

## **Consensus of League of Women Voters Grand Traverse Area**

The League of Women Voters Grand Traverse Area held three consensus meetings on Prison Restudy. They were Benzie Unit with 13 members, Leelanau Unit with 16 members and Grand Traverse Area General Membership meeting with 10 members.

The responses are a compilation of the consensus of all three meetings.

### **LWVMI PRISON/JAIL RESTUDY CONSENSUS QUESTIONS**

#### **1. In terms of guiding Michigan's criminal justice systems, how would you rank the following sets of principles in terms of importance?**

We had difficulty with the word "rank." However the general consensus was that Therapeutic is most important, with Restorative second and Retributive third. All were important to INCLUDE.

##### **Retributive Justice**

Important to Include

##### **Restorative Justice**

Important to Include

##### **Therapeutic Justice**

Important to Include

##### **Comments:**

It is believed by those present that Therapeutic Justice is the most important since this method has the most likelihood of changing behavior if properly implemented.

In addition, it was stated that all three methods might be used over the course of the incarceration as it suitably met the needs, changes, and maturation of the prisoner. Therefore, we believe that none should be exclusive over the other.

It is difficult to choose one because the type of justice varies according to the type of crime, age of prisoner, recidivism, and other factors.

#### **2. Should the League support alternatives to incarceration? Should alternatives be used for individuals who can be safely managed in the community?**

YES

Comments:

Criteria should be written and used to identify these individuals. This would require a change in the guidelines for sentencing by giving the judge discretion in sentencing.

It is important that prisoners be able to carry on with their job, family relationships if deemed possible. The cost to taxpayers would be less too.

**Should an effort be made to find alternatives to incarceration for persons with mental illness who have committed crimes?**

YES

**Should the League support ending incarceration of juveniles in adult facilities?**

YES

Comments:

Juveniles should not be tried as adults.

If a juvenile facility is nearby, the juvenile should be housed there. If the only juvenile facility is a great distance from his/her family, it is best to find a suitable nearby facility to house him/her. It all depends on the circumstances.

**3. Should the State of Michigan pay all the costs of an indigent person's defense?**

YES

Comment:

No, if other funds (private) can be found.

Network of family and nonprofit funds to be used.

Greater use should be made to train lawyers in the defense of the indigent by forming and funding an Office of Public Defender. In addition, students in law school could help by helping with the investigation necessary to build a case, etc. such as recently done at Northwestern University in Illinois.

**4. Should individuals sentenced to prison forfeit any of the following rights as citizens?**

Note: There was a marked difference among the three meetings.

**Right to Vote**

NO

The Benzie Unit, with thirteen members, decided that YES was the answer.

**Access to the Courts**

NO

The Benzie Unit, with thirteen members, decided that YES was the answer.

**Access to FOIA**

YES

The Leelanau Unit, with sixteen members, decided that NO was the answer.

**Protection of Michigan Civil Rights Act**

NO

Comments:

Forfeiture of right to vote only while incarcerated.

Provide absentee ballots only if prisoner was registered to vote prior to incarceration. (several people commented in this way)

**5. How important is each of the following forms of oversight?****Ombudsman**

Important

**Media access to prisons**

Important

Comment: Helps with oversight.

**Policies that encourage visitation**

Important

**Careful oversight of privatized services with penalties for nonperformance**

Important

Comments:

It is important to consider geographic access by the prisoner's family.

There is not enough transparency within the system.

Privatization should only be used for services within the prison such as food, health care, etc. and not for running the prison as a whole. Those in charge of the prison should be state employees accountable to the Department of Corrections and the state legislators.

**6. Which of the following should be responsibilities of the prison system?****Humane conditions**

YES

**Mental health care at community standards**

YES

**Health care at community standards**

YES

**Timely rehabilitative programming**

YES

**Assistance with transitioning to freedom**

YES

Comments: Assistance with transitioning to freedom with assistance from other community organizations.

Local community responsibility.

**7. Which of the following are to be expected of the parole board?**

**Objective rationale for holding someone past his or her minimum date**

YES

**Ensuring that all individuals are released early enough to provide some transitional supervision**

YES

Comment: This should be ongoing during incarceration too.

Comments not on specific questions in the Consensus Restudy:

There is more need for early childhood education. Some people even suggested money be reallocated from money in the prison budget to education of young children.

The Parole Board should be selected by civil service standards and not be political appointments.

The questions themselves caused some problems. They could have been worded differently.