

Michael Skinner
Shirley Medium
PO Box 1218
Shirley, MA 01464

July 2014

The Honorable
State
State House
Room
Boston, MA 02133-1054

Re: **SUPPORT FOR A BILL THAT PROVIDES ENHANCEMENT FOR PUBLIC
SAFETY BY REFORMING THE PAROLE BOARD.**

Dear

I am writing to you seeking support for the enclosed draft of a bill that would enhance public safety by reforming the parole board by expanding its members and assigning them into specific target areas to work with in order to better evaluate those men and women who will be eligible for parole.

Recently, with the enactment of the "Melissa's Bill" which will allow more men and women who are serving non-violent drug sentences to see parole sooner than previously expected, along with those who will be convicted of the "Three Strikes" law, as well as those juveniles who are now eligible for parole under the recent U.S. Supreme Court decision in Miller v Alabama, the current seven member parole board will be faced with an increasing case load in the coming months and years. This will further tax and stress their already limited resources and time.

Several years ago in the state of Michigan, the drug laws were amended and revised, making several thousand men and women eligible for parole sooner than expected. The state legislators responded by expanding their parole board membership from fourteen to twenty-one to better deal with the increased work load.

I believe it is time for a similar expansion here in Massachusetts by expanding the current seven to eleven with the following breakdown:

- Three members assigned specifically to handle County Inmates;
- Three members assigned specifically to handle state inmates who are not serving life;
- Five members assigned to second degree lifers.

The way the evaluation model is set up, the people who interact with us the most on a daily basis, have the least amount of input and say with regards to whether or not we are viable candidates to be returned back into society. Usually, a six-part folder is given to the parole board prior to the hearing for them to peruse and take notes from and make a snap judgement of the person who is about to go before them with his or her freedom at stake. And it appears to be failing as more and more inmates are being denied, coupled with the fact that more and more inmates are choosing to wrap up their sentence rather than go through the current parole process. This means more

and more are returning back into society without any supervision. This is not good for public safety as it puts people at risk by having so many unsupervised ex-cons set up for failure and likely to re-offend. Recidivism rates in this state are currently at a staggering rate of 64% within a three year period of release. By expanding parole board membership to eleven, it allows them to focus and work with their specific target groups. It will promote a more hands on approach. Rather than relying on an outdated, generic case file, they can now evaluate based on interaction with staff and all those involved in our daily lives inside these places. Let the decision makers get to know us up close and personal. Let them see first hand who we are today and what we are doing, or not doing to better ourselves and make the changes necessary to ensure a successful re-entry back into society. By focusing more on the individual, they will be able to periodically interview us, speak to those who are around us everyday. Call or drop in for an unannounced visit and see what we are doing. And build a new, more accurate case file that will be used to determine if we are ready to go back to our communities. And if not, then tell us why and what we have to work on and improve upon to make it happen down the road.

No system is perfect, but this outside the box thinking and logic will make it extremely difficult for someone to fall through the cracks and create another tragedy like in past years. Hopefully you agree with me that smart criminal justice is what is needed and that this proposed reformation of the parole board is but the first step in making that happen for the betterment of all the good people of the Commonwealth.

Thank you kindly for your time and attention to this matter.

Very truly yours,

Michael F. Skinner
Shirley Medium
PO Box 1218
Shirley, MA 01464

HOUSE.....No. 1234

By Mr. Wise Legislator of Best District, a petition (accompanied by bill, House, No. 4321) of Wise Legislator and others for An Act providing for enhancing public safety by reforming the Parole Board. The Judiciary.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

