

Press Republican – Editorial - State should expand shock program

1/10/2016

The State Department of Corrections and Community Supervision recently reported that its two shock-incarceration programs have saved taxpayers billions of dollars.

The shock camps, including one in Moriah, also turn out parolees with a much lower rate of recidivism.

So why, we ask, are there only two shock camps in New York state?

The Shock Incarceration Program is an alternative to conventional incarceration that has graduated more than 50,000 people since it was established in 1987.

Instead of serving time in a regular prison facility, convicted people who are sentenced to Moriah Shock Incarceration Facility in Essex County or Lakeview Shock Incarceration Correctional Facility in Chautauqua County serve a shorter sentence designed to prepare them for early parole release.

The program accepts people convicted of drug offenses and other non-violent crimes.

It is not an easy way of doing time — think military boot camp.

Shock participants take part in what the state describes as "comprehensive life skills programs that include academic education, group counseling, intensive alcohol and substance abuse treatment, physical training, drill instruction and work crews."

They also undergo 108 hours of substance-abuse treatment and education in each six-month session.

After "graduation," most get community supervision by parole officers.

The statistics prove the program's success.

A recent three-year recidivism study that tracked 3,087 shock graduates showed that just 28 percent returned to the prison system for either committing a new felony conviction or violating parole, as compared to the overall statewide recidivism rate of 40 percent.

And DOCCS reports that the Shock Incarceration Program has saved state taxpayers \$1.495 billion since its inception by keeping non-violent offenders out of the general prison population through sentence reductions.

Acting DOCCS Commissioner Anthony J. Annucci attributed the program's success "to the well-trained and dedicated staff the facilities have to offer and the support of the forward-thinking individuals who created the program 28 years ago."

Yet, as of last November, just 728 inmates were participating in the Shock Program, 624 men and 104 women. Moriah Shock graduated 362 men in 2015, and Lakeview released 624 men and 127 women, according to numbers DOCCS provided to the Press-Republican.

Not all of the 52,423 people imprisoned by DOCCS could qualify to participate, but certainly many more defendants would be eligible if more shock facilities were available, thus increasing the savings.

But the state has shown only lukewarm support for the program over the years.

In 2011, then-Gov. David Paterson declared that Moriah Shock would be shut down to reduce excess capacity in the state prison system.

The community fought back with personal stories and statistics that showed the value of the program and the economic impact on the region. A study by SUNY Plattsburgh showed the closure would reduce housing values in Moriah by \$23 million. The prison employs 102 people, including 63 in security positions

So, here is a program that saves taxpayers a considerable amount of money, offers an incarceration alternative for lower level offenses, reduces the number of repeat offenders and provides jobs and an economic boost to the community.

That's a state program not just worth perpetuating but one that demands expansion