

The Tennessee General Assembly
425 5th Ave. North
Nashville, TN 37243

March 16, 2022

Honorable Members of the General Assembly,

As the nation's largest Christian non-profit serving prisoners, former prisoners, and their families, Prison Fellowship urges you to oppose HB 1025 and HB 2656 and safeguard rehabilitative tools like parole and earned time credits that promote more constructive prison culture, reentry success, and public safety.

When change behind bars is incentivized through parole and earned time credits, incarcerated men and women can overcome destructive patterns of thinking and behavior, resulting in safer prisons and jails, more successful second chances upon release, and lower recidivism. Tennesseans must protect these tools that encourage transformation as the state experiences high rates of violent crime, recidivism, and incarceration.¹ Investing in the development of our incarcerated neighbors makes our communities safer, as demonstrated in studies showing that participation in correctional programming significantly improves reentry outcomes.² For this reason, Tennessee and other states incentivize motivated persons to avoid idleness and prepare for their future while behind bars.³

Prison Fellowship commends lawmaker efforts through HB 2657 to ensure there is a clearer expectation at sentencing for both the victim, defendant, and community of the expected minimum time served prior to use of parole and sentencing reduction credits. We urge the General Assembly pass transparency in sentencing as reflected in HB 2657 and collect data to inform significant changes to the state's sentencing code. Therefore, we respectfully oppose HB 1025 and HB 2656, which eliminate access to parole outside the last year of sentence and terminates sentencing credits. Over 30 states use some combination of good time credits and/or earned time credits—with the federal prison system now finally implementing earned time credits enacted in the historic First Step Act spearheaded by President Donald J. Trump.⁴ Thirty-five states, including Texas, Oklahoma, and South Carolina, maintain discretionary parole opportunities.⁵ Tennessee should not cut back on tools used across America to promote facility safety, program completion, and public safety.

Together, parole and earned time credits promote prison environments where men and women do not passively “do the time” but embark on the hard work of becoming good neighbors and responsible citizens – inside prison or out. We urge you to strengthen and protect these active accountability mechanisms by voting no on HB 1025 and HB 2656 while working to advance transparency in sentencing and a deliberative, data-informed review of the Tennessee criminal code.

¹ CJITF, *Interim Report*, Tennessee Criminal Justice Investment Task Force (2020), <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/governoroffice-documents/governorlee-documents/CJInvestmentTaskForceReport.pdf>.

² Chelsea Friske, *The Road to Redemption: Incentivizing Rehabilitation Through Parole, Earned Time, and Good Time Credits*, Prison Fellowship (2021), <https://www.prisonfellowship.org/campaigns/the-road-to-redemption/>.

³ *Id* at 44, 49.

⁴ *Id* at 46-49; Office of Public Affairs, Justice Dept. Announces New Rule Implementing Federal Time Credits Program Established by the First Step Act, Department of Justice (Jan. 2022), <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/justice-department-announces-new-rule-implementing-federal-time-credits-program-established>.

⁵ Friske, *supra* note 2 at 40-45.

Sincerely,

Heather Rice-Minus
Senior Vice President of Advocacy and Church Mobilization
Prison Fellowship