

TWO ROADS

TRUTH



IN SENTENCING

An honest chronicle of the stories and service of the Incarcerated Women and Men
of the Illinois Department of Corrections

Volume 29

To All Readers

Our monthly e-zine focuses on three phases: *Rehabilitation*, *Restoration* and *Re-Entry*. These are the necessary phases of a successful incarceration and transition back to 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.

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.”

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.

TWO ROADS

Editorial Team

Founders	Jim Estes
	Ricky Hamilton
	Jennifer Parrack
Publisher	Penny Rowan
	Matthew Warnsing
	Naomi Puzzello
Editor-In-Chief	Kenji Haley
Senior Editors	Lakisha Woodard
	Kelly 'KB' Bennett
Associate Editors	Jesse Myers
	Evelyn 'Qimayah' Jackson
Content Editor	William Jenkins
House Poet	Ronaldo Crawford

Editor's Take – Kenji Haley **7**

The Thankless Job – Earl Milton, Jr. **10**

From Joel Nelson **11**

An Incomplete Education – Toola Taylor **13**

From Linrod Thames **14**

Truth-In-Sentencing – Abdul Khabir **16**

Truth-In-Sentencing – LaKisha Woodard **18**

Right & Just - Sherrod Tillis **19**

What Trauma Looks Like for Incarcerated Men **22**

Time – Kelly Ragsdale **24**

The Truth About Truth (Volume 2) – Michael ‘Wally’ Walls **25**

The TRUTH About Sentencing – Reginald Spencer **29**

As I Depart to Re-Enter – Tyrone Delaney **32**

Part of the Plan – Earl Milton, Jr. **34**

Hope? – Roger Sharkey **35**

The Root – Ronnie Carrasquillo **37**

Truth-In-Sentencing – Kelly K.B. Bennett **39**

One Crazy Day - Sean Heglesen **42**

Get It Together – Toola Taylor **45**

I'm A Survivor?? – Keith ‘Aquil’ Talley **48**

Truth-In-Sentencing – Jorge A. Ramos **49**

Time - Anonymous **51**

Is Man Redeemable? – James Kral **52**

Man's Inhumanity to Man – Mishunda Davis-Brown **54**

What Should I Be Talking About? – William Jenkins **57**

Strong Enough – Evelyn “Qimayah” Jackson **60**



Volume 29



TR

TWO ROADS

TRUTH-IN-SENTENCING
ISSUE

Editor's Take



Kenji Haley, Editor-In-Chief

TWO ROADS

So, here we are...the end of the road for many of us, and yet the struggle continues. Many men and women have been faced with the time that has shaped us, molded us and made our lives a living hell. Time that could have been spent for the better; learning things, forming bonds, making life anew, but that is not always the case. The unconstitutional Truth-In-Sentencing laws have crippled the men and women of this state since its inception in 1998.

Many had to learn their quest for life behind these walls and barb-wired fences; given the game that was not meant for them. Doing the thing that cannot be undone. They had to become subjected to the foolishness administrated by the system that nurtured them, all the while learning that this may be the only education that they would ever receive. What I find so distressing is the lack of rehabilitation and what others

feel that we should or should not have.

When a woman is facing 50 years at 100%, the question you should ask yourself is...really??

Now, some of you will be cynics thinking that the men and women only want to get so good time and get out of prison early. Well, let's clear the air.

When someone receives that amount of time, the Judge, prosecutor or any other faction understands that a crime has been committed, the person is subject to do time and that there are guidelines that are in place (albeit these guidelines are proposed by people who NEVER been incarcerated) to abide by, but when does it make sense for a women (or anyone) to have to serve more years that she (he) has been alive??

What about the young man, age 17, and yes, he was out in the streets, surviving the best way he knew how, affiliating with the things that led to the situation that he's currently in. What in God's name does giving a kid 58 years do mentally and physically?

When we issue out these types of guidelines, the State of Illinois has lost its way. They have truly put the iron fist down on these men and women to prove a point of *law and order*. With that being said, there are victims, and I don't want to sweep that under the rug, because there are people whose lives are changed forever. But, locking someone "under the jail" for decades, leaving them uneducated, unformed, and any "un-" you could think of, does nothing to correct the muddle that this person has done. I would like to replay to you our creed:

- **Rehabilitation** *involves the struggle for change one confronts during incarceration.*
- **Restoration** *reflects the refined version of oneself that we've become, and our restored self seeks service of self-worth to the world.*
- **Re-Entry** *is the ultimate goal one accomplishes through class study, self-study or modification programs completed during one's incarceration.*

We say this for a reason. There is a method that people have to follow to become a better person.

I was recently in attendance at the Illinois Justice Project Journalism Conference, held at Loyal University of Chicago, via Webex. This was a room full of journalist and other *Agents of Change*, and I was honored to have my Kewanee brothers William Jenkins (Two Roads Associate Editor), Halik Williams (Kewanee Horizons Editor) and Evelyn 'Qimayah' Jackson (Two Roads Editor at Logan) on the panel. The question that was posted to them was:

"If there was something that these journalists should be talking about when it comes to the Department of Corrections, what should it be?"

The answer from all three persons was the resounding Truth-In-Sentencing laws. Ms. Jackson said it best *"if the laws were changed, I would be home by now because I have served half of my sentence (24 years)."* Mr. Jenkins added *"[Y]ou cannot start re-entry 6 months out or 12 months out...you must start re-entry from day one."*

We are no better than our counterparts in other states and countries when it comes to incarceration. If you read our last Truth-In-Sentencing edition (Vol. 19.1-2), John Howard provided statistics that showed the truth.

It states:

“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.”

“But locking someone ‘under the jail’ for decades, leaving them uneducated, unformed, and any ‘un-’ you could think of, does nothing to correct the muddle that this person has done.’

But how do we confront it? The price of housing men and women in the Illinois Department of Correction is staggering. I was told that the price to house the juveniles in 2024 is currently \$187,000. What is more astonishing is the Department of Juvenile Justice (IDJJ) is currently building a new facility in the Central Illinois region. In the meantime, the State is razing Stateville and Logan...ONLY TO

REBUILD THEM. The need for more prisons in small town America is asinine. The fact that we have all these laws to contain men and women instead of funding more programs to keep them motivated and encouraged from the disparity of the system makes no sense.

Our 2nd edition of TWO ROADS Truth-In-Sentencing issue has been remarkable. We have more insight from advocates that are trying to help make changes. We are thankful for the contributors; it feels like we are beating a worn-out drum trying to help the people who have never been affected by these things. I have been honored to champion this journey because “when you don’t know, you don’t know”, and to give people the understanding for change, I believe that we can go further.

I want to thank all the readers nationwide and also give a shout out to Ashton and the Education Justice Project Danville and the men at Lawrence Correctional Center. Continue to feed us with your submissions. You all are doing a magnificent job and thank you for your well wishes and encouragement of TWO ROADS. We hear ya’!

The Thankless Job

Earl Milton Jr.
Centralia

The good that you have done, and that you do every day, which no one seems to notice or appreciate, I want you to know that we see it all. The careful persistent effort that you put into even the smallest things, we feel the love and care dispensed daily in the little details, which are ignored.

You are a rock star to us, the thankless job that you do we thank you for it. The one that you thought nobody even cared about; special little touches that you put into everything that you do these are the things that deserve the most gratitude. Keep doing the things that you do and forget the rude oblivious masses, always know that you been noticed, also we do care. Everything that you do and everything that you are means so much to us, you are indeed a rock star, and we are your fans.

concerning why this is so true, first know that there are no thankless jobs, for in reality you are what keeps the wheels turning so smoothly. You are the nuts and bolts that keep the engine from falling apart, the Ferris wheel needs your oil. No toil is in vain, even if you feel miserable and invisible.

Even if you have been plagued with the pain of the forsaken or overlooked soul, we felt the need to tell you just in case you have not heard “We appreciate everything that you do.” Even if you never hear us say so.

So, on behalf of all those that feel forgotten, overlooked, or unappreciated, we want you to hear it from us first, you are a rock star. In addition, the world would fall apart without you, and thank you on behalf of us all, keep up the good work, and keep standing tall.

Just in case you have any questions

Joel Nelson

What does Truth- In sentencing means to me? It means serving 100% of my sentence without any recourse, nor the possibility to earn program credit for positive programming. I do understand fully there should not be incentives for doing the right thing, but after decades of promoting this stance that the state of Illinois is tough on crime. When in fact it has the complete opposite effect, high rate of recidivism, high rates of crime and more importantly a high price tag for the people of the State of Illinois.

The State adopted and ratified this federal program, and for more than 25 years since its application, it has done nothing to address its ills that are going on in the cities within the state, as well as outside the state. In just a couple of months I will be starting my 21st year of incarceration, and after serving this amount of time so many things have changed i.e., technology, currency, etc.

I came into this system in my early 20's, a father to kids in diapers, and now in my middle 40's; a Grandfather with grand kids out of diapers.

however, my village was not well. Beneath each personal choice is a sea of chosen influences, experiences, and factors that shape our circumstances, and our character. The life outcomes for black males are bleak, in just about every domain, from education, to low paying employment, from life expectancy, to incarceration; you will find us ranking at the bottom or the top respectfully.

During the 1980's Congress created the sentencing Commission, an appointed panel that established strict sentencing guidelines and predictable expanded drug related penalties. The sentencing Reform Act of 1984



which created the commission “also eliminated parole and required all inmates to serve at least 85% of their sentence behind bars before becoming eligible for release. This is the birth of “Truth-In-Sentencing.”

All of these measures failed to address the most basic questions of why the epidemic was happening in the first place. Also, what kind of response would help restore vulnerable people and communities instead of destroying them. The Truth –In –Sentencing is the perfect drug for the predator/prey system that marginalized communities have endured for generations.

Nevertheless, we have to mobilize our efforts to change this narrative, by bringing light and education about the topic at hand, how this bill is continuing to erode the family structure, and a cost each taxpayer must pay. If we are to continue following the federal government lead which recently passed a comprehensive law, The First Step Act, along with the giving their population a chance to earn Program Sentence Credit, something the Legislators in the State of Illinois refuse to look at. We are all more complex than our classifications; we are more layered than the labels placed upon us.

We are put in boxes, (tough on crime) to help others understand them, but every individual is more multifaceted than that. If it is truly about public safety, how can you make more victims, by giving them some type of incentives which help reduce recidivism, cost to taxpayers, and the pillage of the black and brown communities whom the Illinois Commission for Sentencing has continued to point out – that the majority of people serving these long-term sentences under Truth- In- Sentencing comes from the above-mentioned demographics.

As I started this topic, I asked myself this question. “What does Truth-In-Sentencing mean to me? I responded by saying 100% of my sentence – without any recourse, nor the possibility to earn program sentence credit for positive programming. Now I have a different answer, Inhumane.... I.D.O.C mission statement is as follows;

“To serve justice in Illinois and increase public safety by promoting positive change for those in custody while operating successful reentry programs and reducing victimization.”

An Incomplete Education

Toola O. Taylor

Illinois River

If someone were to ask me if I had an experience without which my education would be shamefully incomplete, the answer would have to be a definitive, “no”.

To be “educated,” by definition is to be developed in knowledge, skill, or character. “Education” is the process by which this is accomplished. However, to be educated, and possess an education, denotes finality- a cessation after absorption of what can be learned; completion.

