



State of Minnesota
Minnesota Department of Corrections
Office of the Commissioner

December 27, 1996

Jim Nobles
Legislative Auditor
Centennial Building
St. Paul, Minnesota 55155

Dear Mr. Nobles:

You and your staff are to be commended for your report on the recidivism of adult felons. The report is the most comprehensive review of recidivism compiled to-date in Minnesota and will be of great value to policymakers. We also appreciate your receptivity to our suggestions with many of them incorporated into the final report. In general, the report findings, although disappointing, are consistent with data previously gathered in Minnesota and nationally.

We support the report's acknowledgment that Minnesota's criminal justice system is designed to ensue offenders with the most serious offenses and extensive criminal histories are imprisoned. It is not a realistic expectation that recidivism rates would be low with this recalcitrant clientele who are repeated failures with well established criminal behaviors. From this perspective, the findings are relevant that, of those released from prison, 72 percent did not return with a new crime and 66 percent were not reconvicted of a new felony.

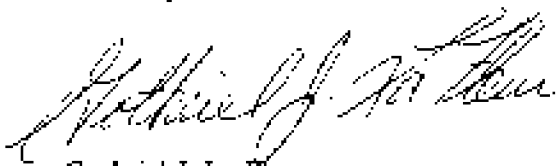
It is also significant that the report identifies reduction of dangerous inmate idleness and the resultant increased inmate discipline among the primary purposes of institutional programming. Other points relative to programming include the fact that program costs continue to represent a relatively small portion of institutional expenses (about 13 percent) and much of our institutional programming has been mandated by the legislature. Recidivism is directly related to the individual inmate's willingness and ability to change. Our department has a responsibility to provide the best possible opportunities for change through appropriate programming. Without those opportunities the potential for change is reduced.

The department continues to question the wisdom of using arrest data as a measure of recidivism due to a number of reasons including the phenomenon of "rounding up the usual suspects." We understand the shortfalls of using reconviction data, but believe it is a more accurate measure. It is also concerning that the report does not analyze whether offenders are rearrested for lesser offenses than those for which they had been committed to prison.

I assure you that your report is very helpful to us as we continue to carefully evaluate our programs and systems to determine whether there are ways to improve outcomes. A newly formed program committee is charged with thoroughly reviewing all existing institutional programs and making recommendations for improvements. A recently created planning and research unit has program evaluation and effectiveness as a top priority.

Also, a cooperative venture is underway between state and local providers of offender supervision to ensure that all programs are positive outcome driven. We will continue to work cooperatively with local jurisdictions to determine ways to evaluate, strengthen, and improve probation services.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gothriel J. La Fleur". The signature is written in a cursive style with some flourishes.

Gothriel J. La Fleur
Commissioner