

LWV New Hampshire study of the impact of the incarceration of women in New Hampshire.

This study began in 2009 and continued to 2012, when our position (see below) was adopted.

Background research:

Our study committee, consisting of approximately 30 members of the League from various local Leagues and the state board, began with two previous studies of the challenges faced by women offenders in NH: “Women Behind Bars”, a study by the NH Women's Policy Institute (2008), and “Double Jeopardy”, a study by the NH Commission on the Status of Women (2004). (These articles are on the Incarceration Study page of our website: LWVNH.org)

We also found articles, websites, and books that addressed the topic of female offenders on a national scale. From that print research and discussion, we developed questions to be answered as we conducted our field research.

Field trips and speakers:

We visited the eight county houses of correction that hold female inmates, the state prison for women, and the state prison's “halfway house” for women. We toured the facilities, interviewed the county superintendents, the state prison warden, and numerous staff members at all locations. In addition we were granted interviews with the incarcerated women themselves. We also had several released felons come to meetings as guest speakers.

We also met with the person in charge of parole, the community corrections director, the Commissioner of Corrections for NH, the Assistant Commissioner, and the director of the women's “halfway house.” When we began to investigate alternatives to incarceration, we attended a session of the Grafton County Drug Court, where we were granted extraordinary access to the team that runs this alternative program. We have since attended “graduation” ceremonies for several offenders who avoided felony charges by completing the intensive drug court program.

We attended a state-wide conference on mental health courts in 2013, yet another alternative to incarceration that is being established in NH.

At the county level, during the course of our study, two new houses of correction have opened to replace cramped and aged facilities that we viewed in 2009, and we visited those new facilities. An addition to another HOC houses a new “step-up” program emphasizing community corrections—housing inmates as they prepare for re-entry and then hold jobs in the community. Another county is opening a building in spring of 2013, to house newly released offenders as they seek work and more permanent housing in the community, which we will visit when we can.

Consensus and position:

The results of our research and visits were made available to members during the course of the study through discussions at local League events and in our state League newsletter. Consensus was reached in two stages and resulted in our position (see below).

From this position the League is advocating for improvements in the treatment of women offenders, with a goal of reduced recidivism and improved futures for the women and society.

Timeliness of the study:

In the fall of 2011 the US Commission on Civil Rights came out with a scathing indictment of the NH Prison for Women at Goffstown (NH's only prison for women), citing gross inequalities with the men's prison and deficiencies in space and programs for women. A lawsuit is pending, filed by four female inmates.

Also in the fall of 2011 the League began planning a project to raise the initial funds for intranet

education equipment and staff training at the women's prison, in an attempt to offer more high school and vocational preparation courses to women. This project got derailed almost as soon as the Department of Corrections proposed it, when the Governor instructed the Department to issue requests for proposals for privatizing the state's prison system. League efforts shifted to studying private prisons, then opposing this effort in NH (based on both our incarceration position and the newly adopted LWVUS position on privatization). In coalition with other groups (see NH Prison Watch website), we took action to oppose privatization. In April 2013 that privatization proposal was rejected by the state, based on a third-party negative assessment of the bids received.

The League is now (April 2013) supporting the line in the state's capital budget to build a new women's prison, probably on the campus of the existing men's prison at Concord.

We are also supporting efforts to establish more drug courts and mental health courts in NH, as alternatives to incarceration.

Sharing the study:

Rather than expend efforts on a detailed print report of our study, the study committee determined it would have more impact by offering talks and a powerpoint presentation to community groups. We have been doing that since summer 2012, including a large church conference, an adult education course, and numerous smaller events across the state. We have also used newspaper articles and radio and TV talk shows to spread information to the public. We have two more adult education courses for fall of 2013 to share our findings and recommendations.

For further information, contact us via our website: LWVNH.org

LWVNH position:

INCARCERATION of Women in New Hampshire—Position adopted April 2012 following our three years of study.

LWVNH believes that the incarceration of women in NH, whether in the county Houses of Correction, the women's prison or the halfway house, impacts not only the offenders and their families but also society as a whole. The League believes that the corrections system should encompass gender-specific strategies in their policies for the treatment of women within that system. The League also believes that the goal of the corrections system for women should be to provide opportunities for rehabilitation while recognizing the need to address and repair the harm caused by criminal behavior.

The League supports the following:

The use of alternatives to incarceration for non-violent offenders who can be safely managed in the community

The strengthening of policies designed to support the role of the mother in her children's lives

The use of gender-specific assessment tools

A facility used to house offenders must provide transportation (or be located on public transportation routes) for legal services, work opportunities and health care. Lack of transportation cannot continue to be a barrier to full participation in available and necessary services.

Any facility used to house offenders must have adequate and appropriate space for the provision of the diverse services needed for women offenders.

