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Dr. Mr. Rezendes,

I must say, I was deeply disappointed and equally offended by your article. You represented yourself as an objective, fair-minded journalist, but wrote a completely biased (or incredibly naïve) piece of sensationalism. Your article, especially the headline and cases you cited, is the very kind of misleading, fear-mongering propaganda that has contributed to the problems with the Parole Board and Department of Correction the past 2½ decades. Since you appear to be a reasonable person, I must assume that you too have been misled, misinformed, or manipulated by the tough-on-crime rhetoric and self-serving political agendas that promote it. To that end, let me set the record straight.

Prison is a business; it creates jobs for thousands of under-qualified and overpaid correctional staff, parole officials, and administrators while simultaneously removing tens of thousands of prospective workers from the workforce. While there may be individual desires and personal motivations for the work they do, collectively it is in the interest of the Parole Board and DOC for their system to be as ineffective as possible. It is in their interest to promote criminal thinking and criminal activity—it's called job security.

I readily admit that that may sound overly cynical and conspiratorial, but I can assure you that it is not—it is the product of nearly twenty years of first-hand knowledge and personal experience. I have watched for two decades as rehabilitative, educational, and job-training programs have been systematically eliminated from the prison system; I have watched the percentage of inmates in higher security triple and number of correctional officers double as the rules, regulations, and their enforcement grew increasingly draconian; and equally predictable, I have watched the recidivism rate triple and DOC budget quadruple—all of this ushered in by Governor Weld's "joys of busting rock" philosophy in the wake of the Willie Horton scandal.

The two primary reasons this was able to take place is because prisoners are essentially voiceless and the public is easily deceived. There is so much evidence to support my argument that I don't know where to begin—let's just start with the treatment received by prisoners during their stay in the DOC. Every day prisoners are beaten, abused, degraded, demeaned, or belittled by correctional staff and administrators. In spite of being one of the most compliant and exemplary prisoners in the system personally, I cannot recall a single day that some correctional staff did not abuse their power at my expense. Not one day.

When we read about ourselves in the paper or see ourselves on the news—individually or collectively—we are inevitably labeled heartless, callous, worthless, or unwanted. There is never any mention that we were scared, frightened, insecure, misguided, desperate, or hopeless. We, especially lifers, live for decades in a system designed not only to *remind* us that we are unfit for society, but that *makes* us unfit by stripping us of all our autonomy and infantilizing us, a system that makes us completely and utterly dependent on it for survival. Our food is prepared for us, our laundry washed and dried; we are told when to wake up, when to make our bed, and when to go to sleep; every aspect of our day is governed by rigid and uncompromising rules. In many ways, being “functional” in prison is tantamount to being institutionalized, the epitome of societal dysfunction. Is it any wonder that so many prisoners have problems readjusting to society these days?

Now apply that to lifers who will inevitably spend an average of twenty-five years in prison (even though the statute only calls for fifteen). Then consider that the DOC has a policy that prevents us from participating in programs or vocational training until we’re within 18 months or so of our release date; and another policy that prevents us—regardless of our institutional adjustment—from transitioning to lower security. Certainly there is no excuse for the actions of men like Edward Corliss and Gerald Hill, but the media—so quick to declare them incorrigible and irredeemable—makes no mention of the system that spawned them. Just as a wise friend of mine once said: “When you take your car to a mechanic and it comes back worse than it went in, you don’t blame the car—you blame the mechanic.”

Of course, I acknowledge that there some men (and probably women) in the system who simply can’t or won’t be reformed. But contrary to propaganda and media distortions, those are the anomalous exceptions, accounting for perhaps one-half of one percent of the population. The other 80% or so who return to criminal activity or antisocial behavior do so because the system makes no legitimate attempt to reform them. They are not given the skills, knowledge, or motivation to change. But that fact continues to elude the masses thanks to biased, one-sided reporting.

