



September 26, 2018

Illinois Department of Corrections and Chicago

In 2016, an estimated 21,000 people returned to Chicago from prison. Parolees return to primarily four zip codes in the city, creating segregated areas that receive a large number of returnees, and these zip codes are mostly on the West Side of Chicago. According to Chicago Coalition for the Homeless, 1,200 individuals are released directly from prison to homeless shelters in Chicago annually, while as many as 48 percent of individuals in Chicago emergency shelters report having a felony conviction.

In 2018, Illinois reduced funding for most programs, but increased its budget for the Department of Corrections, spending almost \$1.5 billion annually to incarcerate just over 44,000 inmates at the average cost of \$34,000/inmate.

In spite of these resources, we continue to hear of major problems within the Illinois Department of Corrections. Prisoners are not receiving the educational opportunities they need to be equipped for a successful return home. Illinois must put trade and vocational training or career technical education programs in prisons. The programs must be designed to teach inmates about general employment skills or skills needed for specific jobs and industries. We still hear of misuse of solitary confinement. There are major deficiencies in prisoner medical and mental health care. On release, many ex-offenders do not have the medications they need, even though they are supposed to receive two weeks of medication with follow-up appointments in the community to which they are returning. Many still leave prison without an ID, in spite of several Illinois laws that require it.

Even though I introduced Ban the Box legislation and it eventually became law, people still do not have the opportunities they need to find a job to be able to support their families when they return home.

Furthermore, due to the issue of prisoner gerrymandering, prisoners are counted in the district where the prisons are located rather than their home district. This unjust system prevents any accountability and an undercounting of people in Chicago.

If we don't reform our prisons, the streets in our city will continue to be a problem. Criminal justice reform and reform of the Department of Corrections are needed if we want safer and more vibrant communities.

Because of these many issues, I will be holding a press conference called Operation Save Lives, calling for reform of the Illinois Department of Corrections, on Friday, October 5, 2018 at the Stateville Correctional Center in Crest Hill, IL. We will leave at 9 a.m. from West Austin Development Center, 4920 W. Madison St, Chicago, in a convoy of buses to Stateville to demand action and reform. Please consider joining us.

The Illinois Department of Corrections spends too much of our taxpayer money and it does not help returning citizens to help our communities when they do return back home. We deserve and demand better, so our communities can thrive and become the vibrant places they are meant to be.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'L. Ford', with a stylized flourish at the end.

La Shawn K. Ford
State Representative-Eighth District