A priority emphasis on rehabilitative programs that

- ② provide parity between programs offered for men and women while recognizing the gender-specific needs of women
- ② ensure focus on and treatment of a woman's pre-existing trauma
- ② use evidence-based treatment protocols for offenders with substance abuse and/or mental health related diagnoses.
- ② increase educational opportunities, including vocational training
- ② incorporate the use of technology to increase an offender's access to programs.

An emphasis on the development of an individual plan for reintegration into society for each incarcerated female.

Increased collaboration among the county departments of corrections.

The primacy of the State's and counties' roles in managing functions of incarceration.

The goals of SB500 (The Justice Reinvestment Project, enacted in 2010, modified in 2011)

- ② To reduce recidivism by providing community supervision and treatment as determined by a pre-release needs assessment,
- ② To increase public safety by requiring close supervision of potentially dangerous offenders upon release,
- ② To reduce prison costs by lessening the time spent incarcerated and shifting the last months of the sentence to supervised living in the community,
- ② To reinvest some of the prison savings in community-based programs supporting newly released offenders
- ② To enact swift and sure sanctions of parole offenders, without the cost and delay of a hearing.

League Action would include measures that would address the following:

Sentencing alternatives, including drug and mental health courts, probation, restorative justice, weekend sentencing, use of electronic monitoring or fines should be considered as efforts to keep families together and allow offenders to earn a living, pay taxes and contribute to their communities.

- ② Work toward the establishment of mental health and drug courts in every county or circuit court division
- ② Support reliable stable funding for community support and services in alternative programs
- ② Strengthen linkages and increase the capacity of community agencies that work with women offender

Policies to support the role of the mother

- ② Parenting education and support programs within the HOC, prison and halfway house
- ② Increased DCYF involvement in support of services available to children and women
- ② Alternatives to placement for children of offenders
- ② Support for visitation including those children in foster care
- ② Adequate notification of parental rights termination hearings and priority efforts to ensure woman's attendance at those hearings
- ② Release to home monitoring prior to delivery of a child by a pregnant offender whenever possible

The use of gender specific assessment tools at both the women's prison and the county HOCs.

Ensure intake and assessment collection of information specific to females

Facility concerns

- ② Facilities used to incarcerate women should be located near public transportation so that families can visit and women whose classification allows them go out into the community have access to transportation for work or other programs as prescribed by their treatment plans.
- ② If a facility is not located near affordable and accessible public transportation, the facility should provide transportation for work opportunities, legal interactions for the offender and health care that must be treated off-site.
- ② The facility must have adequate and appropriate space for living, treatment, education, visitation with children, and recreation/exercise.
- ② Overcrowding, antiquated or inappropriate living or program areas, unkempt and poorly maintained space should not be tolerated.
- ② Building or leasing a new women's prison and halfway house should be priority issues for the state of NH.

Priority emphasis on programs within the incarceration facility.

- ② Services and programs that include but are not limited to: education, vocational training, substance abuse/mental health treatment and counseling, parenting, self-help, health care, recreation, spiritual guidance and transition plans to re-enter the community should be provided using evidence based programming. Where appropriate, the programs should be gender-specific.
- ② Parity of programs offered to men and to women should be a priority.
- ② Increased emphasis on education and vocational training to assist women to find employment when released. Steps should include better collection of data, individual planning for educational opportunities and employment goals, and designing programs/courses around needs of current inmates to benefit women most effectively.
- ② Increased efforts to incorporate technology to expand opportunities for additional programs. Use of satellite learning could be a cost-effective resource for expanding educational opportunities, including the delivery of college courses.
- ② Programs offered within the prison should include recognition of a woman's pre-existing trauma. Treatment for that trauma should be given so that other programming can be effective.
- ② An increased priority on treatment for offenders with substance abuse and/or mental health diagnoses. This would include the availability of individual counseling on a regular basis when needed.

An emphasis on the development of an individual plan for reintegration into society for each incarcerated female.

Housing, health care, counseling and treatment (if required), employment, and family issues all need to be addressed in each individual's re-entry plan.

Increased collaboration among the county departments of corrections

- ② A uniform method for intake and assessment would be helpful for interpretation of data, seeking grants, tracking repeat offenders from county to county and guiding policy at the state level.
- ② Sharing of successful programs, particularly those alternatives to incarceration offered within counties, could benefit all.
- ② Strengthen the informed participation of the county delegation, lawyers, judges and community support providers.

The state's and the counties' primary roles in managing all aspects of incarceration.

If the legislature or the county delegation determines that a function within incarceration could be better managed through privatization, there must be clear goals, a contract that is specific with measurable benchmarks toward agreed-upon performance standards and penalties for noncompliance.

The corrections department must provide oversight of the private contract.

The state and/or county should not resort to increased levels of incarceration for women merely to fulfill terms of a contract with private companies.

Adopted by the LWVNH Board April 27, 2012