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STATE OF RHODE ISLAND

IN GENERAL ASSEMBLY

JANUARY SESSION, A.D. 2024

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A N A C T

RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE -- THE RHODE ISLAND FIRST STEP ACT

Introduced By: Representatives J. Lombardi, Hull, Ajello, Felix, Morales, Henries,
Stewart, and Cruz

Date Introduced: January 11, 2024

Referred To: House Judiciary

It is enacted by the General Assembly as follows:

1 SECTION 1. Title 12 of the General Laws entitled "CRIMINAL PROCEDURE" is hereby
2 amended by adding thereto the following chapter:

3 CHAPTER 19.4

4 THE RHODE ISLAND FIRST STEP ACT

5 **12-19.4-1. Policy.**

6 (a) The general assembly finds and declares that sentence reductions for various defendants
7 -serving lengthy terms of imprisonment are appropriate and hereby enacts this chapter in furtherance
8 of that finding.

9 (b) As used in this chapter, the term "department" means the Rhode Island department of
10 corrections.

11 **12-19.4-2. Sentencing factors to be considered.**

12 The court, in determining whether to impose a term of imprisonment for any defendant
13 convicted of a crime, shall consider the following:

14 (1) The seriousness of the offense, the history and characteristics of the defendant, the need
15 for rehabilitation, substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, the need for educational or
16 vocational training and the defendant's prior criminal history.

17 (2) Notwithstanding the provisions of this chapter or the provisions of rule 35 of the rules
18 of criminal procedure, a judgment of conviction that includes such a sentence constitutes a final
19 judgment for all other purposes.

1 **12-19.4-3. Dignity for female prisoners.**

2 (a) The department shall not shackle any female inmate who is pregnant while incarcerated.
3 This ban shall continue for a period of three (3) months after the ending of the pregnancy.

4 (b) The department shall provide and make available to all female prisoners sanitary
5 napkins and tampons at no cost.

6 **12-19.4-4. Modification of an imposed term of imprisonment.**

7 (a) The court may modify a term of imprisonment, upon motion of the department or upon
8 motion of the defendant if it finds that:

9 (1) Extraordinary and compelling reasons warrant such a reduction; or

10 (2) The defendant is at least sixty-five (65) years of age, has served at least two-thirds (2/3)
11 of the sentence for the offense or offenses for which the defendant is currently imprisoned, and a
12 determination has been made by the director that the defendant is not a danger to the safety of any
13 other person or the community.

14 (b) The court may modify an imposed term of imprisonment to the extent otherwise
15 expressly permitted by statute or by rule 35 of the rules of criminal procedure.

16 (c) In the case of a defendant who has been sentenced to a term of imprisonment based on
17 a sentencing provision that has subsequently been reduced, the court may reduce the term of
18 imprisonment, after considering the factors set forth in this section.

19 **12-19.4-5. Notification requirements- Modification based on terminal illness.** (a)

20 Terminal illness shall mean a disease or condition with an end-of-life trajectory.

21 (b) Notification. The department shall, subject to any applicable confidentiality
22 requirement, in the case of a defendant diagnosed with a terminal illness:

23 (1) Not later than seventy-two (72) hours after the diagnosis, notify the defendant's
24 attorney, family members or health care designee of the defendant's condition and advise them that
25 they can prepare a request for sentence reduction on the defendant's behalf;

26 (2) Not later than seven (7) days after the date of the diagnosis, provide the defendant's
27 attorney, family members or health care designee an opportunity to visit the defendant in person,
28 regardless of whether the defendant is being housed in a prison facility or hospital;

29 (3) Upon request from the defendant, family member or health care designee, ensure that
30 the department personnel assist the defendant, if not represented by counsel, in the preparation,
31 drafting and submission of a motion for sentence reduction, or assist them in preparing a request
32 that counsel be appointed to represent the defendant if the defendant otherwise qualifies for the
33 services of the public defender or court appointed counsel;

34 (4) Not later than fourteen (14) days of receipt of a request for a sentence reduction, process

1 said request; and

2 (5) Ensure that all department facilities regularly and visibly post, including in prisoner
3 handbooks, staff training manuals and materials, facility law libraries and medical and hospice
4 facilities, and make available to prisoners upon demand, notice of:

5 (i) A defendant's ability to request a sentence reduction pursuant to this section;

6 (ii) The procedures and timelines for initiation and resolving requests for sentence
7 reductions; and

8 (iii) The right to appeal the department's denial of a request to the sentencing court.

9 **12-19.4-6. Release of a prisoner.**

10 (a) A prisoner shall be released by the department on the date of the expiration of the
11 prisoner's term of imprisonment, less any time credited toward the service of the prisoner's sentence
12 as provided in subsection (b) of this section. If the date for a prisoner's release falls on a Saturday,
13 a Sunday, or a legal holiday, the prisoner shall be released by the department on the last preceding
14 weekday.

