at 46, thus potentially becoming self-sufficient. Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to express my views on truth-in-sentencing laws. Hopefully I have been a help explaining some disparities with the TIS laws.

An Essay

On Eradicating and or amending the Truth-In-Sentencing

Porche Williams

Vienna

Should inmates displaying exemplary behavior in the Illinois department of corrections be afforded a fair chance at receiving good time?

Restructuring the truth-in-sentencing and implementing a good time system assessible to all, can be great for encouraging inmates to be mindful of their behavior. In respect to that, if an inmate displays stellar behavior, he or she should be rewarded with good conducts credits or at least allow them to earn it.

The change in policy can decrease the over-populated prisons, detour violence and reunite inmates with their loved ones. In my personal opinion, with respect to the health and safety concerns of the public, any man or woman who has taken the initiative to reform themselves should not be prejudiced from good time, solely based on the nature of their offense. We then must ask ourselves “*Can a good time system be a great way to naturally encourage inmates to become mindful of their behavior?*”

With deep conviction, especially regarding inmates, there lies belief that giving a person something to be enthusiastic about, had power to replace despair with hope. In this example, one thing to be excited about is the chance of obtaining freedom, by the way of an early release. Inmates would be more compelled to avoid trouble if they knew that the reward of early release could be stripped from them.

Given this scenario, would an inmate show more inclination towards an early release, or entertain the idea of mischievousness?

Exemplary behavior speaks loud and clear and shows great character. The effects of such a transformation would not only be beneficial on an individual level, but would also benefit the households and communities where the individuals would be readjusted.

Speaking in terms of economics, imagine former inmates being productive members of society and possessing the skills necessary to produce goods and services, which could in turn remedy the labor force shortages thus adding growth to our country.

With this as a consideration, and the fact that many men that would not have disciplinary issues and had proven themselves to be just, how could those inmates ever be distinguished and be rewarded if truth-in-sentencing continues to be upheld?

Will inmates eventually have abandoned optimism and zeal, knowing that their efforts in school and programs are overlooked by lawmakers and an administration that touts anti-discrimination, fairness, and equality pursuant to the constitution, but never follows through?

If the gist of good time is to commend or compensate an inmate for his behavior and rehabilitation, yet it is always based on false promises of future statutory amendments, when does it lose its' appeal? What better way is there to decrease the prison overpopulation, detour violence and most importantly, reunite men and women with their loved ones than by restructuring the truth-in-sentencing and the good time credits.

Here's the bottom line: Mass incarceration causes Illinois prison to be overpopulation, with the bulk of the taxpayers money is spent on housing inmates. Restructuring the law would allow an equal opportunity for those who show good behavior and to complete programs would steer inmates from fighting, knowing that any forms of bad behavior would stop them from getting an early release. By detouring violence, not only do we create a safer environment for inmates, it also creates a safer environment for the officers employed in those facilities.

Children are suffering from having their parent removed from their lives due to incarceration and as unfortunate as that is, the long term psychological effects to the children can be detrimental to their health and to our society as a whole. The main functions of the Illinois prison systems is supposed to be in place *to renew, rehabilitate and correct the man and women incarcerated, successfully reuniting them with society and their families*, in which truth-in-sentencing and good time incentives play a vital role.

In conclusion, after reviewing the contents of this document (and all the others in this newsletter) before you, I respectfully request that you allow these words to persuade you to explore the vast potential of a brighter future for many, as a result of restructuring the truth-in-sentencing. Furthermore, I implore you to access the equality and fairness of the system that is currently in place. Is the prison and justice system designed to permanently oppress those who have made mistakes in breaking the law, or is designed to help revive, rehabilitate and reacclimates citizens back into society?

It is our very nature as humans to learn through trial and error. Rightfully, it is safe to say that every man and woman deserves another chance to establish a life if they have proven themselves worthy of that chance to establish a life if they have proven themselves worthy of that chance though reform. We, the people, can make this happen together. Let's advocate for change.

Everybody's Not Guilty

Antonio Quinn

Hello, my name is Antonio Quinn. First and foremost thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story. I was born September 22, 1983, in Maywood by a beautiful woman named Ruby Black. She had 5 boys and 1 girl. On Valentine's Day 2006, my family lives changed forever.

