

Criminal Justice

2009 Issues Briefing

Eileen Subak, LWVIL Issue Specialist

For your Program Planning, please check the web site for League Activity 2007-2008 and Outlook, Resources and updates. www.lwvil.org.

If you, as an individual or a League, are working on criminal justice issues, please get in touch with Eileen Subak, Issue Specialist. issues@lwvil.org

Panelists at the 2007 Legislative Briefing highlighted issues facing criminal justice: A prison population that increased five fold since 1970, prisons that are de facto mental health hospitals, the disproportionate incarceration of minorities for drug offenses and the sobering news that over half of released offenders return to prison. The panelists called for community interventions that are more effective at less cost without endangering public safety: Appropriate treatment for offenders with mental health and substance abuse needs and new policies to support offenders who return to the community. Here are some promising recent developments.

INTERVENTIONS

* The LWVIL supported the expansion of Mental Health Courts [PA 95- 0606] and the Drug School Act [PA 95-0160]. Both offer alternatives to traditional prosecution. [See the Mental Health Legislative Briefing Report]

* The Illinois Disproportionate Justice Study Commission [PA 95-0995] will analyze the impact of Illinois drug laws on minorities and make recommendations by December 2009.

RE-ENTRY

* The League supported legislation that reduced the length of parole for offenders who earned a GED [PA 95-0539].

* The Task Force on Employment of Persons with Past Criminal Convictions is expected to have legislation ready for the spring session. The League submitted testimony in May, sent action alerts and plans to continue work to improve hiring practices.

* Although the LWVUS does not have a criminal justice position, Illinois should benefit from the passage of the federal Second Chance Act [PL 110-199], spearheaded by Illinois Congressman Danny Davis. It will authorize grants to provide employment assistance, substance abuse treatment, housing, family programming, mentoring, victim support, and other services that can help reduce re-offending and violations of probation and parole. A solicitation for grants is expected in March.

* The Governor's Report, Inside Out, has identified ten areas that account for almost 85% of the 39,000 people returning from prison each year. The private sector has partnered with the Illinois Department of Corrections and the Division of Mental Health to release fourteen planning grants to assess re-entry housing needs.

· The MacArthur Foundation is funding a re-entry model projected to serve over 600 clients in the East Garfield community of Chicago over three years.

REVISION OF CRIMINAL LAW

* The CLEAR Commission is revising Illinois criminal laws. SB 100 is on the concurrence calendar for action in January. The League had issued action alerts in 2007.