15 (b) A prisoner who is serving a term of imprisonment of more than one year, other than a
16 term of imprisonment for the duration of the prisoner's life, may receive credit toward the service
17 of the prisoner's sentence, beyond the time served, of up to one-hundred twenty (120) days at the
18 end of each year of the prisoner's term of imprisonment, beginning at the end of the first year of the
19 term, subject to determination by the department that, during that year, the prisoner has displayed
20 exemplary compliance with institutional disciplinary regulations. In the case of a prisoner serving
21 a life sentence, the prisoner may receive credit toward their parole eligibility date of up to seventy-
22 five (75) days at the end of each year. No prisoner shall receive credit toward the service of their
23 sentence if the department determines that, during that year, the prisoner has not satisfactorily
24 complied with the institutional regulations, or has incurred disciplinary infractions in violation of
25 any institutional regulation. Provided, however, the department may award the prisoner such lesser
26 credit as the department determines to be appropriate after considering the nature and frequency of
27 the violations. The department shall also consider whether the prisoner, during the relevant period,
28 has earned, or is making satisfactory progress toward earning, a high school or college diploma or
29 equivalent degree or has worked in prison industries, in any form of employment, during the period
30 of their incarceration.

31 (c) The department shall ensure that it has in effect an optional general educational
32 development (GED) program for inmates who have not earned a high school diploma or its
33 equivalent.

34 (d) The department shall ensure that a prisoner serving a term of imprisonment spends a

1 portion of the final months of that term, but in no event not more than twelve (12) months, in pre-
2 release custody, under conditions that will afford that prisoner a reasonable opportunity to adjust
3 to and prepare for the reentry of that prisoner into the community. For purposes of this chapter, pre-
4 release custody shall include home confinement, a residence in a community treatment center,
5 restitution center, mental health facility, alcohol or drug rehabilitation center or other community
6 facility or halfway house under the supervision of the department.

7 (e) The authority under this chapter may be used to place a prisoner in pre-release custody
8 for a term of ten percent (10%) of the remaining term of imprisonment of that prisoner or six (6)
9 months, whichever is longer. The department shall place prisoners with lower risk levels and lower
10 needs on home confinement for the maximum amount of time permitted under this subsection.
11 Those prisoners who are not considered to be low risk levels or those not with lower needs shall
12 also be considered for pre-release custody; provided, that the term in pre-release custody shall not
13 exceed five percent (5%) of the remaining term of imprisonment of that prisoner or four (4) months,
14 whichever is longer.

15 (f) The division of parole and probation shall, to the extent practicable, offer assistance
16 with job placement, counseling services and medical services to a prisoner during prerelease
17 custody under subsection (e) of this section.

18 (g) The department shall issue regulations pursuant to this section not later than ninety (90)
19 days after the effective date of this chapter, which shall ensure that placement in pre-release custody
20 in a community is:

21 (1) Conducted in a manner consistent with this section;

22 (2) Determined on an individual basis; and

23 (3) Of sufficient duration to provide the greatest likelihood of successful reintegration into
24 the community.

25 **12-19.4-7. Allotment of clothing, funds and transportation.**

26 (a) Upon the release of a prisoner on the expiration of the prisoner's term of imprisonment,
27 the department shall furnish the prisoner with:

28 (1) Suitable clothing;

29 (2) If the prisoner is considered indigent, an amount of money, not more than five hundred
30 dollars (\$500), determined by the department to be consistent with the needs of the offender and
31 the public interest; and

32 (3) Transportation to the prisoner's bona fide residence within the state; provided, however,
33 that no transportation shall be provided to a place outside of this state if the prisoner is a Rhode
34 Island resident or if the prisoner has not obtained approval from the department to transfer his or

1 her probation/parole to another state.

2 **12-19.4-8. Mandatory functional literacy requirement.**

3 (a) The department shall have in effect a mandatory functional literacy program for all
4 mentally capable inmates who are not functionally literate in each correctional institution within
5 six (6) months from the effective date of this chapter.

6 (b) Each mandatory functional literacy program shall include a requirement that each
7 inmate participate in such program for a mandatory period sufficient to provide the inmate with an
8 adequate opportunity to achieve functional literacy, and appropriate incentives which lead to
9 successful completion of such programs shall be developed and implemented.

10 (c) As used in this section, the term "functional literacy" means an eighth grade equivalence
11 in reading and mathematics on a nationally recognized standardized test or functional competency
12 or literacy on a nationally recognized criterion-referenced test.

13 (d) Non-English speaking inmates shall be required to participate in an English-as-a-second
14 language program until they function at an eighth grade equivalence on a nationally recognized
15 educational achievement test, or until the expiration of their sentence, whichever comes first.

16 **12-19.4-9. Release from confinement.**

17 (a) The department shall establish pre-release planning procedures that help prisoners
18 acclimate back into society. The planning procedures shall include providing defendants with
19 information in the areas of education, vocational training, employment opportunities, the
20 availability of medical care, mental health and substance abuse counseling and community
21 resources that would otherwise assist them upon their release.

