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Sunday, 06/19/05

Rehabilitation makes good financial sense

To the Editor:

Every Tennessean would do well to support the new programs in our state prisons that "focus on rehabilitation and accountability." ("Fewer repeat offenders goal of new effort," June 14)

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David Delbridge, executive director of Project Return, states that this represents "a shift in emphasis for the Correction Department toward rehabilitation." A shift from what? From a punitive attitude that focuses on punishment, encapsulated in the angry statement, "Lock them up and throw away the key!"

For decades, some politicians have capitalized on this feeling for personal political advantage by claiming to be "tough on crime." The result: Exploding prison populations have cost us taxpayers dearly — about \$18,250 per prisoner per year, totaling more than \$182 million each year for Tennessee's prison population.

Rehabilitation, including new work skills and improved interpersonal relations, makes good financial sense, as well as being more humane. After all, most prisoners will return to the community in a few years.

If they are bitter and alienated, chances are they will commit further crimes and end up in prison again. But if they've gained new skills and an improved attitude, the reduction of repeat offenders by 10 per year (the goal of the project) will save Tennessee taxpayers \$182,500 per year.


Reclaimed lives and large tax savings — that's a great return on the new program's investment. Let's tell all our political leaders that this is the approach we favor and want them to support.

Fred Cloud

Liz Sharer is the letters editor. She may be reached at 259-8026.

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