

THE INCARCERATION OF THE ELDERLY: UNNECESSARY, COSTLY, AND INHUMANE

PENNSYLVANIA'S INCARCERATED POPULATION IS AGING.

Over 7,115 people incarcerated in Pennsylvania are over 55 years old.¹ That's more than 15% of the total incarcerated population. Why is Pennsylvania's elderly population so large? Pennsylvania is one of only six states that denies parole to people with life sentences. As a result, Pennsylvania has the second highest number of people serving life without parole (also known as Death by Incarceration (DBI)) sentences of any state in the country.²

EXPANDING PAROLE ELIGIBILITY ONLY FOR "NON-VIOLENT" OFFENDERS WON'T SOLVE THE AGING POPULATION PROBLEM.

One third of elderly incarcerated people are serving a life sentence.¹ The average age of these lifers is 64, and it's increasing every year. Beyond this group, almost every incarcerated person over age 55 is within 5 years of their minimum sentence (Figure 1). Creating another parole mechanism only for those convicted of "non-violent" offenses will not drastically reduce the aging prisoner population because it will apply only to those who are already close to their release date.

AGING LIFERS POSE THE LOWEST PUBLIC SAFETY RISK.

Age is the ultimate rehabilitator. Studies show that the rate of recidivism decreases drastically with age.³⁻⁵ What's more, **former lifers are three times less likely to recidivate** than the general released prison population nationwide.⁶ A recent study found that of 174 Philadelphia juvenile lifers who were re-sentenced and released (due to the Supreme Court ruling that mandatory life-without-parole sentences for juveniles are unconstitutional), **only 3.5% were rearrested and 1% re-convicted within approximately two years.** Compare that to a rearrest rate of 30% within two years of release for people convicted of homicide offenses nationally.⁷

RELEASING AGING LIFERS WILL SAVE MILLIONS AND REUNITE FAMILIES.

Nationwide estimates indicate that the **cost of healthcare for older incarcerated people is 2-3 times higher per year** than for younger incarcerated people.⁸ If even a quarter of the elderly prisoners serving time in Pennsylvania state prisons were paroled, the state **would save \$132 million a year.**

Currently, the families of 2,054 elderly people serving life sentences are permanently separated from their loved one. Half of those incarcerated elderly lifers are from Philadelphia (Figure 2).

Time to Minimum Sentence, Age 55+

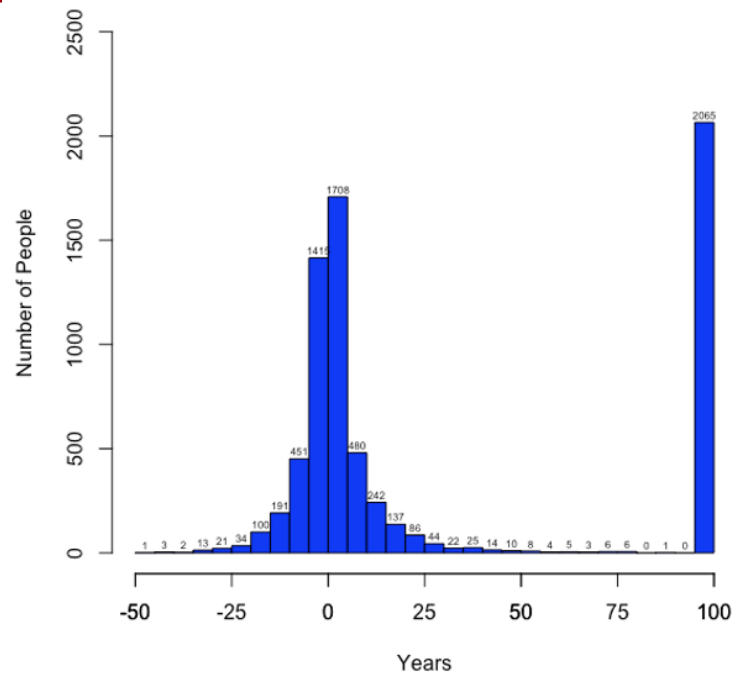


Figure 1. Time to minimum sentence for everyone over age 55 incarcerated in Pennsylvania on 6/10/2020. 100 years indicates a life sentence.¹

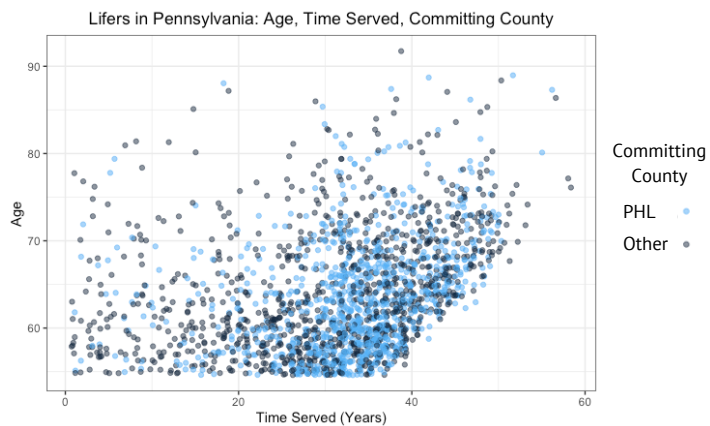


Figure 2. Age and Time Served for all individuals over age 55 serving a life sentence in Pennsylvania. The average age is 63.7 years. The average time served is 31.6 years. 48.7% of elderly lifers were committed in Philadelphia County (blue dots).¹

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- *Photo by Joshua Vaughn

