

Earned Credit in Ohio's Prisons

A civil liberties briefing



As state leaders continue to discuss effective solutions for Ohio's prison overcrowding problem, one idea that should be implemented is expanding the use of **earned credit**. Two bipartisan bills currently pending in the Ohio General Assembly, **Senate Bill 10** and **House Bill 86**, broaden the use of earned credit.

What is earned credit?

Incarcerated individuals can earn days off their sentence if they participate in educational, vocational, substance abuse and other programming. Ohio currently allows inmates to lessen their sentence one day for every month they participate in these programs. Reforms would expand this up to five days.

Who is eligible for earned credit?

Inmates who are sentenced to life without the possibility of parole and those sentenced for sex crimes **are not eligible** for earned credit. In addition, the legislation is crafted so that low-level, non-violent offenders will be able to obtain the most amount of earned credit, while those convicted of more serious crimes may only earn the minimum. Finally, S.B. 10 and H.B. 86 allow only those incarcerated after the bills are enacted to be eligible for earned credit.

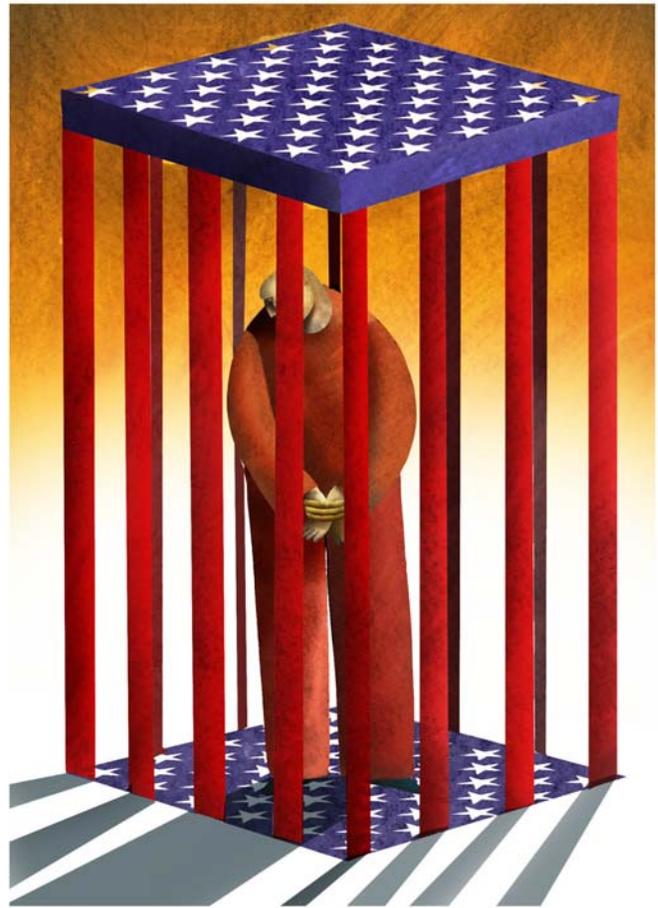
What are the cost savings?

According to the National Conference of State Legislatures, states who increase earned credit may save considerable funds. In New York, the Department of Corrections found that they saved \$369 million from 1997-2006 because they were housing inmates for a shorter period of time. Washington State also found in 2003 that they had an average net benefit of \$7,179 per inmate because of earned credit policies.

Kansas, Nevada and Pennsylvania enacted earned credit reforms and each yielded increased savings and alleviated overcrowding in their prisons. Nationally, 33 states use earned credit. The Bureau of Justice Statistics places Ohio with the sixth largest prison population, meaning the state could realize great cost savings by reducing its prison population.

How does this impact public safety?

States that have earned credit programs report a lower recidivism rate than states that do not have one, ac



ording to the National Conference of State Legislatures. In fact, many states have seen a decrease in recidivism rates after expanding earned credit, which also saves resources.

Is this different than “good time?”

Yes. Good time refers to credits given to an inmate for complying with prison rules and behaving well while incarcerated. Earned credit is only given to those who complete educational, vocational, or rehabilitative programming.

Will this undermine the person's punishment?

No. Under the legislation, inmates cannot earn credits that amount to more than 8% of the person's total sentence. So, a person sentenced to 6 months in prison could earn no more than 14 days. Inmates will still be adequately punished for their crimes, but will also emerge from prison with the tools to become productive members of society.

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