From the day I was born, I began to come into being ; to occur or happen- to develop, physically , emotionally, mentally, etc., Life is composed of a constant continuum of learning experiences that discontinue only at the point of cerebral demise. Therefore, in order for me to truthfully, answer the question whether or not I have had an experience without which my education would be shamefully incomplete, in my

opinion, I would have had to journey to beyond the end of my life to properly, ascertain the education that was my life. Prematurely, by answering such a question, it can be argued that throughout the rest of my life, I can experience an occurrence, or happening that will not only refute or contradict that answer, but also be so decisive as to render it irrelevant.

In summation, there is no such thing as a “complete” education of which one could, with surety, claim an event that would have rendered it incomplete without having experienced it in its entirety. An informal education is an education that has no parameters; no limits, to measure its completeness. It is casual; an education obtained by and through day-to-day activity and is unplanned. A formal education is an education based upon strict curriculum, awarded upon “completion”, by certificate or degree. However, in order to maintain the professionalism of a formal education (career)...

one is required to, in most cases, every few years or so, return to school of one form or another to supplement the knowledge and skill with that which has been learned or discovered since his or her absence from academia,

acknowledging the fact that an education is never complete- in my lifetime, or anyone else's.

Linord Thames

I know what it means to survive, on a daily basis, I must hope. Dreaming of being free when I get tired of staying woke. "Ghost Bills" are for real in prison, every year someone says the Truth-In Sentencing law has changed, search the internet and it is still the same. That is part of my pain, knowing I have been, rehabilitated without any reward or gain...!

Illinois, there is no truth; in the Sentence, you gave me 28 years and to serve 100% of it. First time offender and with no possibility to earn any good time or parole, "Illinois this is your truth in sentencing law" it has not made me any better, also it has not done anything to stop crime.

My life should not be about the politics of this world, as if what was done fits the interest of justice and promotes public safety. I am not an immigrant,

migrant, nor refugee, I am an American citizen, who believes in the home of the brave and the land of the free. Therefore, I ask whatever happened to my second chance, the chance to be restored back to a useful citizen. "Illinois there is no truth in the sentence you gave me."

The solution is not Truth-In – Sentencing and it never was, but it is those in power they must be willing to allow those who caused the problem, to be the solution to the problem.



CLOTHES DRUGS PILLS ALCOHOL
GAMBLING PRIME GAMING
PILLS EXERCISE SEX SHOPPING

ADDICTION

Let's End This!

Without staff support:

Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
"ADDICTION"
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

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

Please send your submission and scanned
photo to doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"ATTN: ADDICTION"

SUBMIT NOW!!

Truth-In-Sentencing

For those that do not know me, my name is Abdul Khabir AKA Jesse Myers; I have spent over ten years in incarceration for an Aggravated Domestic Battery/Strangulation. I received a sentence of 15 years at 85% (12 years 9 months) under truth in sentencing my third class II felony enhanced to class X sentencing. The state offered a plea bargain of 8 years at 85% (6 years 9 months) I would be HOME! That is not my main point but part of it. Many people know my story, and some do not. One thing I think is important to the reader is that I take full responsibility for my actions. This has not always been the case.

When at first convicted, I was bitter, selfish, self-centered, self-seeking, and maladjusted to a life which included being honest. I blamed everyone and everything for my problems in life. I filed many frivolous motions in vain attempts to regain my freedom. I would lie on the prosecutor, my defense attorney, the judge, my ex-girlfriend, and even the victim of my crime. Small things began

to change as soon as I got to prison but I was far from ready to take responsibility for many more years. Through a series of events and inspirations things started to change at around year seven.

I will not say I know where I would be today if I had accepted that plea bargain. However, it is my belief that I would not be the same transformed individual that I am today. Notice that I said I would have done under seven years, but it took over seven for me to take hold of true change. I had to face many hard-truths about myself. I was living in a pit of shame and guilt.



Abdul Khabir
TWO ROADS
Associate Editor

Therefore, it was very difficult for me to be honest with others and myself about what I had done. I had hurt a woman, not only had I harmed her physically, but I chose to go to trial. Which meant she would have to make a choice whether to testify against me or not. I am very remorseful that I forced her to make a decision like that, and that she had to relive her suffering in front of others.

I thank Allah that she was courageous and brave enough to do so. I had been living in a cycle of erratic behavior, which went back to my early twenties. This was not my first time making poor decisions or being violent. Had she not had so much courage that behavior was likely to continue. I was sinister, malicious, and manipulative. It is my belief that I would have continued on that way. Even going into year 11, I am still discovering things about myself that need correction. I have a daily reprieve contingent on the maintenance of my spiritual condition. I work daily to walk a new path and stay focused on a new way of thinking.

One of the things I will say, looking back I wish I could have seen it sooner. I wish that the second I walked into Graham Correctional the first time in 2010 that I accepted help which was offered to me.

Alternatively, on this sentence back in 2013, the day I came to IDOC, having a plan designed specifically for me, to help direct me may have brought this change sooner. For many this type of plan and action may be the difference maker.

Moreover, in some circumstances could be the difference between LIFE and DEATH. Some of my associates were saying (and I am sure you will read these words in their articles as well) “Re-Entry has to start from day one”. I strongly agree with them. Personally, I am grateful that I received a “harsh sentence”. I did not need someone to be soft on me. What I needed was to face reality. That is why it is difficult for me to discuss sentencing. What is good for me may not be so for the next individual. The man that writes this today got here the hard way and many people had to suffer in order for me to change. Compared to what I put others through I suffered little. Allah placed many people in my path to help direct change in me. I have accepted my punishment, and now believe it to be fair and true.

However, not everyone is as fortunate as I am. People In this system need help and direction. In addition, they need to be offered a chance to show their change. For many, appraisals of change, or receiving

recognition for change, may be just what they need to continue moving in a good direction.

Consider the mitigating factors in the lives and upbringing of the majority of offenders. Truth-In-Sentencing Laws take chances away from those deemed unworthy of any more chances. Not everybody will always be worthy of

second chances, but anybody may at some point in time become worthy. If or when they prove themselves, there needs to be avenues for them to receive that chance.

Mostly there needs to be avenues for all, at all times, (if they choose) to be helped with guidance toward chances and change.

Truth In Sentencing

I came into the penal system at the age of 21 years old. I felt jaded and mistreated by the whole process of how my fate was decided. So, upon my arriving, I was not in a very good mental place. I had a lot of emotions going on. I felt alone. I just wanted my family. I was so angry, especially at myself for putting myself in the situation that I was in because of the pain I felt.

I rebelled against authority. Authority was not the only one I was taking my anger out on though. I was fighting those around me also. I was not looking to change. I was convicted and sentenced under the Truth-In-Sentencing. As I sit here and realize that Truth-In-Sentencing is not beneficial to anyone. Truth-In-Sentencing should be abolished. Taxpayers have to put in more money the



LaKisha Woodard

TWO ROADS
Senior Associate Editor

longer that we are locked down. The [prison] populations in the institutions always remain high because the Truth-In-Sentencing laws. They don't leave room for us to get out and prove ourselves. So, what do we do? Hope, wish and pray that Truth-In-Sentencing gets abolished soon.

Right & Just

Sherrod Tillis

Big Muddy River

The need for stability in law cannot be allowed to obscure the changing needs of society or veil the injustice from the doctrine in need of evaluation.

Today and the past year(s), the entire world has been encapsulated within death, tumult and fear brought on by the emergence of Covid- 19(a virus I have had coursing through my system). Even w/being cognizant of the effects of this implacable virus, millions of people around the world and especially here in the U.S, took to the streets. People of different ethnicities & backgrounds marched in unity to protest in fervent anger against the pandemics that has plagued our society for centuries before Covid-19 reached U.S shores.

The murders of unarmed African American men & women vitalized the people to stand up and demand change. A change to all the evil policies that perpetuate injustice & oppression, these demands shed light on the obscure issues that all stem from a nefarious tree called

“Racism.” This tree has many branches, it is the largest one, systemic, - racism reaches deep into minority communities.

In my opinion it starts with POVERTY, the schools in these communities are dilapidated, books out-dated, classes overcrowded, teachers are weary – also underpaid. Lacking an educational background the men/women cannot get hired for jobs, without a job men/women in poverty turn to crime to survive and to feed their families. Most are born into situations where their mothers are on drugs and their fathers are dead, in prison, or an absentee. Which means there is not, a positive influencer, in their lives to project integrity, knowledge, wisdom, morals, self-esteem, or the encouragement & importance of attaining an education, so being poor with an empty stomach, it is either survive or die.

Then there are laws drafted by the Legislature aimed at the poor’s only means of survival, instead of the real problem that maintains the ghettos across the wealthiest nations on this earth, POVERTY!

Lawmakers created the infamous drug laws that made people of color serve more time in prison for rock-cocaine because they were more inclined to possess it; as opposed to the lesser sentence given to whites, who were more inclined to possess the powder form of the same drug!

I believe the U.S has some of the Greatest minds on earth, which is why I view an idiotic policy or law as nothing but EVIL! Especially; when regular citizens, are cognizant of the problems, & solutions, which those in positions of power seem to ignore all together. If crime is not the origin of the problem, then why start there? Is it for votes / politics? The” tough on crime “mantra arrived in the 90’s all across the nation, the fruit that sprang from that branch of systematic- racism is called Mass Incarceration.

Where minorities, make up the majority of the population, but only a small percentage of the country’s population. Lawmakers thought it was logical to incarcerate their way out of crime; this way of thinking gives ink to the injurious to the African American community that can possibly result from a change. The lock ’em up logic is flawed also ineffective.

Again, lawmakers thought their sentiment & logic of “keeping offenders off the streets” would increase public safety & restore public satisfaction with the criminal justice system. Yes, the same CJS that the people of Illinois cried out for reform, but Illinois adopted the Truth –In –Sentence law anyway. A law set by two specific reports on behalf of the dept. of justice authored by then U.S Attorney Gen. William Barr. The same man who, coincidental asserted to the world, “There is no systematic racism in America .” Listen I can never say that the taking of another person’s life is not one of the worst a person can commit, but I can factually say with troves of data to support that the T.I.S law is more injurious to the minority communities than it provides public safety.

When watching the news, you see that the crime rate is significantly high, If you watch it every day you will see it is the norm. This tells me that it is still a serious issue presently, which proves after 20+ years of Truth-In Sentencing was signed into law that this law is NOT a deterrent of crime. If a law is not effective and does not work it needs to be repealed, so there is room for one that does.

There are essentially two max security prisons in Illinois; because of mass incarceration the prisons are bursting at the seams. So much so that I.D.O.C recently had to change its long-standing policy, a person could not serve their sentence in a medium or minimum-security prison unless their sentence was less than 20 years. Presently that number is 30-40 years and some cases natural life. The rehabilitation options are low which perpetuates recidivism.

Personally, I have matured & evolved from the person I was 21 years ago, mostly from self-education and being determined to be the best human I can be. I have been involved with the few programs available to me, many individuals in my situation or worse do not see the need to change, because they figure they will never be released. The length of time being served under Truth – In Sentencing has dramatically increased, noting that a larger proportion of individuals serving time for murder will not be released until after they have reached the age of 75 or have died in prison.

Truth – In –Sentencing law prevents individuals from earning good time..It also does not allow individuals to show all they have accomplished to a parole

board. T.I.S & law makers keep Fathers/ Mothers, Uncles/ Aunties, Brothers /Sisters Cousins/ Friends & Husbands/Wives in prison on essentially Life sentences with no chance for parole. Generation after Generation will continue to be trapped in this vicious cycle if Truth- in Sentencing remains. Illinois needs to depart from T.I.S; it is clear and unambiguous that Truth- In –Sentencing is not a deterrent, with all the damage to individuals in custody, their families, recidivism & mass incarceration, T.I.S law was terribly reasoned.

