

PROGRAM ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY
DAMAGES PRISON CULTURE IN MASSACHUSETTS

By
Charles N. Diorio
www.inmateauthorproject.org
Twitter@prisonauthor

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Massachusetts prison officials have been wrestling with the Court's over their Program Engagement Strategy, or PES. PES is a scheme to force prisoners into behavior modification programs like drug and alcohol treatment and sex offender therapy programs.

Prisoner's who refuse treatment programs are PES'd. Recently, court cases have been decided that attempt to limit the scope of the Department of Correction to impose harsh sanctions on prisoner's who refuse these programs. In September, prisoner's across Massachusetts will lose many of their privileges like single cell accommodations, institutional employment and good time opportunities.

In the North Central Correction Institution in Gardner, where nearly 75% percent of the general population has some kind of sex charge, inmates are being forced into G Block, a dormitory where privileges will be taken for at least 30 days. Prisoner's will lose personal property, and other essential privileges which they have until now enjoyed.

Currently, the Program Engagement Strategy is being challenged in several Superior Court's in civil actions that may chip away at the supremacy of the Executive Branch to essentially resentence prisoners to additional punishment - like social engineering and behavior modification programming.

At the moment, prison officials are allowed to implement their Program Engagement Strategy which they see as a positive way to encourage participation in onerous group therapy which most prisoners refuse.

The main point of contention is that the Department of Correction may not demand participation in programs like Sex Offender Treatment, or drug and alcohol encounter groups. What the DOC may do is strip away privileges for those inmates who refuse to participate.

A disproportionate number of inmates, sex offender's in particular, are subject to this Program Engagement Strategy. The stigma attached to sex crimes is much more onerous than any stigma attached to drug or alcohol related offenses. In fact, the culture in prison rewards and encourages drug crimes, while sex crimes are treated with overt hostility.

Moreover, the Correction Recovery Academy, or CRA, is a highly sought after way to earn extra good time. The CRA program is offered in well regarded correction institutions like MCI-Norfolk. While, sex offender treatment is only offered in one location, the Massachusetts Treatment Center on the grounds of Bridgewater State Hospital. MTC is an old blight where sex offender's are crowded into delapidated dormitories and forced to participate in groups which may or may not address their special needs, but will compell each individual to talk about their case and feelings surrounding their offense.

The Program Engagement Strategy in North Central Correction Institution at Gardner will certainly disrupt the delicate ballance which exists in this dangerously overcrowded facility. NCCI is 160 percent beyond its design capacity. Originally designed for just 560 prisoners, today it is home to 960.

Massachusetts Department of Correction is fully invested in behavior modification and social engineering incarcerated individuals no matter the cost.

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Charles N. Diorio W103769 NCCI-Gardner P.O.Box 466 Gardner, MA 01440
or via: corrlinks.com