22 (b) The department shall inform a person who is released from prison and required to
23 register under the sex offender registration and community notification requirements of chapter
24 37.1 of title 11 as they apply to that person.

25 (c) The department shall assist prisoners, prior to release from a term of imprisonment, in
26 obtaining a social security card, driver's license or other official photo identification, and a birth
27 certificate.

28 (d) The department, the state and its agencies, officers, and employees shall be immune
29 from liability based on good faith conduct in carrying out the provisions of this section.

30 **12-19.4-10. Recidivism prevention.**

31 (a) In order to prevent recidivism, increase public safety, rebuild ties between offenders
32 and their families and to encourage the development of and expand the availability of the evidence
33 based programs such as substance abuse treatment, the department through its division of probation
34 and parole shall provide sufficient transitional services for up to one year to include education,

1 vocational training, employment opportunities, the availability of medical care, mental health and
2 substance abuse counseling and community resources that would otherwise assist them upon their
3 release.

4 (b) In order to achieve these goals, the department shall:

5 (1) Assess each prisoner's skill level, including academic, vocational, health, cognitive,
6 interpersonal, daily living, and related reentry skills, at the beginning of the term of imprisonment
7 of that prisoner to identify any areas in need of improvement prior to reentry;

8 (2) Generate a skills development plan for each prisoner to monitor skills enhancement and
9 reentry readiness throughout incarceration;

10 (3) Ensure that priority is given to the reentry needs of high-risk populations, such as sex
11 offenders, career criminals, and prisoners with mental health problems;

12 (4) Coordinate and collaborate with other agencies including the department of health and
13 criminal justice community-based organizations, and faith-based organizations to help effectuate a
14 seamless reintegration of prisoners into communities;

15 (5) Collect information about a prisoner's family relationships, parental responsibilities,
16 and contacts with children to help prisoners maintain important familial relationships and support
17 systems during incarceration and after release from custody; and

18 (6) Provide incentives, as the department deems appropriate, for prisoner participation in
19 skills development programs.

20 **12-19.4-11. Elderly and terminally ill offenders.**

21 (a) The department shall establish a program to determine the effectiveness of removing
22 eligible elderly offenders and eligible terminally ill offenders from a prison facility and placing
23 such offenders in pre-release custody until the expiration of the prison term to which the offender
24 was sentenced.

25 (b) In carrying out the program as described in this section, the department may release
26 some or all eligible elderly offenders and eligible terminally ill offenders from a prison facility to
27 pre-release custody.

28 (c) A violation by an eligible elderly offender or eligible terminally ill offender of the terms
29 of pre-release custody, or the commission of another offense while in pre-release custody, shall
30 result in the return of that offender to the designated institution in which that offender was
31 imprisoned immediately before placement in pre-release custody or to another appropriate
32 institution, as determined by the department.

33 (d) "Eligible elderly offender" means an offender in the custody of the department:

34 (1) Who is not less than sixty-five (65) years of age;

1 (2) Who has served at least two-thirds (2/3) of the term of imprisonment to which the
2 offender was sentenced and in the case of an offender serving a life sentence, that has served at
3 least the minimum term of years required before parole eligibility; and

4 (3) Who does not have a history of violence while incarcerated, has not attempted to escape
5 or escaped during his or her term of imprisonment and who has not engaged in conduct which
6 would place them at substantial risk of re-offending or endangering any person if released to pre-
7 release confinement.

8 (e) "Eligible terminally ill offender" means an offender in the custody of the department:

9 (1) Who has been determined by a licensed physician approved by the department to be:

10 (i) In need of care at a nursing home, intermediate care facility, or assisted living facility
11 as those terms are defined in section 232 of the National Housing Act (12 U.S.C. 1715w); or

12 (ii) Diagnosed with a terminal illness.

13 (2) Who has served at least two-thirds (2/3) of the term of imprisonment to which the
14 offender was sentenced and in the case of an offender serving a life sentence, that has served at
15 least the minimum term of years required before parole eligibility; and

16 (3) Who does not have a history of violence while incarcerated, has not attempted to escape
17 or escaped during his or her term of imprisonment and who has not engaged in conduct which
18 would place him or her at substantial risk of re-offending or endangering any person if released to
19 pre-release confinement.

20 SECTION 2. This act shall take effect upon passage.

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EXPLANATION
BY THE LEGISLATIVE COUNCIL
OF

A N A C T

RELATING TO CRIMINAL PROCEDURE -- THE RHODE ISLAND FIRST STEP ACT

1 This act would establish the Rhode Island first step program requiring the department of
2 corrections to assist offenders with reintegration into society, provide them with counseling,
3 medical care, and education and provide for modification of imprisonment or relocation to pre-
4 release confinement for elderly and terminally ill offenders.

5 This act would take effect upon passage.

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