In closing it is my hope that all everyone affected will continue to fight, protest, raise awareness & pray that change will be affected!! Thank you to all the individuals responsible for “Two Roads” & Kewanee Horizons. Reading all the articles & stories inspired me to use my voice and offer my thoughts & opinions look forward to more from me. Peace & positive, Energy to all.

Trapped in Bondage at Big Muddy River

Sherrod Tillis

What Trauma Looks Like For Incarcerated Men

Emerging research indicates that trauma is a significant mental health issue in the lives of male prisoners and could be important to conceptualizing interventions that can improve prison safety, prisoner mental health, and reentry outcomes. This paper explores the types and timing of common trauma exposures within a sample of male prisoners.

Similar to populations served by the child welfare system, juvenile justice system, and public mental health care systems, men in the prison system have high rates of lifetime exposures to trauma, beginning in childhood. According to a national sample of children and youth, 25.2% of boys experience some form of child maltreatment. This sample of men reported rates twice that. Moreover, male prisoners report rates of lifetime trauma exposure and rates of PTSD several times higher than the general population.

In this study, 10% of participants met the criteria for PTSD. This is twice the lifetime rate found in community samples for men. However, the qualitative nature

of the trauma exposure experienced by male prisoners is not well understood.

Volume

In this study, violence is frequent and pervasive in these brief timelines within participants' lives, regardless of demographics. The theme of witnessing or learning of the violent death of someone they were close to, particularly during childhood or adolescence, was nearly universal for this sample. Being themselves the targets of violence as youth was also prominent.

Of note, most of the violence reported was not abuse at the hands of caregivers (that is, not what would be considered "child maltreatment") but attacks by strangers, acquaintances, or "enemies" outside their families. For example, 16 participants reported being shot or shot at by strangers or neighborhood rivals at least once during their childhoods or adolescence (between ages 11 and 25, mean=16.25).

Thirteen of these participants identified as Black (two identified as Multiracial and one as White). According to the *Centers for Disease Control and Prevention* (CDC) half of deaths among Black males in this age group (15-24 years old) come as a result of homicides (compared to white males in this age group for whom homicide accounts for only about 8%).

It is also noteworthy that the highest scorers were among prisoners non-Black. While high rates of exposure to violent death were still present for the non-Black group, childhood maltreatment was more common. In the current sample, it appears that Black prisoners may have been exposed to fewer categories of trauma than non-Black prisoners. One possible theory to explain this is racial groups experiencing less racial discrimination may have more protective factors that can buffer even those with high rates of childhood trauma from incarceration.

Behavioral health issues in adulthood that are often associated with trauma exposure in childhood may be more often responded to with therapeutic interventions for those with racial or

other socioeconomic advantages that can be protective against arrest and sentencing to prison. This would be consistent with Wolff and Shi's findings, that white male prisoners received mental and behavioral health services at over twice the rate of black male prisoners in their study.

Their study also found that white males and other racial groups reported experiencing more physical and sexual trauma during childhood than black males. At the same time, PTSD rates have been found to be higher among African-Americans than people of other racial/ethnic groups as are certain types of trauma exposures. Because African American men are disproportionately affected by mass incarceration and the least likely to receive trauma services, it is of particular importance to understand the types of trauma exposure they experience in order to better target services toward them.

Conclusion

Nearly all (95%) people in prison will eventually be released. According to the Bureau of Justice Statistics, however, 77% of people released from prison are re-arrested within 5 years.

The process of returning to society from prison is a fraught experience during which the majority of former prisoners have limited financial and social resources and face barriers to employment, housing, and basic medical and mental health care.

Successful reentry is threatened by substance use relapse, unmanaged chronic disease and mental health disorders, family strain, as well as the

complex problems resulting from concentrated poverty and a racially biased criminal justice system. It is in the interests of not only prisoners but public safety that correctional systems begin to become aware of the prevalence of trauma and to take into account the needs of prisoners with histories of trauma.

This was written by the following authors:

*Maria Morrison / University of Washington
Carrie Pettus-Davis / Florida State University
Tanya Renn / Florida State University
Christopher Veeh / University of Iowa
Christopher Weatherly / University of Iowa*

Time

Kelly Ragsdale

Centralia

As African American people, it's our duty to change the narrative, we must want better as people we have to stop settling for anything. We have become content with the situation; we have placed in making the job easy for society to suppress us.

The hate, jealousy the violence, the disingenuous actions we exhibit towards each other has become normal, we so accustomed to doing so because the Hierarchies made it acceptable.

The abuse we display towards each

other is absurd when it all will end. Other races of people have more unity among themselves, other than African Americans people to the point we see no wrong in it.

We down each other, kill each other, rob, steal, and cheat each other without any doubt or remorse. We have to start loving ourselves first before we can expect any change to happen, or be viewed, in a positive manner. We treat each other just as bad as those who enslaved us it is time to change the narrative.

The Truth About Truth

Volume Two

Michael (Wally) Walls

Pontiac

It has been over a year, since the initial Two Roads truth-in-Sentencing, issues were published. In that time, smatterings of bills aimed at prison reform remain, essentially stagnant, mired in the muck of the legislative swamp. There are some amazing proposals on the table, true enough. Earned Good Time Relief; Elder Parole; including mandatory minimum sentences; equitable sentencing structures; and putting Judicial Discretion back into the courtroom where it belongs.

These are all amazing ideas, but they are on a fast track to nowhere if they continue to lie upon the legislative table, collecting dust. Some of these bills are more neglected than Marjorie Taylor- Greene's match.com dating profile. The sad reality is that with this being an election year, we cannot honestly expect much on the floor of the legislature. The majority of the summer will be spent on some," see what I can do" moments that some legislators, use to get re-elected. About the only thing,

seeing less action than the floor of the legislature this year will be Donald Trump's bedroom.

Typically, an Illinois State Senator or Representative is elected for a two-year term; The Legislator will actually spend about nine months of the following year in Springfield. The other three months will be spent in their home districts, working at their district's office. Election year politics are an entirely different animal, January and the most of February are generally spent in session. By late February, though the focus is about defending one's territory in the March primary a few weeks later, they will take an Easter break heading into the summer session.

After a brief Labor Day respite, the Legislature will head into the fall session until mid-October. Then is off to the campaign trail, working on being re-elected in the general Election the first Tuesday of November. After the election chaos subsides, about five weeks

of the session remain before adjourning for the winter break. All told, the average Illinois legislator will spend about sixteen months of a two-year term actually ‘legislating’. Now if only they could somehow translate “legislate” into getting some bills passed. Maybe then, we would have something, a little more promising than “a few good ideas”.

While we sit around waiting for the State legislature to pass a bill or two, a lot of us work diligently to seek some type of relief through the judicial system. Once you have exhausted your legal remedies, and your Federal Habeas Corpus, where do you turn? Like many, I have turned to the filing of a petition for Executive Clemency with the Illinois Prisoner Review Board.

The July 2022 PRB Hearing was postponed due to PRB staffing issues, so my PRB Hearing took place in October 2022. For some reason, I had some perception that the clemency process was more expeditious in nature. Having never filed a petition before, I figured this would only take 6 months or so. Whoops, I had it figured wrong, a year and a half later, and I am still waiting, on a decision.

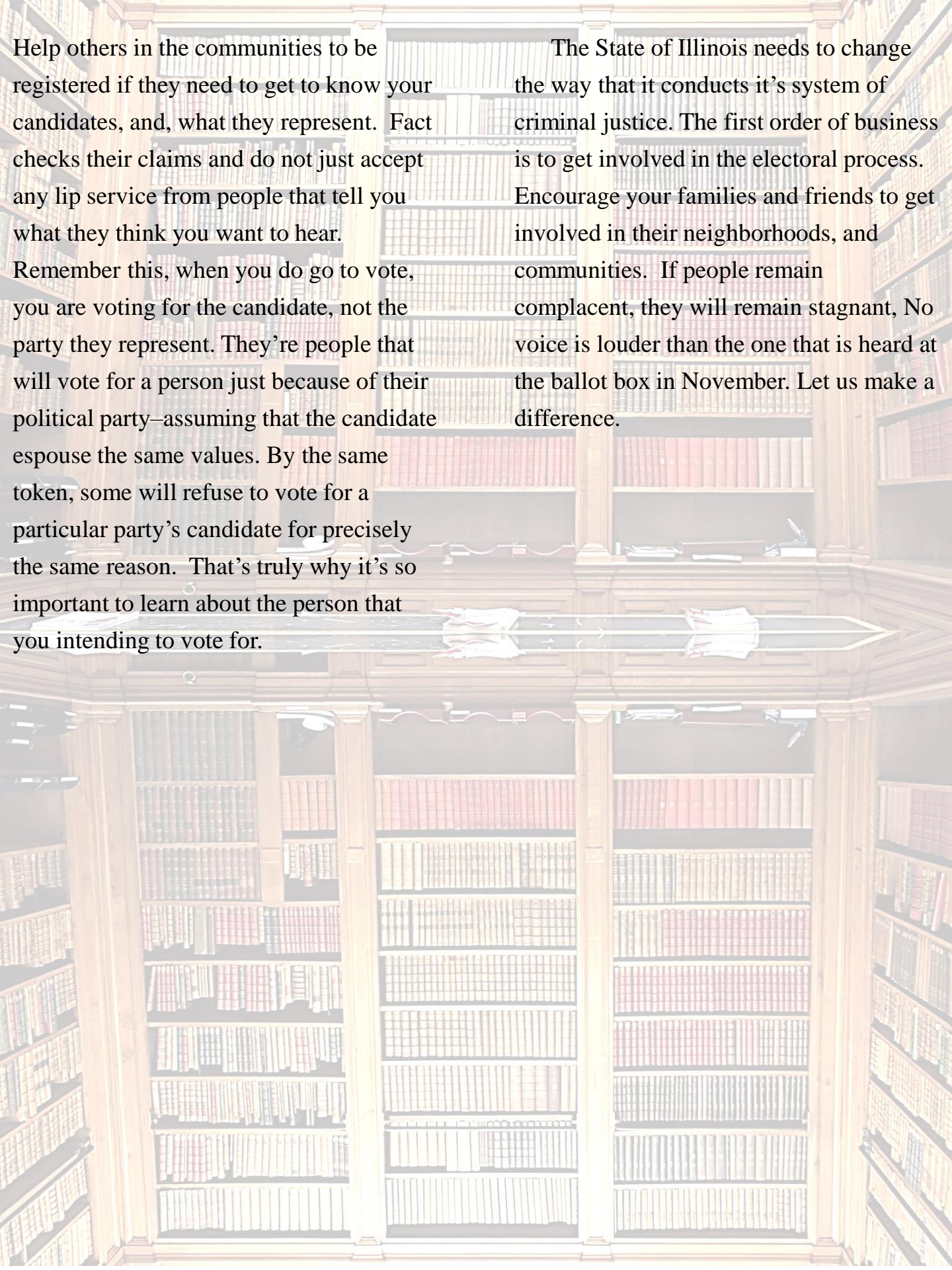
What amazes me, however, is the story of

a guy that I have known for quite some time, he had his PRB Hearing in October 2021, and he is still hanging around 30 months later, waiting for a decision. That makes me wonder, how many more people are in the same boat? Now I am not a rocket scientist by any means, but this does make me wonder, if you are stuck waiting four or five years for a clemency decision, what is the point of a one-year waiting period, if when the PRB Hearing was held, I was 55 years of age; I am currently 58 years of age, and will I be 60+ when I finally get a decision?

