



# A start to solving prison overcrowding

One of the major accomplishments of the Legislature this year was the enactment of a major prison reform law. LB 907 was introduced by Senator Brad Ashford of Omaha, and passed on Final Reading by a vote of 46 to 3.

LB 907 was prompted by the fact that the Nebraska prison system holds so many inmates that it is currently at 155 percent of its original design capacity.

The murder of four people in Omaha last year, by now-convicted Nikko Jenkins who had been recently released from prison as a result of our state's "good time" law, also contributed to the debate about reforming our prison system.

LB 907 is designed to reduce recidivism rates and find innovative ways to reduce the prison

population while keeping Nebraska's citizens safe, and keeping spending under control.

The bill has a total price tag of \$14.5 million dollars. This will be divided among the Office of Probation, the State Department of Correctional Services, and the Nebraska Center for Justice Research at the University of Nebraska at Omaha.

The four main points of the legislation are as follows:

- It allows the state to track parolees once they are released back into society using a computer-monitored GPS system.

- When a prisoner has served 80 percent of the sentence a re-entry into society plan must be put into place by the Corrections Department.

- It requires the Commission of Public Advocacy to find areas in Nebraska that have shortages of legal professionals.

- The Nebraska Justice Reinvestment Working Group is created, and will work with the Council of State Governments in order to study how to reduce

prison populations.

The Justice Reinvestment Working Group will consist of four state senators, four representatives of the Executive branch, and four representatives of the Judicial branch of government. Governor Heineman, Speaker Greg Adams, and Chief Justice of the Nebraska Supreme Court Michael Heavican will serve as equal co-chairmen of the Working Group. The first meeting will kick-off within the next month.

As with any other government programs, part of the success of LB 907 will require the watchful eyes of Nebraska citizens to make sure the law is being implemented efficiently and effectively.

LB 907 will not fully solve our states problems with prison overcrowding but the law is an important first step in the right direction. As I've previously written, public safety is one of the key reasons that we all pay taxes.

The good time law that allows prisoners to cut one day off their sentence for every one day that they don't commit an offense

should have been changed to make prisoners earn these days off.

I strongly support Governor Heineman's proposal which would allow prisoners to earn — rather than automatically receive — good time through participation in rehabilitation programs during their sentence.

While the Corrections Department has put into place some regulatory changes that should help to extend prison sentences for violent offenders, substantial changes to the automatic "one-half" sentence reduction will require a future legislative change. I look forward to supporting that proposal in the next session.

As always, your input and questions are very important and helpful to me. Please do not hesitate to contact me or my staff if I may be of assistance. Please reach me at Senator Bill Kintner, 1115 State Capitol, Lincoln, NE, 68509 (402-471-2613), or at my email: [bkintner@leg.ne.gov](mailto:bkintner@leg.ne.gov).



Column by State Sen. Bill Kintner