

The News-Herald

Wednesday, September 7, 2011

Editorial: Prison reforms a worthwhile idea

<http://www.news-herald.com/articles/2011/09/07/opinion/nh4461301.txt?viewmode=fullstory>

Gary Mohr has a plan.

No one could ever accuse the state's director of prisons of being a status-quo kind of guy.

No, Mohr is plunging head-first into what he says is an overhaul of the state's prison system, creating a "tiered" system that puts prisoners to work and forces them to prove they're ready for life on the outside.

Mohr said the first tier, or lowest, would manage low-risk inmates working as truck drivers or in light manufacturing.

"I want to put these inmates to work," Mohr told The Columbus Dispatch.

Middle-tier inmates would be in transitional facilities while taking part in educational, training and community re-entry programs. The highest tier would be reserved for the most serious offenders, including those serving life terms.

Of course, with any plan, there are detractors.

The ACLU says it's not in favor of having inmates performing jobs, because they can be exploited.

But Mohr's plan isn't all about work. He wants to do even more.

The director is asking the Ohio General Assembly to change the rules so that more prisoners can take advantage of the educational opportunities already available to inmates.

Currently, only new inmates can access such benefits.

Mohr also is asking for rules changes that would allow more inmates to experience "transitional control," which transfers inmates to community residential facilities during the last six months of their sentences.

Mohr's goal is to have fewer inmates in the state's residential prison population, which would save the state millions per year.

We're inclined to think that Mohr's on to something here.

Most of the prisons in Ohio have the word "correctional" in their name — meaning there is some sort of behavior modification expected. The goal of the prisons is rehabilitation, which implies change, too.

Mohr's advocating a system that takes those convicted of crimes and puts them on a different path. They'll be working or being educated, preparing to live different lives once their punishment is completed.

It's hard to argue with a system that has as its goal the improvement of lives — and could save the state money to boot.

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