As I mentioned earlier, this is an election year, the cool part to this is that we are sitting upon what could potentially be one of the greatest untapped segments of voters in Illinois.

Imagine families and friends of the incarcerated men and woman of Illinois, along with those of us that had been incarcerated in the past. The State of Illinois recently spent a lot of time and resources, making sure that people could vote after their release from custody.

Well, why not let them know we have been listening. By spreading the word that people should encourage your families and friends to get involved in the electoral process, get registered to vote.



Help others in the communities to be registered if they need to get to know your candidates, and, what they represent. Fact checks their claims and do not just accept any lip service from people that tell you what they think you want to hear.

Remember this, when you do go to vote, you are voting for the candidate, not the party they represent. They're people that will vote for a person just because of their political party—assuming that the candidate espouse the same values. By the same token, some will refuse to vote for a particular party's candidate for precisely the same reason. That's truly why it's so important to learn about the person that you intending to vote for.

The State of Illinois needs to change the way that it conducts it's system of criminal justice. The first order of business is to get involved in the electoral process. Encourage your families and friends to get involved in their neighborhoods, and communities. If people remain complacent, they will remain stagnant, No voice is louder than the one that is heard at the ballot box in November. Let us make a difference.



DON'T TURN YOUR BACK ON DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

**DOMESTIC VIOLENCE
AND PREVENTION
OCTOBER 2024**

Without staff support:

Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
DVAP
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

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

Please send your submission and
scanned photo to
doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"ATTN: DVAP"

SUBMIT NOW

The TRUTH About Sentencing

Reginald Spencer

Kewanee

Hello, my name is Reginald Lamarr Spencer. I would like to write my truth-in-sentencing story with a letter I wrote over a year ago:

“In December of this year, I will have been incarcerated 20 years. From day one, I knew I would never re-offend, knowing how horrible of a thing it was to do to anyone and being aware of my actions that were totally out of character of me.

The record of my character before and after this crime shows clearly that the system could definitely use some reformation in consideration for my rehabilitation and resentencing, in light of the fact that I was able to maintain a spotless disciplinary record for 20 years.”

In a maximum-security prison, one has many opportunities to be angry in ways one would never think of. I’ve seen it many of times; however, for a man being in the position that I was in and to not have any infractions is a miracle.

Considering my background (being a first-time offender, I thought that 10 years was too much time because I would have had to serve 8 ½ years, but to have now been in 20 years, one could say that the abolishment of the truth-in-sentencing law would have allowed me to leave from prison 2 years ago.

Here is a thought: *What actually constitutes whether one is worthy of a reconsideration of sentencing?* Who is even paying attention to this, and what are they looking for, when the men and women work on their ways to establish a “new you” yet are being neglected because the system is looking to find ways to remove people from their families and destroy generations of lives?



Then there are those who are released from prison, who have not learned, and they are meshed with the ones who have changed, but that leads to *who deserves a second chance?* These have been my questions and thoughts. Many loved ones have too, and in most ways, they have been in prison with me. Most of them thought that I would have received a lesser sentence.

When a person does as much time as I have, he or she can never get that time back, or live a life that would have given them the ability to enjoy the friends and family, as some of them have perished. Those years are lost forever, but a change in the truth-in-sentencing laws could surely make a huge difference for the people in the State of Illinois to bring some healing—particularly when one has done so much time, when they come home, their children have children.

I have personally witnessed men who have died before making it out to be with their loved ones and others by suicide. I've heard of their loved ones succumbing to illnesses and disease right before their release. A change in the law would bring a tremendous gleam of hope and balance in our lives.

Before I was locked up, I got my sons involved with football at the ages of six and seven. My youngest, Andrew, now plays professionally overseas and is on a well-known reality show, while my youngest Phillip is a Minister and a hard-working African-American. I could only imagine how it would be spending time with my boys, if I was not under the thumb of the truth-in-sentencing laws.

My father and I spoke on all of this time incarcerated would be behind me, and we spoke on how we would all be together again as a family with all the pain behind us; laughing and having fun. My father and I made many wonderful plans upon my release, as well as my Mother and I. But this dream is deferred because I lost my mother to uterine cancer in 2018, and in 2021, I lost my father to cancer as well. Just five short years, I lost two of the most important people in my life, knowing that if these laws were different, I would have been there with my parents in their last days.

These are some of the things that a person who is locked up encounters whether they deserved their time or not...guilty or innocent. Since my incarceration, it's difficult to remember the countless number of people I've met with such a variety of talent that could be beneficial to society in the most positive ways. I am very confident that if these men and women who received a second chance, by the elimination of this disastrous law would not only be successes, but a way to show that we aren't all that bad after all.

Furthermore, with all the "rumbling" that is going on, I feel that I would be at the end of my time (December) before change would come. When I wrote for a *Resentencing Consideration* in 2022, my counsel said that it was "Under Review", and all that did was allow the State to play the "waiting game" with my life. If they would have taken the time to work on the changes to the men and women who are suffering by the stroke of the pen of the judge, and the process of the county, to name, and shame me and others, this story of mine would only be an afterthought.

With less than 8 months left in my sentencing, the future is bright. I plan on

enrolling in the CDL program in the State of Illinois, and with the record that I bring (with no tickets in my time) and the classes that I have taken; I believe the best is yet to come! Truck driving pays enough for me to live in a way that will not have me hurting paycheck to paycheck. Look at that—I started out at a maximum and with the hard work and patience, I am ending my time in a minimum.

Even with all the things that I have personally done—graduating from DEFY Ventures, participating in a variety of programs throughout my time, and even having a spotless record, I was denied for Adult Transitioning programs....I am still waiting for the results of a consideration and yet, I am still fighting for my freedom.

In closing, I am at the end of the proverbial tunnel and having waited for year for the laws to change, it seems that those "rumblings" are coming to life. I pray that those who DO benefit from this will take the true opportunity to prove the naysayers wrong and to make changes that they need to never re-offend again.

As I Depart To Re-Enter

Tyrone Delaney

As I depart this dismal vault, I think about that there is a whole population (28,000+) that awaits the same fate/outcome as me. As this is my understanding from three plus decades of incarceration. Activation is the cause for mobilization, as a collective, we have the power to dictate the course of action our legislator's must take but we cannot sit on our laurels expecting someone else to chart our course. Become active in your community and stop waiting and assuming someone else going to do for you what you can do for yourself.

Your mouth is the instrument by which you are exalted or condemned; every man is born with the freedom of willpower. We are free to use that power for right or wrong. We are subjected to the divine law of justice, which is the law of cause and effect—which means that you will reap for which you sow. The law of nature will respond equally for the ruler or beggar.

WHOMSOEVER FIX THEIR MIND TO CHALLENGE THE STATUS QUO OR ANYTHING IN LIFE, HAS ONLY TO EXERT SOME FORM OF EFFORT IN THAT DIRECTION, AND THE LAW OF NATURE WILL BRING KNOWLEDGE OF THAT AND HOW TO GET THAT WHICH YOU ARE SEEKING.

This foundation, at its core is the process on how change happens, even if your thoughts sound stupid to you, put it out there, for there would not be an *Apple* or *Google* without the thought. It was a failed attempt, after failed attempts before there was success, we have to develop and nurture the critical mindset, to reject systemic issues.

If you see something wrong in society, in your community, or serving time under an unjust sentencing scheme, you are morally obligated to act. To fix it, or not-stop complaining and wishing for a miracle, it is only going to leave you heartbroken, or disillusioned or miserable..

There are several Individuals in Custody, returning citizens and a Host of organizations, i.e. *Restore Justice*, *Precious Blood Ministries*, and *Reconciliation*, *Parole Illinois*, *Project Now*, *Illinois Re-Entry Council* that has had intense dialogue with several members of the Legislator body, who will listen to our concerns. From the Truth-In-Sentencing programming, Re-entry, the passage of bills, (justice reform) to coming to Kewanee Life Skills Re-entry Center and meeting with us, not as a guest of the facility /department but at the behest of restore justice, Precious Blood Ministries, and reconciliation several returning citizens and members from *Credible Messenger Mentoring Program* (CMMP).

The dialogue is happening, but our efforts are lacking. Get involved; become educated on the topics you are passionate about, albeit Truth-In-Sentencing, Life without the possibility of parole, Mandatory Supervised Release (MSR), or Violent Offender Registry, how it has affected you, and your family as well as anyone within and outside our community.

The underbelly of criminal justice is

ugly and can only thrive if it has a villain. I have often heard “Justice is blind”, but Justice is not deaf. Therefore, who has the ear of justice? Think about that for a moment...NOW ACT....

THROUGH STRUGGLE &
SOLIDARITY

Tyrone (TY) Delaney

Part of the Plan

Earl Milton, Jr.
Centralia

way to providence; it is all part of the plan.

On a journey, there are twists, and turns, delays and some setbacks, yet as long as you continue the journey without letting anything change your destination you will make it. If you continue to plod along on your way everyday, you will get there; as detours in life come, always vividly remember the vision that you have for your life, be flexible and willing to adapt but never settle for less.

Yet settling for more is okay because that is not settling; it is all part of the plan. Stay focused on where you are going, with tenacious determination go after your goals and dreams. Leap over the hurdles that might possibly come; you might have to break through the obstacles to get to your end zone. You might have to swing at some fast pitches if you want that homerun. Sometimes you have to cross over the whole court to take it to the basket and slam-dunk that ball to get the points.

Prepare yourself for the unexpected, master the fundamentals, practice your

You have a life to live, live your best, while doing the best that you can do, in all you do. And as sure as you see the sun rise you will make it to your destination; after that, set up another journey and get there too. Set out on the seas to achieve what you have envisioned for your life. Do not be discouraged by any setbacks, failures, or obstacles, be encouraged most likely it is there to strengthen you. Learn from your trials, extend your reach as far as your faith can stretch, remember with a positive perspective, you can envision a positive plan. Patiently progress, while pursuing providence as you proceed towards your dreams and end game; remember why you want that which you are pursuing, also why you are pursuing it.

Be mindful that what you seek you also can achieve it, then go after it like your life depended on it, and whatever happens along the way is part of the plan to get you to the promise land.

Hope?

