



OFFICE OF GOVERNOR PAT QUINN

# NEWS

**EMBARGOED FOR RELEASE:**  
1:15 p.m. Friday, August 13, 2010

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## **Erickson Report Finds Serious Flaws in MGT Push Program, Offers Guidelines for Improved Corrections Procedures**

*Quinn Administration Details New Public Safety Initiatives,  
System-Wide Reforms Already Accomplished*

CHICAGO (August 13, 2010) – Criminal justice expert David Erickson released his review of the Illinois Department of Corrections' Meritorious Good Time Push program Friday, reporting a number of serious flaws in the program, which was terminated in December 2009, and offering detailed recommendations to reform the prison system's parole procedures.

After an accelerated prisoner release plan last year was found to include some prisoners who had committed violent crimes, Governor Pat Quinn suspended, then terminated the program. He named Erickson, a retired criminal trial judge and Appellate Court Justice, to head a three-person panel to review all Department of Corrections' Meritorious Good Time (MGT) programs and make recommendations on how the programs should be overhauled.

In releasing the report, Judge Erickson called its recommendations "a starting point toward the potential establishment of a good-conduct program aimed at protecting the public, assuring sentencing integrity, rehabilitating inmates, encouraging good inmate behavior, and triggering the attitudinal shift within the Department that will restore the public's trust."

"Over the past months, we have looked hard at the factors that led to the mistakes made with last year's MGT Push program," said Jerome Stermer, the Governor's chief of staff and a member of the review panel. "As a result, Governor Quinn has instituted system-wide reforms of Illinois' corrections programs and put improved public safety plans in place. In the past fiscal year, we hired and trained more than 700 new corrections officers, to reduce overtime and make our prisons even more secure. We anticipate adding and training more than 800 new corrections officers in this fiscal year. We also are preparing to train a class of new parole agents – the first in seven years – to help expand our supervision of inmates after they complete their prison sentences."

Stermer noted that Governor Quinn has brought in a new team of senior staff at the Department of Corrections, to support Director Michael Randle and oversee implementation of systemic reforms. Michael J. McCotter, a 37-year law enforcement veteran, is now Chief Public Safety Officer for the Department of Corrections, and Mark S. Prosperi, a 30-year prosecutor for the U.S. Department of Justice, is serving as Public Safety Liaison Officer for the Office of the Governor. Both were appointed by Governor Quinn in January 2010.

McCotter and Prosperi have improved the Department of Corrections' communications with law enforcement officials statewide and worked to develop a drastically revised program for good-conduct awards, in keeping with the principles outlined in Judge Erickson's review.

The news conference Friday included Randle, Prosperi, McCotter, Acting Assistant Director of Corrections Gladys Taylor, and the three review panel members -- Erickson, Stermer, and the Governor's Acting General Counsel, John Schomberg.

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Governor Quinn on Friday also released a critical component of the MGT review, an analysis of the Department of Corrections' processes, computer systems and related information technology. The process and technology review was assisted by advisors Ernst & Young LLP, who provided their expertise pro bono. The process and technology review noted that the Department of Corrections' "outmoded and inefficient computer system" severely hindered effective MGT implementation, and recommended that "future efforts should focus on enhancing IT infrastructure."

At the time the MGT Push program was initiated, the Department of Corrections' IT systems were operating on a 25-year-old mainframe system, and the Offender Tracking System had not been updated in more than 10 years. After decades of piecemeal fixes, the Department was using 39 different and unconnected computer systems to fulfill basic operating needs. The Department of Corrections is already taking the first steps toward remedying these deficiencies and has sought bond approval from the General Assembly to fund a complete and necessary IT capital overhaul.

The Department of Corrections' accelerated release program, known as MGT Push, was implemented in September 2009. Three months later, Governor Quinn learned that MGT Push included violent offenders. He immediately suspended the program and named Judge Erickson to lead a comprehensive review of the program and suggest policies and procedures to increase public safety and maintain the integrity of the criminal justice system.

The review panel's report sets out four core objectives for any good conduct credit program:

- 1) Protect public safety by deterring crime, including re-offending by former inmates;
- 2) Recognize and respect the interests of victims;
- 3) Offer appropriate incentives and rewards for inmates' positive behavior while incarcerated, and,
- 4) Provide inmates with access to relevant rehabilitative programs.

Judge Erickson and the review panel found that MGT Push failed to achieve these objectives. The review recommends three major areas of reform, and further advises that all meritorious credit programs remain suspended until crucial reforms are in place.

**Earned and Individualized Awards.** The Department of Corrections' accelerated meritorious credit program discarded an unwritten previous policy requiring inmates to spend at least 60 days in state custody before receiving any awards for meritorious conduct. The MGT Push program also continued the Department's longstanding practice of routinely awarding MGT credit to inmates who had done little, if anything, to demonstrate good conduct.

The report recommends that the Department of Corrections require inmates to earn credit awards over at least 60 days in Department custody by showing good behavior and taking part in rehabilitative programs. The 60-day minimum is now required by law under new legislation spearheaded by Governor Quinn.

**Accountability and Transparency.** The report found that the Department of Corrections relied on unwritten rules and outdated technology and procedures in its inmate release programs, and further found that the record-keeping and policies related to release decisions varied widely throughout the system.



The report recommends a number of measures to enhance the accountability and transparency of both the program and individual meritorious credit awards. The committee calls on the Director to formally delegate authority over earned "good time" programs to the Department's Chief Public Safety Officer. Program policies and procedures instituted under the Chief Public Safety Officer's direction should be set forth in formal, written rules, directives, and manuals and should be developed with both notice to and input from community stakeholders.

