

Correctional Services Canada Revitalization

An independent panel on Correctional Services Canada appointed by then Public Safety Minister Stockwell Day issued a report in late 2007 which identified where we are failing in the federal prison system and what can be done about it. The CSC Review Panel in its report entitled *A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety* indicated a key issue is that anyone serving time in a federal institution gets statutory release after two-thirds of their time has been served. It doesn't matter how well or how poorly they have done in addressing their own issues within the system, they get a 'get out of jail free' card after serving only two-thirds of their sentence.

The downside of this policy is that **40 per cent of those given statutory release re-offend** or have their release revoked and the violent re-offending rates are three times higher versus parole releases (parole is the supervised release of a prisoner before the completion of his/her sentence). As the Panel said, statutory release is "a key disincentive to offender accountability". Whatever happened to earning your way out early? By having to earn their way out, offenders are much more likely to work on behavioral changes which would, in turn, improve release outcomes. At least, that is what the statistics cited and the review seemed to indicate. The side benefit is fewer victims and a better society.

As part of the move toward behavioral change, the offender must use the tools available and use them to effect change. They have as much a responsibility for change as does Correctional Services.

Another major highlight of the report was the astonishing statistics concerning the education level of the federal prison population. 'More than 70 percent of offenders at admission had unstable work histories; more than 70 percent had not completed high school and more than 60 percent had no trade or skill knowledge.' These are astonishing facts. It points to the dereliction of our education and social systems that allow this to happen and helps contribute in no small way to the possibility of someone getting into a life of crime. This was a major element cited as pointing toward potential criminality in The Vancouver Board of Trade's October 2006 *Kids 'n Crime* report and the subsequent follow up in September, 2010-*The Economic Aspects of Kids 'n Crime*.

The period of incarceration offers an opportunity to rectify this situation as long as more meaningful skills development is provided to prepare an offender for employment upon release. Again, the review panel pointedly stated that "without the means to earn a living upon release, an offender's rehabilitation is jeopardized'.

In summary, the panel made five major recommendations:

1. **Offender Accountability** – "If rehabilitation is to occur and truly be sustained, it must be a shared responsibility of CSC and the offender." According to their report, "it is the responsibility of CSC to provide opportunities and tools necessary to the offender – to provide the offender with ample opportunity to learn the skills required to correct behavior... However, to change his or her behavior, the **offender must seize opportunities offered to change.**"
2. **Eliminating Drugs from Prison** – "The presence of illegal drugs in federal penitentiaries is not only unacceptable but results in a dangerous environment for staff and offenders." This results in "assaults against offenders and staff, promotes transmittable diseases ...and destroys hope of providing a safe and secure environment where offenders can focus on rehabilitation."
3. **Employability/Employment** – "Without the means to earn a living upon release, an offender's rehabilitation is jeopardized." In summary, with more than 70 per cent of offenders having unstable work histories and not having completed high school, a structured work day including training in addition to providing skills around dealing with substance abuse and violence is important.
4. **Physical Infrastructure** – "Address the shortcomings of existing facilities through the development, design and implementation of regional complexes." As indicated in the report, this would assist in

improving the management of facilities and more consistently address problems around inmate segregation.

5. **Eliminating Statutory Release – Moving to Earned Parole.** Rather than statutory early release which has shown that “most of the violent re-offending by federal offenders is done by those on statutory release”, Earned Parole would lower the possibility of re-offending and increase the protection of society. “The Panel is of the opinion that presumptive release is a key disincentive to offender accountability.”

(Note: All quotations and recommendations taken from CSC Review Panel: A Roadmap to Strengthening Public Safety, October 2007 - Executive Summary pages iii-x.)

The government has already addressed two of these recommendations in that they have moved forward with the announced modernization of physical infrastructure and recently committed to a program for the elimination of drugs from prisons. This leaves the other three major recommendations to be tackled.

Recommendation

That the federal government implement all of the recommendations of the CSC Review Panel for the benefit of society, the economy and the individual offenders.

Submitted by the Vancouver Board of Trade

The Special Issues Committee supports this resolution.