Roger Sharkey
Kewanee

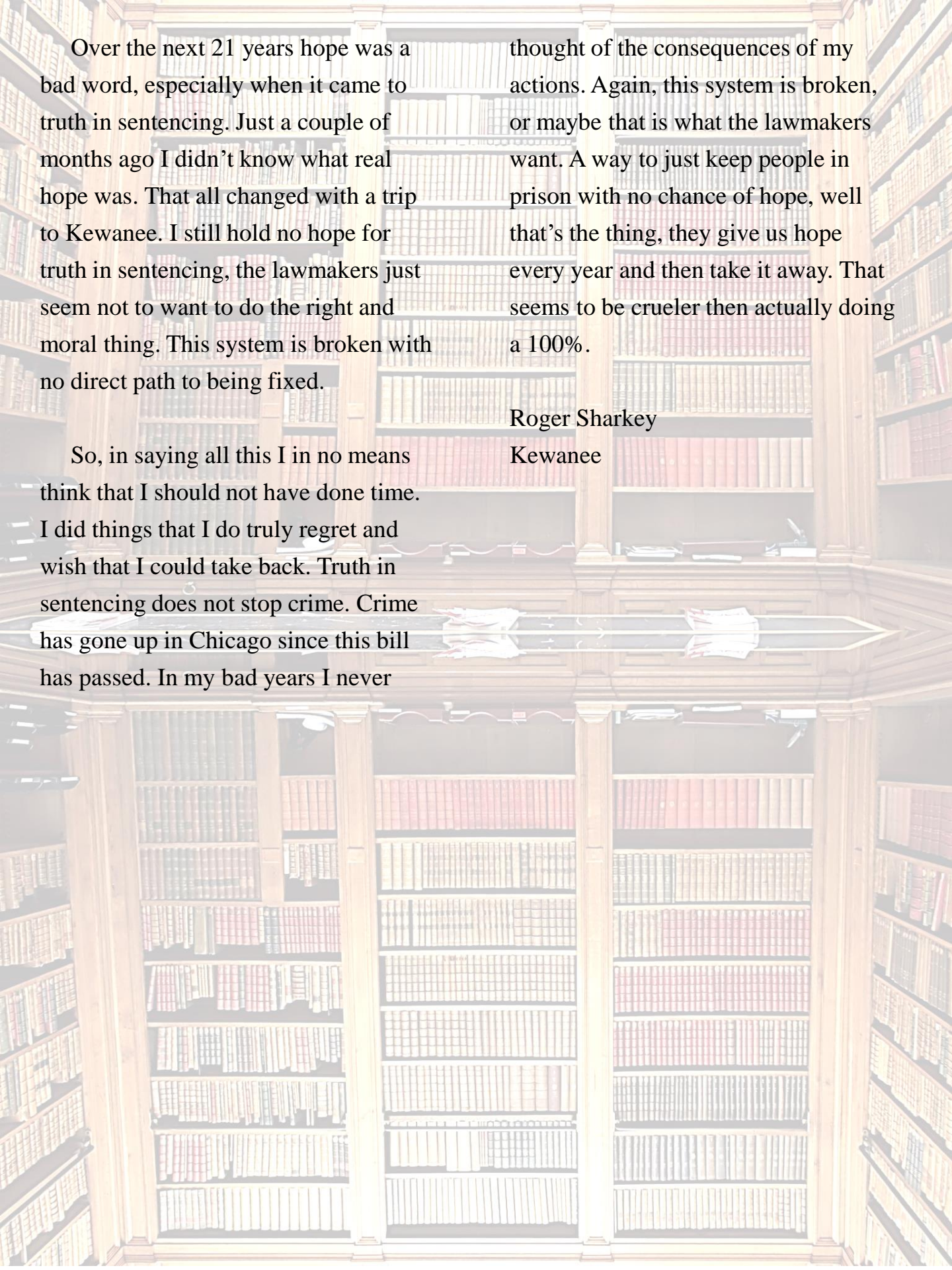
This is one thing that truth in sentencing cannot obtain. I have been gone 23 years now and I have learned that hope is a drug. Hope can, at its best, keep a smile on your face. It can make you more tolerant towards things that make you irritable.

Hope can have you on the top of the world. That is when it becomes so dangerous, when hope lets you down. You can get so depressed that you don't feel like getting out of bed, grooming yourself, or even talking to people. I bring hope into this conversation because for 21 years now there has been hope that the truth in sentencing would finally be eliminated. Bear with me for a second while I tell you about my truth in sentencing story.

In September of 2003 my rappie (codefendant) was pleading guilty to the charges. After he said guilty the state's attorney stops the judge from giving him

his time. He copped out for 20 at 100% but the S.A. tells the judge that is going to change and the state he should get 40 years because truth in sentencing wants 20 years served. The judge then tells the S.A. that he has read nothing about that happening so since you both agreed to 20, he getting 20 years. At the time my rappie and I were both on the same wing in Cook County jail on the Christian deck. So, when he comes back from court, he is elated. Tells me what happened and that was my first taste of "hope".

Last year hope again came creeping in and was swept away. The pre-1998 guys got their blessing, and I am truly grateful to have seen some go and those guys that got out that I didn't see but knew very well. Those that are still waiting for your good time keep fighting that good fight. For me though, I still have no hope for the lawmakers. The sad part of it is, if my crime happened 3 years earlier, I would have been home 10 years ago under the old laws of 50 %.



Over the next 21 years hope was a bad word, especially when it came to truth in sentencing. Just a couple of months ago I didn't know what real hope was. That all changed with a trip to Kewanee. I still hold no hope for truth in sentencing, the lawmakers just seem not to want to do the right and moral thing. This system is broken with no direct path to being fixed.

So, in saying all this I in no means think that I should not have done time. I did things that I do truly regret and wish that I could take back. Truth in sentencing does not stop crime. Crime has gone up in Chicago since this bill has passed. In my bad years I never

thought of the consequences of my actions. Again, this system is broken, or maybe that is what the lawmakers want. A way to just keep people in prison with no chance of hope, well that's the thing, they give us hope every year and then take it away. That seems to be crueler then actually doing a 100%.

Roger Sharkey
Kewanee

The Root

By: Ronnie Carrasquillo

Spirit of Rehabilitation,
(Giving of Life)

vs.

Spirit of Punishment
(Taking of Life)

SPIRIT OF REHABILITATION

Prior to 1977, lawmakers believed Offenders were *redeemable beings*, meaning that an Offender could transform his (or her) life for the better of society. the spirit of rehabilitation was enforced by the Proportionate Penalties Clause (PPC), found in Article 1, Section 11, of the 1970 Illinois Constitution.

It says:

Sentence the Offenders for the seriousness of the offence, and Restore the Offender to **Useful Citizenship**.

The law **prior to 1977** is known as the “Old Law”, where an Offender was sentenced to a Minimum Sentence and a Maximum Sentence.

The Legislative intent of the Minimum Sentence meant that when an Offender served his (or her) Minimum

Sentence, he (she) became eligible to appear before the Parole Board. Once you appeared before the Board, you satisfied Clause A of the PPC. The crossroad between your Minimum and Maximum Sentence meant you could be released by the Parole Board **IF** you were considered as an “acceptable risk” to finish your sentence on parole in society.

This parole grace depended upon what sort of restoration evidence the Offender could provide, showing his (her) rehabilitation effort. It’s the discretion of the parole board to determine when to exercise Clause B of Article 1, Section 11 of the 1970 Illinois Constitution. The legislative intent of the Maximum sentence was to hold the sentence **against** the Offender until the Offender showed change.

Without any effort towards rehabilitation, it was likely that the Parole Board would continue to hold the Maximum sentence against the Offender. During the existence of the Parole Board, rehabilitation philosophy of the Illinois 1970 Constitution had a short seven-year life span. Though it's still written the same, it's practice and its interpretation has changed severely. Hence:

SPIRIT OF PUNISHMENT Taking of Life. Looking at the **ROOT CAUSE** of the dilemma that plagues the Illinois Prison system, only have to look in the spirit. The existing system was born in the *spirit of anger*. A *spirit of anger* wanted harsher sentences; longer stay in prison and wanted family separation as more punishment.

The **BREAKING POINT** came in 1977, when Governor Thompson and his legislators enacted *House Bill 1500*, known as the **Class X Bill**. During the General Assembly's wrangling debates to pass **Class X**, a legislator voiced that the motto of Illinois was not only the "Land of Lincoln", but "Keeping Families Together."

The most crucial aspect of Class X Bill wasn't the upgrading (*enhancing*) of

sentences as many think, but what was crucial up to this the Spirit of Rehabilitation. The day when an Offender was deemed no longer worthy the privilege to prove his *Positive Change*, his rehabilitative effort.

The punishment philosophy of Class X doesn't care what the Offender does with his time. The Offender's punishment is merely paid in time, a day served—a day given—etc. the Offender will be released upon a set outdate, whether going to school or not, whether one disciplinary ticket or fifty, it's *irrelevant*. The current Offender doesn't have to prove any transformation thus, the overt majority live entrenched in their sinful nature and await their release. The *spirit of anger* breeds where there is no philosophy to **rehabilitate**.

SOLUTION: UNTIL the flaw of Illinois' Laws reflecting only punishment are changed to recognize Clause B of the Illinois constitution, to **RESTORE USEFULLY**; then without an active concept of rehabilitation - bad product (people) of an angered spirit, will continue to spread back into our communities.

Look at the Chicago communities affected by prison, we only have to ask – where is the spirit of anger, idleness and emptiness breeding that is causing havoc upon the environments? No

change will keep the prison door rotating, at the expense of the citizen, at the expense of a new victim.

Truth-In-Sentencing

How has it affected me? Well to begin please note that I have an N7 number, so yes this is not my first time being in these facilities. I was first, introduced into this system back in 1987, so yes, I saw I.D.O.C through a different set of lenses.

There have been major changes since I first came into this system with an 8-year sentence in which, I was released on parole for good conduct after serving 3 years 9 Months of the 8-year sentence. However, the remaining time was always there hanging over my head if I were to ever return if I did not complete my parole time.

Now with Truth –In –Sentencing laws, I have to serve 100% of my sentence for First Degree murder – also another 3 years on parole when I am released. How does that affect me? Well I am coming to the end of it all, and I

have grown to understand all my actions come with consequences. How can I not accept the consequences of my actions, I remember a time for 1st Degree murder you were given a Life sentence or a De facto life sentence with numbers like 60, 70, 80 years to serve at 50%. Those numbers if served and for good conduct, you will see parole after 30, 35, 40 years served, the same amount those sentenced under the



Kelly 'KB' Bennett
TWO ROADS
Senior Associate Editor

Truth-In – Sentencing guidelines, so I ask you what is the difference?

Mind you, the comparison is coming from a man who everyday regrets the fact I took a life, and I pray everyday for that person's family, hoping that someday they heal from the pain my actions caused them. Do I feel that Truth –In –Sentencing guidelines are a bit harsh? Yes, in some instances, especially when you have done all the things needed to better yourself, earning program credit that you cannot receive per those same guidelines.

The same effect would be seen if this justice system would return to handing out those huge digits for the same crime 60, 70, 80, years, never mentioning the safe neighborhood act ,which adds 15 years federal time if by chance you are caught with a firearm as a felon. I have had the privilege. a great privilege in fact, of serving time with some of the same men who were sentenced before the Truth In Sentence guidelines were enacted. To see these men walk away from this system, after so many years was a proud and hope filled moment, a

bittersweet moment though, because they have been missed.

In closing, to have the knowledge that they are doing great things in their communities and in their lives gives me a greater pleasure whenever I call them brothers. Because there will forever be a bond shared, between me and these men; in fact, I now wish to say to one of these same brothers - see you later!!!!



Reimagining Corrections Abstract

It's time to reimagine corrections. Punishment, in the form of prison, has proven to be ineffective correcting undesirable behaviors in the long-term. Imagine a justice system that truly rehabilitates, restores, and facilitates a successful re-entry for justice-impacted citizens instead of punishment & revenge. What do rehabilitation, restoration, and re-entry look like to you? What will you reimagine corrections to look like? Please submit.

Without staff support:

Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee, IL 61443

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

Please send your submission and scanned photo to
doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"ATTN: Imagine"

One Crazy Day

Sean Heglesen
Kewanee Life Skills Re-Entry Center

“Sean, he’s choking!” Those were the words my mother shrieked! Her hands flying to her face to smother a scream as we sat together on our first visit at the Pontiac Correctional Center’s Medium Security Unit. That set in motion something extraordinary and life altering. Closing my eyes and recalling those few terrifying moments is much easier now as time has passed. But talk about a heart stopping moment. It took me a second to realize it wasn’t my mother who was in pain due to the suddenness of her outburst, but the officer who was stationed behind us at the elevated podium desk where they monitor us from.

