

House panel rips early release of prisoners

By Warren M. Hoyt
special writer

MICHIGAN'S Department of Corrections allowed overcrowding concerns to overshadow public safety, according to a report issued by the House Corrections Committee.

It violated state law in awarding good time to drug offenders and by reducing sentences of gun law violators. And it inappropriately used halfway houses to reduce crowded conditions at state prisons, the House panel said.

The report recommended that the state:

- Develop new policies dealing with community placement.
- Abandon other policies allowing extended furloughs.
- Appropriate additional funds to cover extra parole and security costs.
- Limit — but not repeal — the emergency powers over crowding act.

In 39 recommendations in the 30-page report, it suggested that the Legislature helped create some of the

The House Corrections Committee's 30-page report suggested that the Legislature helped create some of the problems faced by the Corrections Department.

problems faced by the Corrections Department. BUT IT WAS sharply critical of the department, saying that it failed to recognize public safety concerns. And it complained that the department ignored some legislative recommendations.

The department specifically violated state law on allowing "good time" for drug law violators, the report said. "Good time" is time reduced from a prisoner's sentence for good behavior. Current law permits a total of only five days a month for drug offenders, but the department was allowing up to 22 days a month in good time for those persons.

The department also violated the

emergency powers statute, which permits a 90-day reduction in most minimum sentences when overcrowding is declared, the report charged. Prisoners given a two-year mandatory sentence were not intended to have their sentences reduced, the report said.

The department was also criticized for using community placement in halfway houses as a method to relieve overcrowding. And when it did use halfway houses for overcrowding, it was "irresponsible" for not increasing security around those facilities for improving security, the report said.

OTHER COMMITTEE recommendations included:

- Using the emergency overcrowding act only in actual cases of emergency and limiting the amount of time a prisoner's sentence can be reduced.

- Increasing funds to beef up security for community placement and improving parole supervision.

- Enacting a sentencing guidelines bill by the Legislature.
- Abolishing an extended furlough program which allows prisoners to live at home. Also, those prisoners placed in homes should make daily contact with their parole officers instead of the current weekly contact.

The report said the state should also develop a policy that prepares all prisoners for re-entry into society instead of direct release into society. The state should enact a disciplinary credits program, which would replace the good time process now granted some non-violent prisoners and make it easier for the state to withdraw that good time.

IN RESPONSE to the committee report, Department of Corrections Director Robert Brown Jr. said the department had to take "extraordinary measures" to avoid the consequences of serious facility crowding. Brown noted that measures such as the emergency overcrowding act only artificially covered up the problem.

Brown said the department's decision to use such temporary measures has been balanced between the inability to control crowding while taking the necessary steps to limit the threat to public safety.

The writer is executive director of the Michigan Press Association in Lansing.

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Mike Best, amateur astronomer, will show slides and talk on Halley's Comet at Schoolcraft College Dec. 10.

Halley's Comet subject of talk

A slide show and lecture on Halley's Comet will be presented at 8 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 10, in Schoolcraft College's Waterman Center.

Speaker will be Mike Best, founder and board chairman of the Astronomy Club of Livonia. An amateur astronomer for 42 years, Best has written and hosted television programs on his avocation.

Best also teaches astronomy classes in Schoolcraft's continuing education and talented-gifted programs.

The Waterman Center is at the north end of the campus at 18600 Haggerty, Livonia. There is no admission charge.

Best will discuss the historical significance of the comet, when to view it best, how to look for and at it, and "everything you ever wanted to know about Halley's Comet but had no one to ask."

Halley's (rhymes with Sally) Comet comes near earth every 75 years and is due to be seen soon. Two previous appearances were in 1535 and 1910, the years in which author Mark Twain was born and died.

OCC serves up culinary arts

The Oakland Community College hospitality department will present its sixth annual Culinary Arts Open House at the Orchard Ridge campus in Farmington Hills on Thursday, Dec. 12.

OCC students will be demonstrating a variety of culinary art techniques from 7-9 p.m. in J-Building.

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