Prisoners do not have blogs or access to Twitter and YouTube; we can’t call the governor’s office, clerk of courts, or Globe with our grievances; we can’t release public statements or hold press conferences to “shed some light” on a particular incident—the only voice that is heard is that of the DOC/Parole spin doctors. When a guard or group of guards beats an inmate, *they* are the ones who get to write the incident report. When administrators refuse to obey the law or their own policies, our only recourse is to complain to the very people who created the problem. If we boycott a particularly inedible meal or hold a peaceful work stoppage to protest habitual injustices, it is considered a riot despite the lack of violence or aggression. We are always said to be violent and dangerous, ready to explode at any moment. And, of course, we are accused of being master manipulators. The truth, however, is something very different—but as long as the media only tells one side of the story, the public remains in the dark.

My question to you Mr. Rezendes is, “Where is the journalistic integrity?” Where is the voice of reason and justice decrying the backroom politics that get undeserving candidates like Dominic Cinelli and Emmett Snow (both sons of high-ranking police officers as I understand it) released and re-released while suitable candidates are denied parole or returned to prison (sometimes for

years) for completely innocuous violations? Take the case of Dawud Abdul Basir, paroled in the mid 80's. In the ten years that he was out, he earned his Master's degree and enrolled in a Ph.D. program while serving as an associate professor at Boston University until a failed urine test sent him back to prison for nearly a decade. So when Eric Lancelotte—a paroled lifer who came to prison as a teenager—failed a urine test last year, he ran from his parole officer and hid under neighbor's porch, where he was found a short time later. In addition to the parole violation, he was charged with trespassing, one of the thirty parolees accused of committing a new “crime.”

Then there's Robert Stirling, now 70 years old, paroled in 1979. For thirty years, he maintained a spotless record. In 2009 he was accused of Driving Under the Influence in Florida. He was acquitted at trial, but found to have been driving recklessly and ordered to pay a fine... that is, until the Massachusetts Parole Board extradited him, revoked his parole, and decided he should do at least another three years in prison. Or perhaps you'd care to consider my own case: Granted parole more than three years ago, I have yet to be released. I was returned from Boston Pre-Release Center for a minor disciplinary infraction that was eventually dismissed. Nonetheless, the parole board (influenced by outlandish media scrutiny) rescinded my parole and has forced me to seek relief through the courts.

But forget about those of us who have committed some violation, however inconsequential or non-threatening. What about the 141 lifers paroled in the last five years who are law-abiding, tax-paying citizens? Or the 340 lifers currently under parole supervision? What about the ones who are drug and alcohol counselors, or run programs that help ex-offenders reintegrate into society? What about the ones who volunteer at Boys and Girls Clubs, do youth intervention/outreach, or who are the primary caretaker for an elderly or infirm relative? Where is the footage and sound bites from their hearings? Where are the front-page articles about them? You yourself were quick to bring up the accusations against Charles Doucette, knowing full well that he was acquitted of those charges. Doesn't it occur to you how deceitful and manipulative that is? A jury who sat through the entire trial and heard all of the evidence (something neither you nor your readers has done) reached the unanimous conclusion that Mr. Doucette was not guilty—but by reciting the fallacious allegations as you did, you imply that they are true.

What it comes down to in the end, Mr. Rezendes, is this: Human beings are fallible. We all make mistakes, use poor judgment, and make regrettable decisions. Some of us, unfortunately, go further, and commit unjustifiable or unconscionable acts that bring undeserved heartache and suffering to our victims and their families, something I agree is tragic and unacceptable. But we are not beyond redemption. All of us have the capacity to change, to become productive contributors to our families and society, and to make a difference in the world for the better. Sadly, the media, parole board, and DOC seem intent to conceal this from the public. That is just as tragic and unjust as the crimes we once committed. Hopefully the next time you are faced with a piece of investigative reporting, you will have the courage to report both sides, fairly and accurately. Those whose lives are in the balance depend on it.

Sincerely,

Karter Kane Reed