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Date: March 26, 2025

Re: SB 774 - Earned Time Act

Position: SUPPORT

To: Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie

Dear Senate Majority Leader Stewart-Cousins and Assembly Speaker Carl Heastie,

My name is Cheryl Morris, and I am a retired Deputy Superintendent of Program Services at the New York State Department of Corrections, as well as a board member for the Law Enforcement Action Partnership (LEAP). Thank you for the opportunity to express my strong support for the Earned Time Act, which would strengthen and expand good time and merit time laws to reduce unnecessary incarceration and encourage rehabilitation.

LEAP is a nonprofit group of police, prosecutors, judges, and other criminal justice professionals who speak from firsthand experience. Our mission is to make communities safer by focusing law enforcement resources on the greatest threats to public safety and working toward healing police-community relations.

I dedicated nearly 30 years of my life to the New York State Department of Corrections because I care about public safety. However, when we waste limited law enforcement resources on unnecessary incarceration, we only make it harder to keep communities safe. New York spends an average of \$115,000 a year, or over \$315 a day, to incarcerate just one person. For this significant amount of money, we must ensure that we are prioritizing the most serious safety threats. One way to do this is to create a clear pathway for incarcerated individuals to return home after demonstrating that they do not need to be in prison any longer. This process can help prevent prison overcrowding, while freeing up resources to provide other incarcerated people with the services they need to transform themselves before their release.

LawEnforcementActionPartnership.org

Formerly known as Law Enforcement Against Prohibition

Unnecessary incarceration drastically increased in the 1990s, when New York cut rehabilitative and earned time programs in response to the federal 1994 Crime Bill. Despite clear [research that longer prison sentences do little to deter crime or improve public safety](#), New Yorkers are still very limited in the amount of good and merit time they can earn off their sentences.

I am excited to see legislation introduced that would improve programs that encourage rehabilitation and personal transformation within the New York prison system. The Earned Time Act would increase the amount of time New Yorkers who are incarcerated can earn off their sentences through good behavior, completing programming, or otherwise demonstrating rehabilitation. Additionally, this act would create procedural protections and incentivize individual prisons to offer strong rehabilitative programs.

Earned time programs incentivize positive behavior in prison, and it's not hard to see why. When incarcerated people know they can significantly reduce their sentence by committing to the hard work of personal transformation, they have greater reason to focus on self-improvement and preparing for life after prison.

It is time for New York to join the majority of the United States and increase the amount of time people who are incarcerated can earn off their sentences. We are substantially behind even traditionally conservative states such as [Alabama, Nebraska, and Oklahoma](#), all of which permit people in prison to reduce their sentence length by over half through good time credits. Recent polling has shown that [74% of New Yorkers](#) support the Earned Time Act, including majorities of self-identified liberals, moderates, and conservatives, a clear sign that people across the political spectrum understand the importance of reducing mass incarceration and promoting rehabilitation in prison.

Throughout my career in the New York State Department of Corrections, I saw how unnecessary incarceration and a lack of strong rehabilitative programs in prison undermined our broader public safety goals. The New York legislature now has the chance to address both of these issues by passing the Earned Time Act.

Thank you for the opportunity to share my perspective in support of this crucial legislation.

Respectfully,

Deputy Superintendent Cheryl Morris (Ret.)
NYS Department of Corrections
Albany, NY