



SUPPORT FOR HB 2484– Increasing good time credits for certain offenders.

Testimony of Austin Spillar

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Corrections and Juvenile Justice Committee - February 3, 2020

Chairman Jennings and Members of the Committee,

Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Austin Spillar. I am the Policy Associate with the ACLU of Kansas. We are a nonpartisan, non-profit organization that works to preserve and strengthen the constitutional liberties of every person in Kansas. The ACLU of Kansas supports HB 2484 as a positive step toward alleviating the prison overcrowding crisis in our state.

Since 1980, the Kansas prison population has nearly quadrupled. As of 2019, over 10,000 people were imprisoned in Kansas — a 12 percent increase since 2000. While other states have downsized their prison systems, Kansas expanded its prison capacity by nearly 20 percent between 2000 and 2017 to accommodate such rapid growth.

Kansas’s mass incarceration acceleration has had an enormous impact on people of color, especially Black people. As of 2014, the per capita imprisonment rate for Black people in Kansas was the 14th highest in the country. In 2016, Black people constituted 30 percent of the Kansas prison population, but only 6 percent of the state population.

Women are also being sent to prison in Kansas at striking rates. Over the past decade, the number of women in Kansas prisons has grown at three times the rate of men. In 2017, more than half of the women imprisoned had been convicted of an offense not involving violence, and 38 percent had been convicted of a drug offense.

It doesn’t have to be this way. Earned time credits, like those proposed in HB 2484, can be an integral part of reducing mass incarceration in the state and addressing these issues constructively.

This bill benefits all stakeholders. The availability of good time credits based on the merits of a person’s actions can make the prison environment safer for other inmates and correctional officers. Additionally, good time credits are an effective management tool for correction officials.

We support every effort to develop policies and programs aimed at rehabilitating the people in Kansas's prisons. Good-time credits incentivize good behavior (rather than simply punishing bad behavior), helping inmates to develop positive habits, and thereby reducing recidivism rates. Earned time programs that incorporate vocational training, education opportunities and rehabilitation help reduce crime by better preparing offenders for reentry into Kansas towns and cities. We appreciate that this bill will promote offender rehabilitation by fostering good behavior, better decision making, and participation in programs. And we look forward to seeing further support and services for these individuals upon release, to help ensure they are productive, responsible community members.

The ACLU of Kansas urges this committee to take action to pass HB 2484 into law. Thank you.