
COMPLICATING THE NARRATIVE: VICTIM AND SURVIVOR VIEWS ON PAROLE

LANE LEWIS ISRAELI



INTRODUCTION

- Survivor of Domestic & Sexual Violence
- Bachelor's Degree in Sociology & Religious Studies, Research Focus: Domestic Violence in Religious Contexts
- DV Victim Advocate at Detroit Police Department Precincts
 - Assisted survivors in navigating the criminal & civil legal systems, obtaining necessary social service supports
 - Trained Law Enforcement Officers in Domestic Violence
- Sexual Assault Program Manager at DV SA Service Agency
- Developed & Led an Interdisciplinary Sexual Assault Response Team
- Master's Degree in Conflict Analysis & Resolution, Concentration: Trauma-Informed Restorative Practice (Expanded focus to survivors to many forms of violent crime)
- Strengths-based, trauma-informed, empowerment framework
 - Recognizes a variety of survivor narratives & experiences
 - Prioritizes the empowerment of individual survivors in their healing journey

CRIME SURVIVORS SPEAK: THE FIRST EVER NATIONAL SURVEY OF VICTIMS' VIEWS ON SAFETY & JUSTICE, 2016

By a 2 to 1 margin, victims prefer that the criminal justice system focus more on rehabilitating people who commit crimes than punishing them.

6 out of 10 victims prefer shorter prison sentences and more spending on prevention and rehabilitation to sentences that keep people in prison for as long as possible.

By a margin of 2 to 1, victims prefer more investment in community supervision, such as probation and parole, to more investment in prisons and jails.

These results were consistent across all demographic groups, including race, gender, age, income and political party affiliation.

They were also consistent between victims of violent crime and victims of nonviolent crime.

Victims in the violent crime category included those who had experienced rape and other forms of sexual assault, stalking, robbery, assault, the murder of a family member, or more than 1 of these crimes.

SURVIVOR ACTIVISM & POLICY WORK

New York:

- People's Campaign for Parole Justice, a statewide grassroots campaign for parole reform
 - 3 Elements
 - Fair & Timely Parole: Ensure meaningful and fair parole hearings for those who are already parole eligible
 - Elder Parole: Allow incarcerated people of 55 and older (served >15 years) an opportunity for parole
 - Fair & Fully Staffed Parole Board: Experience in social work, healthcare, reentry services, and mental health
 - Supported by:
 - New York State Coalition Against Sexual Assault
 - Downstate Coalition for Crime Victims
 - Crime Victims Treatment Center
 - New York City Alliance Against Sexual Assault
 - Albany County Crime Victim & Sexual Violence Center
 - Championed by well-known anti-rape and survivor activists

SURVIVOR ACTIVISM & POLICY WORK

- Oregon:
 - 2012 "Oregon Out of Balance" Campaign
 - Created by Call to Safety (formerly the Portland Women's Crisis Line), Oregon Coalition against Domestic and Sexual Violence, & Partnership for Safety & Justice
 - Advocated for a public safety system that holds people appropriately accountable, supports crime survivors, and invests in community-based crime prevention, rather than prisons
 - HB 2002; SB 620A; HB 2172B
 - Ensure success of people on parole by limiting the number and complexity of conditions imposed
 - Direct funds to services for victims, including incarcerated victims and victims on pretrial release
 - Redirect funds to the establishment of a continuum of community-based sanctions, services and programs designed to reduce recidivism and decrease utilization of imprisonment
 - Created in partnership and consultation with people who are justice involved, crime survivors, and the families and communities of both

RELEVANT REFORMS ACROSS THE COUNTRY

- Alliances between crime victims and survivors, system-impacted individuals, and the communities and policy advocates of both groups have informed and advocated for the reforms that:
 - Improve probation outcomes: reducing prison as a response for technical rule violations, incentivizing rehabilitation, addressing the challenges that fines and fees pose for success ([Texas](#), [Oregon](#), [Florida](#))
 - Establish clear and objective criteria for parole decisions to reduce excessive lengths of stay ([Michigan](#))
 - Allow the state to release seriously ill and medically frail people in state prison on medical parole ([Michigan](#))
 - Expand earned credit for people in prison ([Illinois](#), [Ohio](#), [California](#))
 - Authorize probation instead of incarceration for low-level offenses ([Illinois](#))
 - Authorize parole consideration for people serving sentences for certain felonies ([California](#))

THE FALSE BINARY BETWEEN SURVIVORS AND THOSE INCARCERATED

- 79% of women in federal and state prisons are survivors of domestic violence and over 60% are survivors of sexual violence before their incarceration.
- Convictions are often the result of survival strategies
- Criminalized survivors of domestic and sexual violence have highlighted the importance of supportive services, such as stable and affordable housing, and counseling, to reduce the number of incarcerated survivors.
- In 2020, the National Network to End Domestic Violence (NNEDV) wrote a list of policy recommendations for the Biden-Harris administration in which they stated:
 - Reducing the number of incarcerated survivors of domestic and sexual violence must be a priority.

IMAGINING A SURVIVOR-SENSITIVE PAROLE PROCESS: PRIOR TO HEARINGS

- Empowered choices in whether and how they will be notified
 - Mail
 - Phone, Text, Email – Secure Link to updated, informative victim information system
- All notification is early, comprehensive, informative and supportive
- The right (but not the obligation) to be heard in a meaningful way
- Empowered choices in whether and how they will participate
 - Written or recorded statement
 - Re-use of previous written or recorded statement
 - Virtual participation in hearing
 - In-person participation at hearing
 - Who will attend with them as support
- New opportunities to engage supportive services made available at time of notification
- Opportunities for restorative dialogue prior to the hearing
- Sensitive Reviews and Appeals Timeline

IMAGINING A SURVIVOR-SENSITIVE PAROLE PROCESS: AT HEARINGS

- New Opportunities for Healing
 - Opportunity to hear offender take accountability (one of the only places the criminal legal system where this may happen)
 - Opportunity to witness the growth and transformation of the offender
- Establish a Sense of Safety and Security for Release
 - 95% of offenders will eventually be released
 - Many victims and survivors have only their past experiences to help them determine their level of safety and can only imagine an offender's return to the community based on that experience, seeing the transformation of the person under review may make them feel safer about their eventual release
 - Transparent, evidence-based risk assessment tool specific to domestic and sexual violence offenses to ensure parole does not take place in cases of elevated risk to the survivor's safety

CONCLUDING STATEMENT:

Commissioners, I took the time to be here today, though I don't have any personal investment in the state of Maine. But, as someone who has worked directly with survivors from marginalized groups, and as a survivor myself, I know how revictimizing it can be when your identity is leveraged to support policies that you would never support yourself.

I recognize that there are some survivors who would not support the reinstatement of parole. But I am here today to complicate the narrative that this is how all survivors feel. To ask you, whatever decision you make, not to use me and others like me to maintain the status quo. But instead to listen to what is being said by me, and more importantly, by survivors all over the country, when we ask for smart and sensitive, rather than tough, justice policies. I hope that the information I have provided will assist you in that work. Thank you so much for your time.