

April 11, 2022

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

Dear Honorable Member of the General Assembly,

As Tennessee faith leaders, we believe that the good news of Jesus Christ calls on the Church to faithfully advocate for meaningful opportunities for the transformation of those who are being held accountable for crime. We write to urge you and your colleagues to safeguard proactive accountability tools like parole and earned time credits for promoting good citizenship behind and beyond bars.

Incarcerated Tennesseans have innate, God-given dignity as they are created in His image and are called to make amends, confront their failings, and chart a different course. When incarceration is required as a response to crime, a proportional, minimum term of incarceration should be served that acknowledges the harm done to the victim and community. By allowing prisoners to modify the remainder of their term of incarceration through program completion and character development, parole and earned time credit offerings respect the demands of justice while positioning them to begin the reentry process more swiftly and to live out God-given vocations as parents, neighbors, and employees.¹ Because we love our neighbors who are imprisoned, we support rewarding their efforts to improve their lives and ensure the likelihood of their successful reintegration into their communities.

Forming constructive correctional cultures in which incarcerated men and women overcome temptation towards criminogenic patterns of thinking and behavior, honors people as created in the image of God, and reduces recidivism. This is an urgent need for Tennesseans as our state experiences high rates of violent crime, recidivism, and incarceration.² Investing in the development of our incarcerated neighbors during their imprisonment makes our communities safer, as demonstrated in studies showing that participation in correctional programming significantly improves successful reentry.³

We support proactive accountability that incentivizes motivated persons to avoid idleness and prepare for their future while behind bars. For example, earned time credits allow incarcerated men and women to reduce their term of incarceration following participation or completion of programming. Additionally, parole boards weigh program participation and intangible evidence of character development in deciding whether to allow individuals to complete the remainder of a sentence in community supervision.⁴ Together, parole and earned time credits promote constructive correctional environments where prisoners do not idly or passively “do the time” but instead embark on the hard work developing behavioral, vocational, and personal skills necessary towards becoming good neighbors and responsible citizens. When a path to redemption and hope is provided to returning citizens, we all stand to benefit in ensuring safer, more prosperous, and more vibrant communities.

Parole and earned time credits are catalysts for challenging incarcerated men and women to live into their divinely ordained purpose. We urge you and your colleagues to strengthen and protect these active accountability mechanisms in the 2022 legislative session and beyond.

Sincerely,

¹ 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/>.

² CJITF, *Interim Report, Tennessee Criminal Justice Investment Task Force* (2020), <https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/governorsoffice-documents/governorlee-documents/CJInvestmentTaskForceReport.pdf>.

³ Friske, *supra* note 1, 13-16.

⁴ *Id.*, 18-31.

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