If we rewind the clock a bit, I’ll give you some context as to how I ended up in the right place at the right time to save a man’s life. I had recently been approved for medium security after spending 28 years in several different maximum-security prisons as a consequence of receiving a mandatory life without parole sentence for a crime I committed as a juvenile. Due to the

miraculous decision by a conservative leaning United States Supreme Court in 2012, of which Justice Kennedy was the deciding vote, *Miller v Alabama* outlawed the practice of mandatory death by incarceration for children.

“If you haven’t ate a double cheeseburger in decades, it’s absolutely amazing!”

My best friend Brian and I set to work and researched every issue related to filing a successive post-conviction petition while applying a United States Supreme Court decision retroactively, before filing my own petition in the courts. It took some time navigating through a procedural nightmare, but I was granted a new sentencing hearing. These types of hearings after so many years have gone by are excruciating for everyone involved and after a heartbreaking recitation of the crime, the Court sentenced me to 100 years in the Department of Corrections with the caveat that I was rehabilitated and not a danger to society. Several months later the court reduced it to 90 years at 50% (45 years in total to serve).

When I look back on it now, I vividly remember the Judge's softly spoken words—tinged with sadness and regret when delivering his decision—"it's a long time Mr. Helgesen, but you may get a chance to live some life outside of prison one day and to me that is not a life sentence." I was devastated. My soul felt like a pane of glass shattered into a million tiny shards reflecting back at me a lifetime of pain and the tragedy I was responsible for in so many lives. Not to mention the anguish associated with knowing that I was going to die in a cage alone like so many before me.

In the weeks ahead of me I spent much of my time in reflection and prayer. I was determined to be the man I professed to be even as I returned to prison—a decent man. No one can take that away from me. I resolved to turn the page and start a new chapter in my life without rancor, but with a purpose. I wasn't sure what that purpose was yet, but I couldn't accept dying in a prison cell. As a consequence of now having a term of years sentence and IDOC's amended policy concerning how much time one can have before transferring to medium security, I was approved for the MSU.

Anyone who has spent significant time locked up in a maximum-security prison

understands the stages of decompression one experiences when moving to a lower level of security; I am no different. The adjustment was difficult, but I clung to my family's hope and excitement for a future yet to unfold. Not long after moving to the MSU, my mother scheduled our first visit. This time though there would be no glass barrier between us unlike the 700 previous visits we shared together. My isolation was at an end, and I was starting to feel human again.

If you haven't ate a double cheeseburger in decades, it's absolutely amazing! My mother and I were having a typical visit—we laughed and joked and generally had a good time because she's not just my mom, but a friend too. There were a few other families enjoying the moment, spending time with their loved ones. On this particular day two Correctional Officers were assigned to the visiting room. Just another typical day on the MSU until mother's scream tore through the room. Immediately my first concern was for my mom, but in short order I knew she was ok. I then swung around in my chair and saw one of them grabbing at his throat with desperation in his eye's. His face was turning blue, and he was dying right in front of us.

His companion officer ran out of the room through a side door to get some help she later told me. As I scanned the room, I realized everyone else was in complete state of shock. No one moved. Against all my instincts, when it comes to dealing with Correctional staff, I leapt to my feet and within a step or two closed the gap between myself and the other C/O. I wrapped my arms around his chest and heaved him forward into the air. On the third attempt the obstruction cleared his throat and he was able to breathe again. Everyone in the room was visibly shaken but, my mind immediately went to, F\$%#! I just put my hands on someone! Luckily for me he was ok, and the administration was quickly made aware that I was part of the solution and not the problem.

“Set out on the seas to achieve what you have envisioned for your life, do not be discouraged by any setbacks, failures, or obstacles, be encouraged most likely it is there to strengthen you.”

After a bit, the shock of it all slowly faded away and life went back to normal—prison normal. But the reason why I wanted to share this story is that I have met so many people over the years (myself included) that have settled for

and accept the reality that we’ve disappointed everyone we love and our communities at large. But I fervently believe it’s within each and every one of us, when the moment arises, to become *the hero of the moment* and break the mold of lowered expectations, do it!

Whether it be something small or something earth shattering, we can become what most believe is out of our reach; Redeemable! In the humblest of ways, I know I can say this because right at this moment I’m at the Kewanee Life Skills Reentry Center writing this feel-good story to all of you when not so long ago the path I was walking in life was a brick road to nowhere. My heart goes out to all of you still struggling to find your path. But please, never stop looking!

Get It Together

Toola Taylor

Mount Sterling

I have been incarcerated, now, for over 16 years. Despite the fact that there are a lot of us who act that, way- if nobody has told you, prison is not a vacation.

We whine about the fact that we are in a hard space, that the people do not treat us right – that we would rather be in a prison where it is easier to do time.

However, truth be told, a lot of us think like this because we are unknowingly suffering from denial – the FAILURE TO ACCEPT that we are, in fact in prison, and there is nothing about prison that was intended to be easy.

If you do not know then let me tell you, that was never its purpose, in fact if you know anything about the history of the establishment, prison actually went soft a long time ago. And aside from that there is a great majority of us who were in prison well before we actually made it here! If you have failed to recognize this fact – then we really have a problem.

All any of us want to do is get out, which is only natural, despite what we

may or may not have done, but life isn't about what you can achieve – it's about what you can become. So, figure –it – out, should be your ultimate goal –for whatever time you have been forced to have to sit-down. Wherever the IDOC has determined, you will do it, unless deep down you enjoy this shit – and you are cool with doing life on the installment plan.

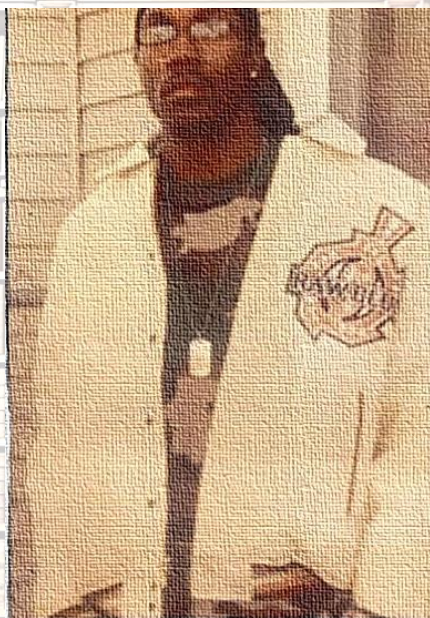
For me it does not matter where I am imprisoned, because in the end I am still locked-up, whether it is in Menard or Kewanee. I cannot talk to or hug my moms whenever I want to; I cannot hug or spend quality time with my son. I cannot hang-out with my brothers; I cannot kiss, hug, or snuggle-up next to the woman I hope to marry. Hard time will make it that much easier –for me never to return, it keeps me focused on the right things, so I do not care one way or the other. I will get it wherever it is they are gonna send me.

It is all about perspective, think about it... How many people do you know

that have spent a good deal, if not the majority of their time, in one of those “sweet ’joints that everyone is trying to get to (especially, those of us doing them NOW and Later Bids), only to be locked –right back up within just a few months of their release? Get it together.

They sought out those facilities to help them, continue to avoid facing the reality of what happened to them, that they were in fact in prison. But I would bet that if their time was hard, they would have spent at least another beat or two thinking about what they were doing (or about to do), when it came to making a decision that might land them back in prison. Realize it is your responsibility to get your mind right – Not the people running the system, cultivate yourself – or be cultivated. If you cannot train yourself, you will never be in charge of your life- or the direction it is going.

‘Hard time will make it that much easier –for me never to return, it keeps me focused on the right things, so I do not care one way or the other. I will get it wherever it is they are gonna send me.’



For those of you who want something different, accept and learn what it will take, and that may mean facing some very hard realities about yourself. In addition, not everything that can be faced can be changed; but everything that can be changed must be faced. You absolutely have to take charge of, and for yourself; because when you give that power over to someone else you will never end up going in the direction you should.

I am certain I speak for the vast majority of families, friends, and supporters out in the world when I say – there are people out there who need you, so I implore you it is 2024 - get it together, get your mind right, recognize what you are being subjugated to-what you are subjugating yourself to.

Finally, in saying all of that I also have to keep it 100 with the people who have been tasked with” serving justice in Illinois and increasing public safety by promoting positive change for those in custody, operating successful re-entry programs, and reducing victimization” (the mission Statement of IDOC).

I recognize that there are some correctional officers who work in these facilities, that make it their mission in life to make sure that we know who is in charge. I have witnessed enough B.S between individuals in custody and correctional officers to last ten lifetimes – most of it unnecessary.

“...there is a great majority of us who were in prison well before we actually made it here! If you have failed to recognize this fact – then we really have a problem.”

And with that being said, I have a message for all of you as well, when you are trying to foster “change’ in people, – which is supposedly the point and purpose of incarceration, according to the mission statement that I just quoted

above. In addition, articles I & II of the Illinois Constitution- it is imperative to be conscientious of how you handle them, so that your efforts are not undermined by your own actions. You must keep in mind that the vast majority of the men and women you encounter will, one day, be released back into society; how can you affect change, while simultaneously breeding contempt, animosity, hatred? Understand that authority and oppression do not have to be the same thing, the road to rehabilitation has two lanes.

Every man or woman who returns to society, that is not prepared, whether you believe it and/or accept it –or not you play a part in it. Otherwise – what is your purpose in this system? We are all cogs in a machine, which is supposed to be operating, with one intention, one goal.

Failure does not just happen, there is always –some level of participation, so I implore you to consider that it is 2024, so let us all **GET IT TOGETHER!!!**

I'm A Survivor??

Keith Talley
Re-Entry Coordinator,
Phalanx Family Services and
Former Two Roads Editor In Chief

Harm, in response to harm, produces
and guarantees the continuation of harm.

“Truth in Sentencing,” a legislative
response to community harm, is harmful
– continues to harm – and will
undoubtedly generate ripples of
generational harm that will endure long
after it has been abolished.

One might find these comments
strange coming from an individual who
actually receives “good time;” however,
because I am also a member of the
community, I too have been negatively
impacted. Being graciously given the
opportunity to regain years of my life
back, while men in the same trenches
with me – some who are my family of
choice – are denied the same
opportunity and allowed to languish
further, often causes me to experience
feelings of “Survivor’s Guilt.”

Yes, I am aware that those feelings
are irrational and, in the extreme,

harmful. And make no mistakes, I am in
no way comparing my indirect
experience with the pain, angst and
struggle directly endured by others and
their families; nevertheless, I do
empathetically feel their pain on a deep
visceral level because I am them, and
they are Me!

