



Commuting WI Life Prison Terms Must Include Reentry Process

Susan M. Stanton, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Alvin Thomas, University of Wisconsin-Madison

Governor Evers recently signed two executive orders that established clearer routes for prisoners across Wisconsin to have their sentences commuted. People are eligible to apply to have their sentences shortened, or be released early, if they have completed more than 50% of their sentences or served at least 20 years of a life sentence. They must also demonstrate, during their time inside, a record of rehabilitation and good behavior.

Thousands would be eligible for commutation according to a statement by public defender Jennifer Bias, though far fewer will be considered and even fewer will be granted. Importantly, while creating an opportunity for some individuals to demonstrate rehabilitation, Executive Order 287 also attempts to protect community safety by making people convicted of sexual assault and crimes against children ineligible for commutation. Additionally, in an effort to redress policy that is now deemed unconstitutional, Evers' actions also establish a special pathway for juveniles sentenced to life in prison without parole to have their sentences commuted. Executive Orders 287 and 288 democratized the commutation process by empowering a 14-member Advisory Board to review applications and make recommendations to the Governor. It shares power with citizens to assist in the rehabilitation and fair restoration of fellow citizens.