At about 10:30pm, a shooting occurred on the block I lived on. I, along with my family and friends went outside to make sure that things were okay. When we made it out there, three people were shot. I ran towards one of the victims and asked if he had a phone to call 911. He handed me his phone and I spoke to the 911 operator. I gave her the location and she instructed us to wait until the police arrived. While I waited, I held the victims hand and prayed for him, whom later died from her injuries.

Once the police arrived, we left and went back inside of the house. At that point I realized that I still had the victim's phone and my brother gave it to the officer. Three months later I was being charged with the case. I was lost, hurt, confused and searching for answers. I went to trial and was found guilty for a crime that I had nothing to do with and was sentenced to 60 years in prison.

Because of “Truth-In-Sentencing” it does not give you the chance to get back home to your family. My kids are now forced to grow up without their dad. I remember, when I my daughter 8 years old and acting up in school and they had a parent/teacher conference. The teacher asked her “What’s wrong? and her response was “I want my Daddy!”. That destroyed me.

If the enhancements that comes with the T.I.S. were not attached and everything went back to the way it was before 1998 (50% vs. 85-100%), I would be coming home to my family. My mom left everything behind this. She had to refinance her home just to get the money for the lawyer. She is now 71 years old and she needs my help. My dad is 82 and my sister has him in a nursing home somewhere he doesn’t want to be.

We need fair chances to re-enter society and the truth-in-sentencing eliminates that chance, because everybody is not guilty. Thank you.

Final Words...

Kevin Gayne

Vienna

On the subject of truth-in-sentencing, I can see how it was a good idea at the time. But times change and new and better ways to rethink corrections emerge. The goal – to create a better society – stays the same. So, we have to ask ourselves if truth in sentencing is a better way to reach that goal.

I don't believe it is. I know that's easy for a person in my position to say, but I'm trying not to think about it from a selfish standpoint. Since the start of my incarceration, I've always known that almost nothing can change my MSR (mandatory supervised release) date. I can fight daily, disrupt the safety of the institution, and just overall cause chaos.

Or, I can go to school, learn job skill, contemplate my life and work towards a bright future. Or, I can just eat and watch TV for twenty-three years. Whatever path I choose, my outdate remains the same.

