



Written Testimony to MN House Public Safety & Criminal Justice Reform
Committee re HF2349, "Rehabilitation & Reinvestment Act"

March 25, 2021

Dear Chair Mariani & Members of the Committee:

ISAI AH is a statewide organization of over 200 congregations, 30 mosques, 500 childcare centers, and dozens of barber shops in Minnesota. Our mission is to enable people to organize for racial, social and economic justice, and build a democracy that respects every person's dignity and a caring economy where everyone can thrive. We are writing in support of HF2349, the Minnesota Rehabilitation & Reinvestment Act, with some qualifications.

As a broad organization of people of faith that has also expanded beyond that, the thing that binds us together is the deep belief in the power of personal transformation through public, collective action. Every human being has dignity, and every one is capable of redemption. No person should be forever judged by their worst act, or even set of acts especially over a period of youth.

No matter where we live or what we look like, every Minnesotan deserves to live their lives in safety. Unfortunately those that bear the brunt of both crime as well as state punishment for crimes are disproportionately Black, Indigenous and People of Color.

We laud the goals of the Rehabilitation & Reinvestment Act as a positive step forward to increase public safety and re-align policies to better enable pro-social transformational change.

While we support the bill, we are concerned about the proposed exemption list. In our view, the exemption list basically front loads decisions about safety and community reintegration with no consideration of the individual or the true value of continued imprisonment. In particular, the exemptions skew towards crimes with the longest sentences. For example, someone sentenced to 30 or 40 years at say age 25 should have the opportunity to earn release as they enter middle age when statistics show the chance of re-offense drops drastically. Indeterminate sentencing is a good thing precisely for its recognition of personal change and substantially reduced public safety risk as the convicted person ages. There's no logic behind saying that's true for some crimes and not others.

Further, we feel that any many of the exemptions, especially that based on a "gang" crime will create unequal opportunity to use this program and could further racial disparities. The gang panic of the 1980's and 1990's was part of the fuel that drove racial inequality in our criminal justice system. Yet in a 1991 article "a close examination shows that most killings classified as gang-related stemmed more from personal feuds than gang rivalry." (article attached) We hope the legislature will do more to unwind, and not deepen, racial inequities of our past in our public policy. We hope you will consider eliminating the exclusions in the bill.

We truly appreciate the intent of HF 2349, the Minnesota Rehabilitation & Reinvestment Act and feel that it is strong, worthwhile step in the right direction.

Sincerely,

Lars Negstad, Policy Director, ISAI AH
Brian Fullman, Lead Organizer, Barbershops & Black Congregations Cooperative