Truth In Sentencing

Jorge A. Ramos

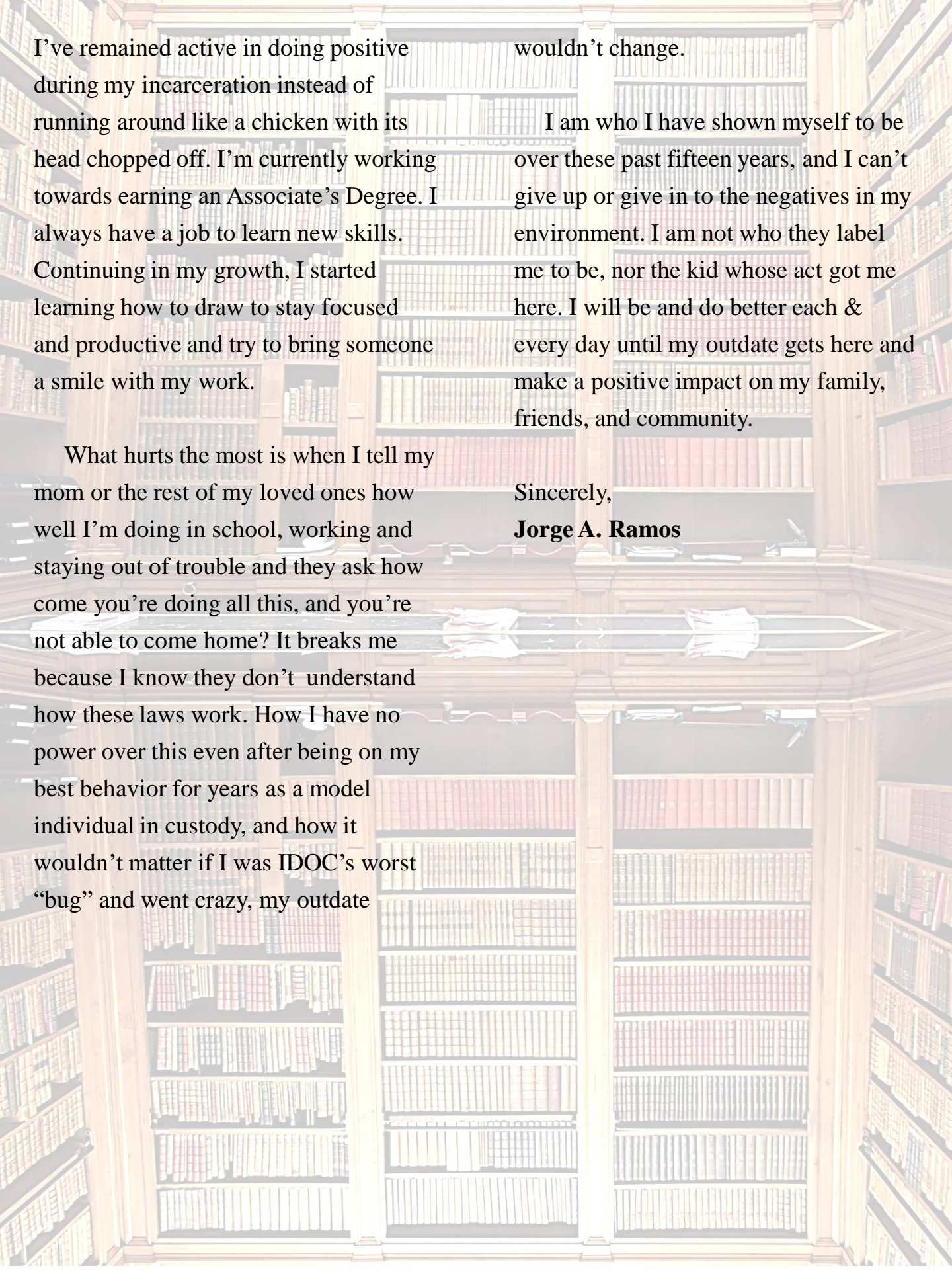
to the Avila Family is unbearable.

Truth in sentencing means no hope. It means, just sit down and be stored away in a warehouse. It doesn't matter if I behave well, if I receive countless Certificates marking achievements & completions of multiple programs or attend school to increase my education. Truth In Sentencing means that my countless hours of working in prison or getting along so well with everyone and not getting into any kind of trouble doesn't matter. I get no help, no chance to get to my family. It literally means no one cares to look at us individually for who we are as men & women, or who we've grown to become. They just see a number.

Personally, I've been incarcerated since I was 16-years old for a case that happened when I was fifteen. As a child, I pleaded guilty to a twenty-three year sentence at 100% for 1st-Degree Murder. I've been incarcerated for over fifteen-years, and I know what I did as a kid back then was wrong. The pain I caused

I will never be able to do or say anything to show how remorseful I am or make it better. I know this sounds cliché to say, but if I could go back and stop myself from doing what I did, I would do it in a heartbeat. It's been the biggest mistake of my life. Since the day of my arrest, I became committed to making something of myself, to changing, growing, and becoming someone who enhanced life and lives because I wasn't going to allow that one thoughtless act to define me.

I won't label myself as a murderer, gangbanger, convict. I know I'm better than that. I have worked on it since day one. Even though I fall under Truth In Sentencing, meaning no hope, I still have hope for myself, to show people, my family, and myself that I am a good man. I focus on school, getting my G.E.D., earning a scholarship and attending college classes trying to learn a real vocational skill to get out being qualified in certain for skills.

The background of the entire page is a faded, artistic illustration of a library. It features tall wooden bookshelves filled with books, a central wooden desk with some papers and a pen, and a large window in the background. The overall tone is warm and intellectual.

I've remained active in doing positive during my incarceration instead of running around like a chicken with its head chopped off. I'm currently working towards earning an Associate's Degree. I always have a job to learn new skills. Continuing in my growth, I started learning how to draw to stay focused and productive and try to bring someone a smile with my work.

What hurts the most is when I tell my mom or the rest of my loved ones how well I'm doing in school, working and staying out of trouble and they ask how come you're doing all this, and you're not able to come home? It breaks me because I know they don't understand how these laws work. How I have no power over this even after being on my best behavior for years as a model individual in custody, and how it wouldn't matter if I was IDOC's worst "bug" and went crazy, my outdate

wouldn't change.

I am who I have shown myself to be over these past fifteen years, and I can't give up or give in to the negatives in my environment. I am not who they label me to be, nor the kid whose act got me here. I will be and do better each & every day until my outdate gets here and make a positive impact on my family, friends, and community.

Sincerely,

Jorge A. Ramos

Time

Anonymous

What does time mean to me? Time is something I took for granted as a young man, running the streets. I lived a fast-paced life, not knowing or caring if I saw the next day. Being incarcerated I have learned to appreciate, time because we never know how much of it we have left.

I know that serving this time, has not been easy, in fact it has been a struggle, and you must take it upon yourself, to make your time as beneficial and positive as you can.

Time is one of the most important resources in this world, it is something we spend and cannot ever get back once it is gone. Tomorrow is not, promised so I choose to cherish life and the phone calls, visits, and smiles, and laughs that come with them.

Yes, time is very precious and valuable to me, I believe most Individuals In Custody could agree upon that. My fellow brothers also sisters who are serving time, please continue to practice patience, so when your opportunity comes to redeem yourself, you do not waste time.

Is Man Redeemable?

James Kral
Danville

I wrestle with the fact that I live in a Democratic society that openly practices retribution towards its citizens in the event they commit a crime, vilifying them even after they have paid their debt to society. Isn't America supposed to be the land of second chances? On the other hand, is that just another idealistic notion our country loves to espouse to avoid acknowledging its own malignant nature that is deeply ingrained into our culture? It begs the question: is Man Redeemable? Furthermore, is redemption reserved for only a select few?

For close to three decades, our state has employed truth-in-sentencing policies, and what do we have to show for it? For starters, this policy has clearly proven it does not deter crime, and it has led to an overpopulated IDOC that is depleted of its resources to aid the populace.

More importantly, economically this policy has left a gash in the state's budget, which fiscally has created a slew of residual effects: defunding our state's

recreational projects, and the state's infrastructure.

I can make countless correlations as to why this policy has been a complete disaster and will continue to fail us, but we must educate those, both the public and the Legislators, who are blinded by political propaganda, agendas, and rhetoric to help them see past the veil of retributive justice.



I have been incarcerated for close to fifteen years now, and recently I received my Associates Degree in Liberal Arts (with distinction). Holding that piece of

did not think it was even going to be possible for me to achieve something of that stature. Contrary to popular belief, we do not have ample opportunities to receive a higher education or get vocational training in prison.

If that were the case, why do we have an organization like ILCHEP diligently lobbying for us to receive greater access to accredited degree programs within IDOC? Needless to say, though, I have had the privilege to acquire a college degree, I must wait another ten years to have any opportunity to put it to use, because of my outdate (thanks T.I.S.).

That, my friends, is the crux of this topic: what does justice truly look like? How do we quantify useful citizenship? Does it truly serve justice to prolong the sentence of an individual who has taken the strides towards self-improvement to re-enter society a better person than when they came in? Do those endeavors not count for anything? Here is the problem: those sentenced under the T.I.S statute are faced with a hindrance that affects their pursuit towards self-improvement. Either they cannot secure an assignment due to the length of their sentence (which becomes discouraging after a while) or

they cannot receive any good time credits from their participation in their assignments. Yet despite those barriers, there are still many who pursue their path to self-improve themselves. However, those deeds go unnoticed and are blatantly unrecognized by IDOC, which sends a clear message. Individuals in custody sentenced under the T.I.S statute hold no value; clearly, the State Legislature thinks it makes more sense to continue reinvesting in a recidivistic system, even if it is at the expense of the taxpayers.

Granted not every legislator believes in the continuance of these policies, but for the rest of the state legislature, I want to pose a few questions: Does the T.I.S policy advance the goal of public safety, if the individuals who enter into our justice system reenter society worse off than when they came in? Whose interest are you really serving by abiding this policy?

We have to take a practical approach to reforming our criminal justice system – Truth-in Sentencing policies that benefit the actual parties involved (us). Those tend to pay the biggest dividends for the future; responsibility does not just fall on the individual who committed the

crime, but also on those who pen the policies. If the goal is to rehabilitate the IDOC populace, then a restorative approach is the best-suited recourse to develop useful citizenship and successful reentry. This starts by passing legislation that can facilitate

that: pass HB5219, bring back parole, give elder individuals release, and invest in programming and education. Give those who have put in the work a chance at redemption. Rehabilitation is an illusion under the retributive system, and only aims for those to be reduced to recidivism.

Man's Inhumanity to Man

**Mishunda Davis- Brown
Logan**

The Truth in Sentencing Law or T.I.S was a “tough on crime” law enacted to protect public safety and the integrity of the justice system. Yet, this law hasn’t been the answer to a crime free Illinois. It has instead crowded the penal system and is costing the taxpayers millions of unnecessary dollars each year by holding prisoners captive for decades who are no longer a threat to society, such as the elderly, disabled, and the rehabilitated. It makes no sense to continue holding prisoners who are no longer a threat.

T.I.S needs to be abolished because it’s an inhumane law that disregards

restorative practices such as second chances after one has been rehabilitated or restored back to useful citizenship to rebuild and bridge communities, but instead it’s a harsh law with nothing but extended sentencing punishment even for first time and young first-time violent offenders, ages 21 and under.

Sentencing is not all about punishment but also restoration so Illinois laws should align with correction and healing instead of focusing solely on punishment. It excludes earned credit, parole (except for youthful offenders of 2019 who were 21 and under at the time of their offense), and no lesser percent to serve than 85%.

T.I.S, in my humble and respective opinion, violates prisoners' Eighth Amendment of the United States Constitution rights, which forbid cruel and usual punishment. (1791)

Punishment for crimes states, "Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishment inflicted."

Well, for 23 years, I have witnessed cruel and unusual punishment, being inflicted upon prisoners including myself.

Cruelty being inflicted, due to prisoners being warehoused in horrible, inhumane living conditions, not being given proper adequate healthcare, treated less than an animal and not outliving these lengthy sentences, including young prisoners. If you were not sentenced to the death penalty, no sentence should become a death sentence with no way out after rehabilitation as T.I.S has been.

I have witnessed individuals in custody, young and old, die from things they did not have to die from had healthcare staff been adequate. There seems to be no real concern for the lives of prisoners, but our lives matter also. The living conditions are so bad that



mold has been found on people's lungs, ceilings are collapsing, MRSA is frequent. I have contracted it twice and a friend of mine also died from it, she came to prison full of life and left in a wheelchair after a near death experience when MRSA and meningitis entered her brain from horrible living conditions.

