

Testimony from Aaron Schnagl, MCF-Faribault

Re: HF 2349 (HF 1078, Article 4)

Submitted by Jay Claire, TC IWOC

April 6, 2021

Mr. Chairman and committee members,

My name is Aaron Schnagl and I am with the Beyond Bars Project, and have been incarcerated since 2013. I have spent half of my adult life in prison. While in I have obtained my paralegal degree and worked as the law clerk at Lakes for two years, as well as been an editor of the prisoner newspaper. I have a wide understanding of our law system and politics in our State. I am also very passionate about prison reform and taking a holistic approach at how we incarcerate people and our criminal justice system. I also have many close friends on committees and in political positions and have my finger on the pulse of our current culture.

The other day I had a chance to read bill twenty three four nine, and although I am happy to support any legislation that supports progressive change, I have to state this bill falls short of real substantial change and reducing the MN prison population. I would say it is really like adding new parts to an outdated model vehicle that already has trouble running efficiently. My first and foremost worry points to Section 5, Statute 244.034, titled, "Certain Offenses Ineligible for Earned Incentive Release Credit." I would remove this section and make this bill universal and eligible for all prisoners. Because this bill would only target a very small portion of the prison population. And most prisoners that are eligible for this bill would simply defer and apply for CIP. Furthermore. this bill on its face doesn't seem much different than CIP in a different format. The problem that has plagued our system has always been not enough incentives for people with crimes against a person, and doesn't help those who wish to change their futures. There's nothing there for them. There is legislation that's in place for those drug offenders that is somewhat effective.

Statistics would show that most people that have violent offenses like homicide or an act of violence are less likely to reoffend than repeat drug offenders. The DOC

offers nothing to this group of offenders that are ineligible in this bill's current form that would go towards time off their sentences, or incentives; so this group doesn't have the external motivation to do any additional programming. Simply put, there is no hope or shot at redemption for this population, and this ideology is arcane when compared to what other states are doing.

I do speak from experience. I was convicted of third degree murder drug overdose and wasn't even required to complete treatment by the DOC. When looked at in the big picture, that is completely counterproductive to my case and needs. I did, however, complete multiple programs PFA vocational programs, yet still had to sit my last four years not doing anything but to work at minimum and wait to be denied work release. Unless the CRP, CIP, and Work Release are expanded in this bill and used to their full capacity, I think this will only waste time and be counterproductive. Although I will say it's a start in the right direction.

I'll conclude with these points: the problem with the bill is it needs to not exclude anyone, and also needs to have the DOC address treatment and mental health first and foremost when someone comes into the system. In my opinion, we don't need more legislation— we need to fix and expand the internal problems with the existing programs, like open up more of work release to more than a year; possibly a longer CIP program for violent offenders; and making sure treatment is handled when people first come in, and fix their thinking before prison culture takes hold of these people. The reality that I've experienced on the front lines is: guys sit, wait, and their last year or two they offer programming, and by then everyone is going through their motions.

Most people I encounter want to change. I have yet to meet a person who wants to be in a cage. But the problem is, someone hasn't shown them the way to change their thinking, and most importantly give them hope for a new life. Being proactive in these institutions relieves the taxpayer burden and the trauma. So many communities have suffered at the hands of failed mass incarceration. It's also not socially responsible, and is inhumane to warehouse human beings. And we can't change that unless we change the culture, and the way we approach public safety.

Thank you for your time.