

Report clarifies controversial Illinois 'early release' prison program

October 29 2010, By Hilary Hurd Anyaso

Over the past year, Illinois residents have heard troubling stories about a program providing men and women “early release” from state prisons. Reporters and commentators have written sensational accounts of a “secret” program by which the Department of Corrections “shaved” the sentences of dangerous and violent prisoners. Political candidates have either attacked the program called MGT (Meritorious Good Time) and MGT-Push or disowned it.

A new report by Malcolm Young, director of Northwestern University School of Law’s Bluhm Legal Clinic’s Program for Prison Reentry Strategies, aims to set the record straight about the controversial program, which according to the report, has been misrepresented by politicians and the media, ultimately leading to the program’s termination.

“Contrary to media reports, MGT-Push has not been responsible for an illegal or premature release of a dangerous criminal or for the commission of additional violent crime,” Young said. “MGT-Push did not cut prison sentences by months or years. It did not add to the public risk or endanger public safety. And it was not ‘secret.’”

As the report, *Setting the Record Straight: The Truth About ‘Early Release’*, explains, the MGT program originated and was expanded beyond present day use under the administration of Republican Gov. James Thompson. MGT-Push was a modest modification which brought the administration of “good time” credit into closer compliance with the

law but made little change in the length of prison terms.

“Prosecutors, defense attorneys and judges determine the sentences imposed on prisoners knowing full well the effect of ‘good time’ credits approved decades ago by the legislature,” Young said. “While it has been assailed for reducing sentences, the facts are that the Department of Corrections has less say than almost any other criminal justice agency in the amount of time prisoners serve.”

The report draws on factual and legal analysis to show that most of the charges laid against MGT and MGT-Push were false.

The report counters each of the major allegations made against MGT and MGT-Push, including that:

- MGT-Push was responsible for an illegal or premature release of a dangerous criminal;
- MGT-Push resulted in the commission of additional violent crime;
- MGT-Push cut prison sentences by months or years, as alleged, instead of the 37-day average it achieved;
- MGT-Push increased the risk to the public; and
- MGT-Push was a “secret.”

The pressure to end MGT-Push and to suspend MGT has had severe consequences: the controversy and the decisions it spawned have resulted in a sharp and sudden increase in the [prison](#) population that will overburden corrections and cost the state millions of dollars.

Provided by Northwestern University

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