

# Call and Post Article: Thousands of Ohio Inmates Languish Away in Prison

The following article, *Thousands of Ohio Inmates Languish Away in Prison*, was recently published by the *Cleveland Call and Post*, which accurately reports on the longstanding Ohio old-law sentencing disparity that adversely affects a minority-class of approximately 5,000 old-law offenders, such as myself.

In the article, the Chairwoman of the Ohio Parole Board, Cynthia Mauser, is quoted justifying the reasons of why old-law offenders are being paroled at a drastically lower frequency than in previous years, in which she states, “Despite the perception of the public, there is no concerted effort not to release these people. There are offenders who are serving time for very serious offenses [murder and sex-related]. Some have multiple consecutive sentences.” Without question, there are many criminal offenses that are more severe than others.

In my opinion, however, it seems that the Parole Board Chairwoman is justifying the practice of discriminating against a select body of offenders. I, however, was not charged, convicted, or accused of any murder or sex-related offenses—nor am I serving multiple consecutive sentences. So, why am I being kept in prison, as a first-time offender? I’ve served 20 consecutive years, and they not only fail to approve a parole, but they can’t even afford me with a “fair and meaningful” Parole Board hearing.

Here’s the full article:

## **Thousands of Ohio inmates languish away in prison**

Kush Azrael | 9/27/2013, 11:09 a.m.

<http://callandpost.com/news/2013/sep/27/thousands-ohio-inmates-languish-away-prison/>

Many of Ohio’s inmates are serving long sentences and are finding it harder and harder to get out of prison on parole.

A renewed emphasis on moving eligible offenders out of prison is having little effect on “old law” inmates. Under the old law, offenders were sentenced “tails,” for example, 6 to 25 years or maybe 3 to 15 years in prison. Under the “new law,” Senate Bill 2, passed in 1996, sentenced offenders serve definite terms, or “flat” time, such as a 10-year sentence.

Many of the almost 5,000 remaining old law inmates in Ohio prisons, more than 50 percent, are doing time for murder or manslaughter.

In 2011, only 7 percent of the 1,918 inmates petitioning the parole board for consideration of release were paroled. This compares to 20 percent of 2,121 inmates getting hearings the previous year. In years before that, the number was closer to 50 percent. Ohio’s parole rate has plunged below 7 percent as the pool of offenders eligible for parole is mostly made up of those convicted of murder and sex offences. But changes have taken place to help model inmates who committed crimes a long time ago convince the Ohio parole board that they

deserve a chance to be released. State officials say they have made changes that could improve inmates' parole odds, such as coaching them on how to articulate their case for release, and working harder to get input from their supporters as well as their opponents such as prosecutors and victims.

However, critics say the parole board has no accountability, is plagued with members biased against offenders and gives too much weight to the nature of the crime, and not enough credit for years of good behavior and rehabilitative programming. They argue that some longtime inmates could be productive citizens instead of costing taxpayers \$25,000 a year to be incarcerated.

One inmate, who we will call William because he still he still has to go before the parole board, is currently housed at the London Correctional Institution. He has completed numerous programs at the institution and currently works for Ohio Penal Industries (OPI) and has worked for OPI for 15 years. Only "role model inmates" are allowed to work at OPI. William's last parole hearing was in 2001. He was denied, and "flopped" or continued for 3 more years because he was a juvenile offender before he became an adult offender.

This is only one example of how the parole board continues inmates' sentences despite the inmates showing signs of rehabilitation.

Some inmates believe this is the toughest time to be in front of the parole board because the board has become more rigid.

Since 1996, judges have given most offenders "flat time," or exact sentences, meaning the only hearing they get is upon release, when the board decides if they need post-release control or not.

Cynthia Mauser, chairwoman of the Ohio Parole Board said, "despite the perception of the public, there is no concerted effort not to release these people." She added, "There are offenders who are serving time for very serious offenses. Some have multiple consecutive sentences."

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**Jason Goudlock** is a progressive writer embedded in the struggle against the repressive United States prison industrial complex. If you would like to offer him support on his quest to attain justice for Ohio old-law prisoners, you can contact him at the following:

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