This reminds me of my African-American Ancestors who were thrown onto crowded boats on top of one another and no one cared about the risk to their health, quality of life, or living conditions. Many died never making it off the boat as in Illinois prisons due to

T.I.S being a death sentence. I have witnessed ladies get misdiagnosed or go undiagnosed to later find out that they have stage 3-4 cancer, where chances of living were slim to none. I have witnessed pregnant women banging on locked doors trying to get to healthcare only to be ignored resulting in a miscarriage.

I have seen two women complain that they could not move their bowels and was not taken seriously, until they died from throwing up their own feces. Detainees are being denied or on hold for years to have necessary surgeries or operations to ensure a better quality of life due to costly expenses not wanting to be paid.

People detained go from needing a minor eye surgery to going nearly blind; from limping to needing walkers, crutches, canes, and wheelchairs when something could have been done before it got to this point. To witness people in these conditions on a regular basis is like living in the aftermath of a war. It

is abnormal, horrifying, and traumatizing knowing you could be the next victim of T.I.S.

T.I.S is so cruel that it has denied many the chance to reproduce, which is a God given right 'to be fruitful and multiply' (Gen 1:28). Many men and women, including myself, came to prison young (21+under), some never having a chance to have kids as some of my friends here at Logan, and many never get a chance due to T.I.S.

After so many years, women begin to lose eggs and once menopause hits, you are unable to reproduce. To deny someone (prisoner or not) the opportunity to reproduce in order to keep their bloodline going is surely cruel. Anything that stops life, denies restoration, and kills people is not of God. Truth-in Sentencing is "Man's Inhumanity to Man" and needs to be abolished in Illinois.

Mishunda Davis-Brown

What Should I Be Talking About?

What do you think journalist should be talking about? This was one of the questions posed to me at a one-day seminar on Tuesday, April 9th, 2024, hosted by the Illinois Justice Project (ILJP) titled, *Effective Reentry: What a Meaningful and Sustained System Demands*. I sat on a panel of three incarcerated journalists consisting of: Evelyn ‘Qimayah’ Jackson (Two Roads Associate Editor), Halik Williams (Kewanee Horizons Associate Editor), and myself, William D. Jenkins (Two Roads Content Editor). With no hesitation, I said Truth-In-Sentencing (TIS).

I find it hard to have a serious discussion about reentry without confronting the elephant in the room, truth-in-sentencing. Anyone sentenced under this law is forced to serve 100%, 85%, or 75% of their sentence without the possibility of earning good-time and reducing their sentence (with the exception of individuals with drug-related offenses serving 75%). Reentry

starts day one, but for those under TIS their reentry process will be possibly delayed for decades. The reception of good-time credit implies more than an early release from a prison sentence, it indicates an individual’s preparedness in reentering society.



William Jenkins
TWO ROADS
Associate Editor

The likelihood of an individual succeeding or recidivating is measured by the amount of programming they have or have not received such as: life skills training, job training, social emotional learning, academic, vocational, etc. Consequently, the more programming an individual in custody has, the more likely they are ready to transition into free society and the less suited they will be to remain in a penal institution. This form of “correction” is referred to as punishment, but I will call it for what it actually is, revenge & torture.

According to Restore Justice, in 2017 one in three incarcerated people in Illinois are under TIS. Per idoc.illinois.gov, as of 2024, the Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC) individual in custody population is over 27,000. This means that this oppressive law affects about 8,910 individuals in custody, and the lives of 8,910 families; A number greater than the state of Nebraska’s entire prison population, think about that. It has been an initiative of IDOC, started by the Rauner administration in 2015, to reduce Illinois’ prison population to fewer than 25,000, then 20,000 under the Pritzker administration, by 2025.

Here we are almost six months away from that deadline and nothing has been done to significantly impact the reduction in IDOC’s prison population. January 2024, House Bill 3026 (Public Act 103-0330) passed and kicked out many individuals serving 50% of their sentences by awarding them supplemental good-time credit; and yet, the problem persists. This is because people under TIS make up a third of the prison population and are not going anywhere any time soon. Individuals with lengthy and excessive sentences are clogging up prison facilities and consuming taxpayers’ dollars. There is no relief for those oppressed by TIS.

The solution seems clear: pass legislation that will give those affected by TIS relief and consequently reduce IDOC’s prison population to less than 20,000. Support the passage of bills such as H.B. 5219 sponsored by House Representatives Barbara Hernandez, Lilian Jimenez, and Keven John Olickal; or, H.B. 3901 sponsored by House Representative Justin Slaughter, simple. However, the reality is that the prison industrial complex (PIC) is real. The Department of Corrections is a business.

According to idoc.illinois.gov, incarcerated people of African descent make up more than 52% of its resources at about 14,000. That deals in human resources. Latinx/Hispanics make up about 31%. The solutions concocted for this problem are impeded by antiquated racist ideas, mostly unspoken, but the proof is in the data.

“Correctional Centers” have replaced the factory and warehouse jobs of the 80’s where little to no prior training or education is required, and one can make a livable wage. Similar to the disappearance of these steel mills, factories, and warehouses, many employed by IDOC fear the thought of depopulation and the subsequent closure of facilities in their towns.

You have probably seen the signs, “Save Pontiac! Save Stateville! Save Danville!” During the journalism seminar, panel 5, consisting of: Jenny Vollen-Katz (Executive Director, John Howard Association), Deanne Benos (Executive Director, Women’s Justice Institute), Sandra Brown (Senior Advisor, Women’s Justice Institute), and Stephanie Kollmann (Policy Director, Children and Family Justice Center, Northwestern Pritzker School of Law), spoke upon the reaction

of town folk surrounding the closing of Logan. The Logan meeting was described as “covert” with an audience of a thousand “worried” people.

Fear and worry are emotions, and emotions are attributed to humanity. Coupled with the ability of high order thinking, it is what makes us human. Earlier I said 8,910 families are affected by TIS, but the truth is so many more are if you count the fearful employees of IDOC. In the belly of the beast, we tend to forget or lose our humanity altogether.

Journalists should be talking about TIS and the abolishment of this law because it dehumanizes everyone it encounters. It determines those sentenced under its statute are irredeemable and “super predators” while turning those employed to enforce its authority into oppressors.

TIS is a vehicle utilized to drive mass incarceration. Make no mistake, individuals who commit crimes should face adverse consequences for their behavior; however, these consequences ought to correct the undesirable behavior in the long-term as opposed to simply being punitive, which just worsens the situation.

This requires a different approach that involves a win-win situation for those affected by crime and the perpetrators. Locking people away for decades in a system that discriminates against them because of their lengthy sentence is not the answer. Excluding those who need restorative programming the most is counterproductive in promoting public safety and a successful reentry.

It is time we, as a society, acknowledge this social problem and resolve it. Replace our fear of financial instability with courage and faith. Let us be courageous and take action toward a better path, a path of redemption and forgiveness instead of revenge and punishment. Let us have faith in humanity, believe that we are all redeemable, and deserve the opportunity to correct ourselves when we have missed the mark.

Strong Enough

Lost time is the key component to every emotion that'll send you on a human rollercoaster. Are you strong enough to face that reality? That's a question I've battled with for years. My main emotion that I battle with is self-blame & guilt. I blame myself for not being a better mother. I blame myself for not being a better daughter, sister, and friend. I felt guilt taking over me. Am I strong enough to face my truth? Am I strong enough to face my family? Most importantly am I strong enough to admit to Allah all that I've done?

We go through the worst moments in our lives in a place where people really don't have compassion for the next. We're treated like we're not human. The judge gave us the sentences not taking into account the underlying circumstances or the extent of damage that is caused. Yes, a crime was committed. The point is that correctional centers are actually for correction and rehabilitation. Serving a sentence under truth-in-sentencing doesn't allow us to be released within a reasonable timeframe in order to show rehabilitation and be a productive citizen.

I speak from my heart because I want others to know they are not alone in this fight against this system and life situations. There's always someone worse off than you. If you've been a consistent reader of Two Roads, you know my intentions and my situations I've experienced.



Evelyn "Qimayah" Jackson
TWO ROADS
Senior Associate Editor

Oh, how I wish I could've laid with my son, brother, grandmothers, and mother when they took their last breath. Oh, how I wish I could've been present for all of the major events over these 24 years. All of those memorable moments I wasn't present for have allowed guilt to set in heavy. I did all I could to run away from it. Again, I ask myself, am I strong enough to face reality?

All praises to Allah for allowing me to see the light at the end of this long tunnel. Yes, I've lost precious time that I can't get back due to these unjust laws. I'm two years over my halfway point of my sentence. Had I been arrested a year earlier I'd be home now. At this point I've made a conscious decision to take my life back. My body is the only thing that's present in corrections. My heart, mind, and soul are focused on my freedom and goals I have set in place. Honestly speaking, the truth-in-sentencing law is not serving the purpose it was made to do.

The prisons are becoming overpopulated due to this law. There is no transitioning out. There are no opportunities for those of us with lengthy sentences. When we do attempt to file things for early release, our accomplishments are little to none. I had to pay for correspondence classes with my own money. We're just being warehoused until our sentence is complete. After experiencing the agony of lost time, I can't get back, I can say I'm strong enough to accept reality; yet I'm a little weak and scared to face reality. I know for sure Allah will see me through it all.

TWO ROADS



The Inspiration Issue

What inspires you? Is it education? Working out? Religion? Two Roads is now taking submissions for your words of encouragement on your inspiration. There is no minimal length - just express yourself. **TWO ROADS** wants you to use your voice. Please have your submission turned in as soon as you can because this community is built on what we bring to this table.

Without staff support:

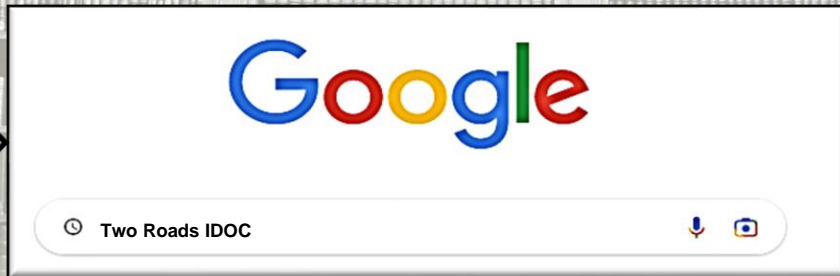
Mail submission, photo to:
TWO ROADS EDITOR
2021 Kentville Road
Kewanee IL 61443

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

Please send your submission and
scanned photo to
doc.tworoads@illinois.gov
"INSPIRE"

Want your Family and Friends to see your Article??

Tell them in 2 EASY-STEPS:



**1. Go to Google and type in
"Two Roads IDOC"**

or

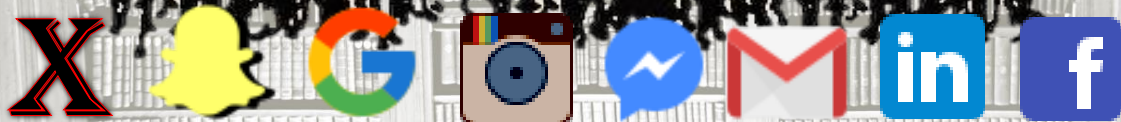
2. Type in:

idoc.illinois.gov/news/tworoads.html

We encourage you to screenshot this page with the hashtag:



#TWORoads



Then LIKE and SHARE the post!