In the Year Two Thousand Fourteen

An Act providing for enhancing public safety by reforming the Parole Board

Be it enacted by the Senate and the House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Section 4 of chapter 27 of the General Laws,
2 as recently amended by sections 6 to 10 of chapter 192 of the
3 Acts of 2012, is hereby further amended by striking it out in
4 its entirety and replacing it with the following: There shall
5 be in the department, but not subject to its jurisdiction, a
6 parole board, consisting of eleven members, to be appointed by
7 the governor, with the advice and consent of the council, for
8 terms of five years. The governor may, with the advice and
9 consent of the council, remove members from the board for cause,
10 upon a written certification of such cause; provided, that such
11 member shall have the right to notice and the opportunity for
12 a public hearing before the council relative to such removal.
13 Whenever a vacancy occurs in the membership of the board the
14 governor shall appoint a panel of 9 persons, who shall submit
15 to the governor, within sixty days of the establishment of the
16 said panel, a list of not less than six nor more than nine persons
17 or not more than twelve persons in the event there should be
18 two or more vacancies to fill, who are qualified by knowledge,
19 education or experience in the administration of criminal justice
20 or behavioral sciences. The governor shall designate and of appoint
21 one of the members of the parole board as chairman, said member
22 to serve as chairman at the will of the governor. The chairman
23 shall be the executive and administrative head of said board,
23 shall have the authority and responsibility of directing assignments
24 of members in the following areas:

25 Three members assigned specifically to handle all inmates who
26 are incarcerated and parole eligible at all County jails and
27 House of Corrections, as well as any inmates classified to such
28 facility due to their sentence structure.

HOUSE.....No. 1234

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts

PRESENTED BY:

Wise Legislator

To the Honorable Senate and House of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in General Court assembled:

The undersigned legislators and/or citizens respectfully petition for the passage of the accompanying:

An Act providing for enhancing public safety by reforming the Parole Board.

PETITION OF:

NAME:

DISTRICT/ADDRESS:

Wise Legislator #1;

Best District/Address

Wise Legislator #2;

Best District/Address

Wise Legislator #3;

Best District/Address

Wise Legislator #4;

Best District/Address

Wise Legislator #5;

Best District/Address

Wise Legislator #6;

Best District/Address

Wise Legislator #7

Best District/Address

29 Three members assigned to all Massachusetts Correctional
30 Institutions specifically assigned to handle all inmates who
31 are parole eligible and are not serving a second degree life
32 sentence.

33 Five members assigned specifically to all Massachusetts
34 Correctional Institutions who are serving a life sentence for
35 second degree murder or a second degree life sentence under
36 the habitual offender statute. Members of the "Lifers Board"
37 shall devote full time to their duties by meeting with the
38 parole candidate at least once per year within three years of
39 scheduled hearing. Members will also be required to make bi-
40 yearly spot checks at the Institution that houses the parole
41 candidate and interview Department of Correction Staff who
42 supervise and interact with said parole candidate. This can
43 include, but should not be limited to; block officers; case-
44 workers; clergy; job supervisors; program coordinators; rec-
45 reation officers; mental health staff; administrators;; volunteers.
46 The complete updated case history file accumulated by the
47 "Lifers Board" will be presented to all five members prior to
48 the candidates hearing for a complete and total evaluation.

49 SECTION 2: Section 133A of Chapter 127 of the General
50 Laws, as recently amended by sections 37 and 39 of chapter 192
51 of the Acts of 2012, is hereby further amended by striking it
52 out in its entirety of the first paragraph and replacing it
53 with the following: A two thirds majority vote of the hearing
54 panel will be required in order to grant parole to those who
55 are in the County and State facilities who are not serving life.
56 After such hearing at the "Lifers Board", a vote of four-fifths
57 would be required to grant parole for any second degree lifer.
58 Under no circumstances shall a parole hearing proceed pursuant
59 to this section unless a majority of the board is present at
60 the public hearing.

61 If such permit is not granted, the parole board shall, at least
62 once in each year of decided set back period, consider carefully
63 and thoroughly the merits of each such case on the question of
64 releasing such prisoner on parole, and may by a vote of two-
65 thirds, or in the case of a lifer, four-fifths, grant such a
parole permit.