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Make time count: Pass the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act

About 95 percent of the men and women incarcerated today will return to Minnesota's communities, so it's in everyone's best interest to help them return to our communities ready and equipped to succeed.

By A. Charlene Leach

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Amid big headlines and wild swings in deficits and surpluses, Gov. Tim Walz's revised budget contained a relatively small proposal for a fresh approach to corrections in Minnesota that deserves a closer look. The

Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRA) will turn our corrections system's attention from tracking *how much time* people spend incarcerated to *how they spend their time* by prioritizing rehabilitation – and saving the state up to \$10 million per year in the process.

About 95 percent of the men and women incarcerated today will return to Minnesota's communities, so it's in everyone's best interest to help them return to our communities ready and equipped to succeed. Better Futures Minnesota has spent decades providing formerly incarcerated men housing, job training, transitional employment, connections to jobs, health and wellness support, and other resources when they return to the community. Most recently, we've initiated a 2Gen program to work on reunifying men and their children. We've seen firsthand how equipping people coming out of prison with necessary resources can change the trajectory of their lives.

Opportunities from day one

What's special about the Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act is that it takes these rehabilitative programs that we know work and creates opportunities and incentives for incarcerated people to participate from day one of incarceration. It gets people involved with things like mental health services, substance abuse treatment, job skills training or education from their first day incarcerated.

The incentive? The potential for earned release and earned supervision abatement for people who demonstrate successful completion of rehabilitative programs as prescribed by an individualized plan.

And the resulting savings – expected to be \$10 million per year once fully implemented – will be placed in a Justice Reinvestment Fund to reinvest in four areas equally: crime prevention programs, victim support services, correction system improvements, and the state's general fund.

The Minnesota Rehabilitation and Reinvestment Act (MRRA) is something everyone can get behind.

More likely to succeed after sentence

It's good for public safety. When we give incarcerated people the tools and opportunities for rehabilitation, they are more likely to succeed in the community after their sentence and less likely to return. Every day I see great contributions made by formerly incarcerated people through my work with Better Futures, and I can attest that making these opportunities available to more incarcerated people earlier is in the best interest of all Minnesotans.



A. Charlene Leach

It's smart management. Minnesota's Challenge Incarceration Program (CIP) is a smaller example of this rehabilitation-focused approach. Evaluations found that Minnesota spends \$4,600 less per person for those enrolled in the program, and program participants are almost 35 percent less likely to reoffend.

And it's proven effective. More than 38 other states have some form of earned release policy in place. These examples show that corrections costs less and people involved with the corrections system are more successful when they return to the community. In 2019 a similar federal policy, the First Step Act, became law because of its broad bipartisan support.

I hope that Minnesota's leaders can follow in the footsteps of federal leaders and come together on this good policy that makes good sense.

A. Charlene Leach is the chief executive officer of Better Futures Minnesota, a nonprofit founded in 2007 to help previously incarcerated men who take responsibility for their past and are committed to doing better — men who

want to work to create a better life for themselves, their children, their family, their neighbors, and the community. Across her career Leach has had extensive involvement in diverse areas such as public health, substance abuse treatment and prevention, community development, and education and training.

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