



The Promise of Measure 57 Coalition

Individuals and Organizations Working Together to Find a Better Way to Fight Crime

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Association of Oregon Community Mental Health Programs

Human Services Coalition of Oregon

Juvenile Rights Project

National Association of Social Workers, Oregon Chapter

Oregon Alliance of Children's Programs

Oregon Business Association

Oregon Criminal Defense Lawyers Association

Oregon Education Association

Oregon Prevention Education & Recovery Association

Partnership for Safety and Justice

SEIU, Local 503

Self Enhancement, Inc.

Stand for Children

**HB 5005
DOC
Budget**

In November 2008, the Washington State Institute on Public Policy released a report announcing the results of their study on Washington State's increased use of earned time for prisoners. **In sum, the state was able to save millions with no change in the recidivism rates of released prisoners.** See the Institute's summary below.

WSIPP Summary

The legislature has established laws that enable certain offenders under the jurisdiction of the Washington State Department of Corrections (DOC) to leave prison prior to the end of their sentence. DOC is authorized to grant "earned release time" if an offender demonstrates good behavior and participates in treatment programs in prison.


The 2003 Legislature increased earned release time for eligible non-violent offenders from a maximum of 33 percent of the total sentence to a maximum of 50 percent. Since the passage of the law, approximately 20 percent of all offenders released from prison were eligible for 50 percent earned release time. This section of the 2003 bill sunsets July 1, 2010.

The Institute was directed by the Legislature to evaluate the effect of the 2003 law. While the immediate effect of shorter stays in prison lowers costs, the relevant research question is whether the law affects criminal recidivism.

Our findings indicate that the law has been effective: criminal recidivism has not increased and taxpayer costs are lower.

We find that the law has no statistically significant effect on violent criminal recidivism, while we estimate a statistically significant decrease for non-violent crimes. Overall, 39 percent of offenders released under the new law are convicted for a new felony within three years compared with 42 percent of offenders prior to the law's enactment.

Since the implementation of the new law, offenders spend an average of 63 fewer days in prison, resulting in an average cost savings of \$6,155 per person. Due to the estimated reduction in felony crime, we also calculate benefits of \$4,588 per person for future crimes avoided and taxpayer costs saved – a total savings of \$10,743 per offender.

 **Washington State
Institute for
Public Policy**

To read the complete report go to: <http://www.wsipp.wa.gov/rptfiles/08-11-1201.pdf>



All the criminal justice Washington can afford

THE NEWS TRIBUNE

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With a \$5 billion projected deficit looming, very hard choices face the Legislature – and the public. One involves crime and punishment.

On average, it takes about \$100 a day – roughly \$36,000 a year – to confine a felon in Washington’s prison system. With 18,600 prisoners in the system, the early release of some of those prisoners offers potentially immense savings for the state general fund.

This hasn’t gone unnoticed. In 2003, in the middle of another budget squeeze, the Legislature gave the Department of Corrections more latitude to grant “good time,” or earned early release, to some classes of nonviolent felons.

The department previously had been able to offer selected inmates a one-third reduction of their terms, on condition of their good behavior. As of 2003, the offer rose to one-half. But that year’s legislation sunsets in mid-2010, so lawmakers will soon have to decide whether to continue the policy.

Given the size of that revenue shortfall, the 2009 Legislature really has little choice. It would be one thing if the 50 percent good time policy were a threat to public safety. Paradoxically, the opposite appears to be the case.

In 2003, the Legislature commissioned its think tank, the Washington State Institute for Public Policy, to study the effects of good time. The institute recently reported that early release doesn’t make much difference in whether violent felons return to criminality. Statistically, the institute reports, nonviolent felons actually commit fewer crimes if they are released earlier.

One explanation for this is that inmates tend to lose more family and community ties the longer they are imprisoned. For some, those relationships help them avoid returning to crime once released.

Whatever the reason, the institute found that the switch to 50 percent good time has saved state government and the public an average of \$10,743 per offender. The policy has done that by releasing them an average of 63 days early, which saved the state \$6,155 in prison costs and the public another \$4,588 in future crimes avoided. ...