

An Act to Reduce Mass Incarceration

Representative Jay Livingstone & Senator Joseph Boncore

Background: Today in Massachusetts, there are more than 1,050 men and women serving lifelong prison sentences that offer no hope of parole. As a result, the number of lifers serving LWOP entering the prison system is greatly outpacing the number of inmates dying in prison, making prisons more packed. These sentences operate under the assumption that a person is incapable of personal redemption and rehabilitation which starkly contrasts with the changing trends in Criminal Justice Reform.

Summary: This legislation would require the possibility of parole and would allow all people currently serving life sentences to have the opportunity for one parole hearing after serving 25 years, applying retroactively. It would not make anyone's release automatic or change parole standards.

Life Without Parole in Massachusetts

49th

Massachusetts ranks 2nd among all States in highest percentage of Life sentences within its prison population. ¹

23%

percentage of the MA prison population serving a life sentence as of 2016. ²

1,018

Number of people serving Life Without Parole sentences as of 2016 ²

629%

Percent increase of people serving Life Without Parole sentences since 1977 ³

1997

Last year that a commutation was granted for a person serving a Life Without Parole sentence ⁴

\$70k

cost of housing an inmate for one year, sick and elderly inmates can cost up to 3x as much to house ⁵

Sources

1. www.sentencingproject.org/publications/still-life-americas-use-life-long-term-sentences/, figure 4
2. www.sentencingproject.org/publications/still-life-americas-use-life-long-term-sentences/, table 4
3. www.cjpc.org/uploads/1/0/4/9/104972649/life-without-parole-a-reconsideration.pdf, pg.1 footnote 9
4. MA Governor's Council
5. www.mass.gov/files/documents/2018/06/21/2016DOCAnnualReport.09.28.17.DOCfinal.pdf