



March 8, 2023

Dear Madame Chair:

I am writing in support of House Bill MN HF2167 which supports arts programming in correctional facilities in the state of Minnesota. As a former Minnesota Department of Corrections employee and someone who served as the Education Director at Minnesota Correctional Facility-Stillwater, I have personally witnessed the strong impact arts programming has on people incarcerated in our state. Through the Education Department, we facilitated programming and developed relationships with organizations like Art From the Inside, the Minnesota Prison Writing Workshop, and Voices of Hope. This type of programming served as a lifeline for incarcerated individuals. Engaging in arts programming provided them with a cathartic form of therapy, a voice that had otherwise been silenced, and a way for them to grapple with their past and look to the future with hope. Besides being a critical form of expression, engagement in the arts reduced violence, helped them manage their emotions, and allowed them to build healthy relationships with others at the prison. Their engagement in arts programming also had a positive impact on staff as it helped create a safer environment in the facility. Further, if staff took the time to observe and appreciate the work created, they were able to see the people in their care through a different lens. Art humanizes people.

Additionally, as an educator in the Minnesota State College and University system, I am aware of the research that proves arts programming can decrease the likelihood of an incarcerated person dealing with mental health issues like depression and anxiety. They are also better able to deal with anger management issues, if the struggle with that. Engagement in arts programming in a prison can help to reduce recidivism once these individuals are released from prison.

Finally, as Board President for the nonprofit organization Art From the Inside, I can attest to how arts programming offered in the prison system not only impacts those who are incarcerated while they are in prison, but it has long reaching effects on the family and loved ones of those incarcerated and eventually on the broader community. That work, whether it is visual arts, creative writing, or music, can be captured and shared with community members. This provides those on the inside with a voice, it changes the often flawed narrative of who is behind bars in Minnesota, and it gives family, loved ones, and community members a way to connect with those on the inside.

Passing of this Bill could have a tremendously positive impact on individuals incarcerated in Minnesota, their family and loved ones, and our broader community. I ask you to please support this Bill.

Thank you for your consideration.



Sincerely,

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