**Communication.** The report found that the Department failed to notify local authorities of pending prisoner releases in a uniform and timely manner. In December 2009, Governor Quinn ordered the Department of Corrections to provide local prosecutors with at least 14 days' advance notice before releasing an inmate with meritorious credit into mandatory supervision. Governor Quinn sought legislation to make this change permanent; this policy was made law when Governor Quinn signed Senate Bill 1013 in January 2010.

In addition to these reforms, the committee recommends that the Department institute a fully electronic advance notification process with appropriate procedural safeguards, to give local authorities time to respond to or prepare for a prisoner's release. Additionally, updated electronic information-sharing between local authorities, the Illinois State Police, and the Department of Corrections would improve internal decisions on awarding good-conduct credit, expand communication with victims, and alert jail and prison authorities to potential inmate risks.

The report on the Department of Corrections' IT systems, also released Friday, details and evaluates the Department's complex inmate-tracking processes, covering intake and release procedures, sentence calculation, credit awards, behavior tracking, and notification practices. The working group found that the Department's antiquated computer systems substantially impaired the Department's ability to function efficiently and effectively. The working group also found that the Department's outdated IT infrastructure forced the use of multiple redundant systems designed to avoid errors in sentence calculation, good conduct credit awards, and release decisions.

A draft copy of the report on the Department's computer systems was made available to Judge Erickson and the other panel members during their review. Judge Erickson endorsed the report's recommendations for a significant and long-overdue investment in the Department of Corrections' computer systems.

Several of the recommended reforms announced Friday will require legislative action. Governor Quinn, his public safety team, and the Department of Corrections will work with the General Assembly to accomplish these important objectives.

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## Reforms and Improvements at the Illinois Department of Corrections

Over the past 15 months, Illinois Department of Corrections Director Michael Randle has led the Quinn administration's efforts to reform Illinois' correctional system and bring professional management to the DOC.

Director Randle has initiated a top-down reorganization of DOC to create a more defined and responsive chain of command reducing bureaucracy, and streamlining management processes and procedures. As part of the reorganization, the Director has personally inspected every prison in the Illinois correctional system, to assess conditions, advise management, interview staff and inmates and ensure that all DOC policies and procedures are understood and followed by wardens and staff. These efforts are focused on the Department's top priority, the protection of public safety.

The Director also has reorganized the DOC's Apprehension Unit, which is empowered to re-arrest parole violators and fugitives, and placed the Unit under the authority of the Chief Public Safety Officer.

As part of the Unit's reorganization, the Chief Public Safety Officer has improved and enhanced communications between DOC and other law enforcement agencies. As a result, DOC is participating in a series of operations with other federal, state and local law enforcement agencies, including the Chicago Police Department. The first two of these enforcement sweeps, which target high-crime areas, led to the apprehension of 21 DOC parolees, who were returned to prison for violating the terms of their parole. Plans are under way for additional sweeps throughout the state.

Under Director Randle's guidance, the Department of Corrections also:

- Is developing a five-year strategic plan for specially designated prisons focusing on vocational and educational programs and creating special units for offenders who are aged 50 or over, those who with a history of substance abuse, and those with serious medical issues. These centralized and targeted facilities will save money and improve inmate outcomes.
- Implemented an Employee Cost-Savings Suggestion Program to identify opportunities to cut spending and suggest lower-cost alternatives for current outlays. So far, the DOC employees' suggestions have achieved \$2.5 million in savings.
- Has begun a multi-stage, comprehensive overhaul of its Information Technology resources. This IT effort is necessary to replace an inadequate, obsolete 25-year-old system with the modern, agile electronic information system required to manage a large correctional system safely and effectively. The first phase of the overhaul is currently under way.
- Hired and trained more than 700 new correctional officers, resulting in a reduction of more than \$5 million in DOC overtime costs in this fiscal year, with substantial additional savings anticipated in future years.
- Has increased its investment in the parole system, providing new vehicles and equipment and is in the process of hiring the first class of new parole agents in many years.

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- Has begun a five-year accreditation process by the American Correctional Association (ACA). During the accreditation process, ACA will evaluate processes, policies and practices at each of DOC's 27 facilities to make sure they meet all applicable industry standards. The first facility evaluated was Tamms Correctional Center. During the process, independent corrections professionals reviewed the prison's facilities, staff and procedures and recommended accreditation of Tamms by the ACA – making Tamms the first State of Illinois corrections facility to qualify for such accreditation in more than a decade.
- Obtained grant money through the Vera Institute, a nationally known, non-profit, non-partisan organization with expertise in the best correctional practices to fund an independent evaluation of DOC's processes, policies, and procedures relating to high-risk offenders in maximum-security institutions. This evaluation will help to make sure DOC is safely managing its most difficult population.
- Received a technical assistance grant from the National Institute of Corrections to review DOC's security management and critical incident procedures. The Institute is an agency within the U.S. Department of Justice that provides technical assistance to state and local correctional agencies and provides leadership in promoting modern correctional policies and practices.
- Developed a 10-point plan to modernize and reform operations at Tamms Correctional Center. Tamms is designated to house DOC's most disruptive, violent and problematic inmates. The Tamms reforms were "enthusiastically" endorsed by the John Howard Association, a prison reform advocacy group.
- Launched a pilot program to allow teleconferencing between inmates with HIV and hepatitis C to doctors at the University of Illinois Medical Center. This pilot program, which is now in place at three facilities, will improve medical care to inmates while reducing transportation costs and improving public safety. The Department plans to expand the telemedicine program to include more prisons and other medical conditions.
- Created a plan to build a special housing unit at Stateville to house prisoners temporarily when they are scheduled for courtroom proceedings in the Chicago area. This special housing unit will substantially reduce prisoner transportation and related costs and address public safety concerns.
- Developed leadership training curricula and begun an Executive Summit Training program for senior DOC managers.

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