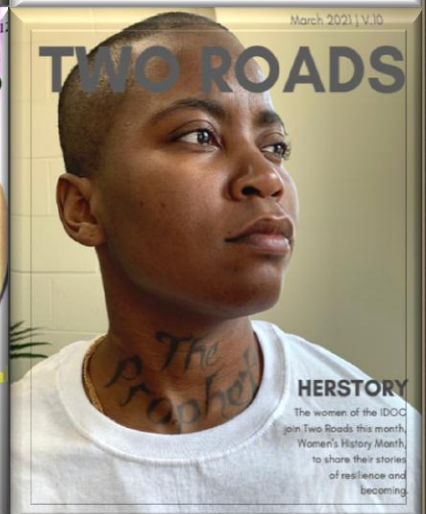
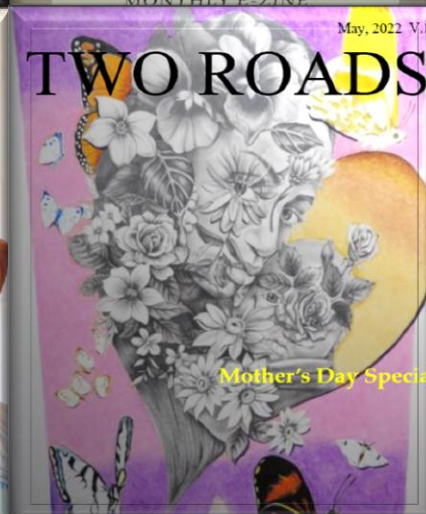
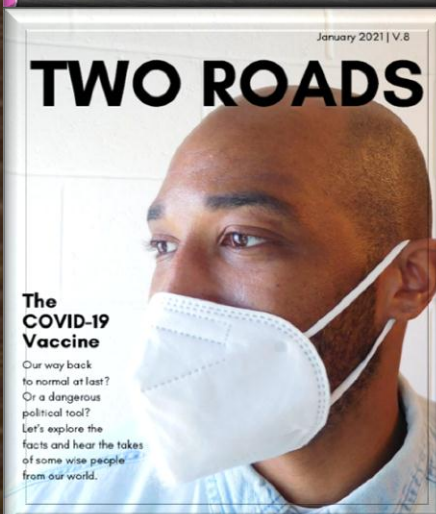
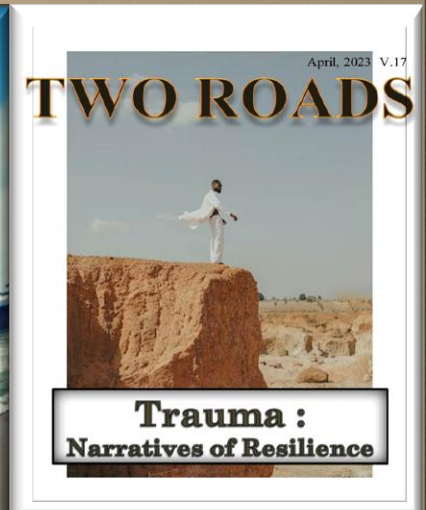
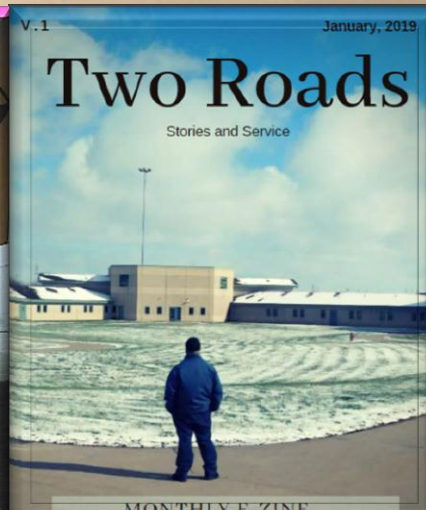
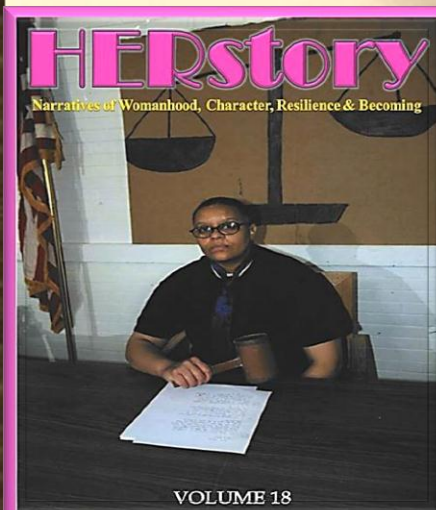
Only through hard work and contemplation can we change and

become productive members of society, which is the best way to pay our debt. And just a small incentive to start us on that path goes a long way. I think most people would agree that they would rather have a reformed felon moving into their neighborhood rather than someone who was stuck in a cage for decades, the let loose.

It is a matter of just a few possible years at the end of a long sentence. Society is no better off if I or anyone else spends twenty-three years inside opposed to twenty. However, if that twenty years were spent being contemplating being productive and contributing to society, we may all just be better off. Some people just need that little bit of hope to get started.

Some may do it on their own with no incentive. Some may never put in the effort some may only do it for an earlier release date. But I do believe that the overall effect would be positive change for the majority of individuals who would benefit from the eradication of truth in sentencing, as well as the communities we will be returning to.

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Encourage your family, lawmakers and
others to take part in Social Justice!!

www.idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoadse-zine.html



We would like to share your unique story to our confined and non-confined readers concerning how has **PEER PRESSURE** had on the lives of you, your family and community. If this has impacted you, we would like to hear your story. In addition, your family and friends can then share their stories as they are impacted by these situations as well. Feel free to have them share their experiences from your incarceration. **Please encourage them to send a submission.**

Submit no later than July 1, 2023

Outsiders and Individuals-In-Custody
(WITH Staff Support)

**Please send your submission and
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penny.rowan@illinois.gov
"ATTN: TWO ROADS Peer Pressure"**

Mail submission, photo to:

Attn: TWO ROADS EDITOR
Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center
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THE TRUTH IN SENTENCING ISSUE

TWO ROADS



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Part III

THE TRUTH IN SENTENCING ISSUE