

Illinois Should Adopt a Parole Process for Elderly People in Prison

Aging persons in prison with lengthy or life sentences will die in prison, despite being rehabilitated and posing no threat to society, unless the General Assembly approves legislation that would provide these individuals with the right to apply for parole.



SB 86 provides a process for parole of older persons in Illinois

- SB 86 has been introduced in the Illinois Senate.
- If enacted, this legislation would provide the opportunity to apply for parole for a person in prison who has attained the age of 55 years and served at least 25 consecutive years of incarceration.



Illinois currently provides no parole process for any person sentenced on or after February 1, 1978

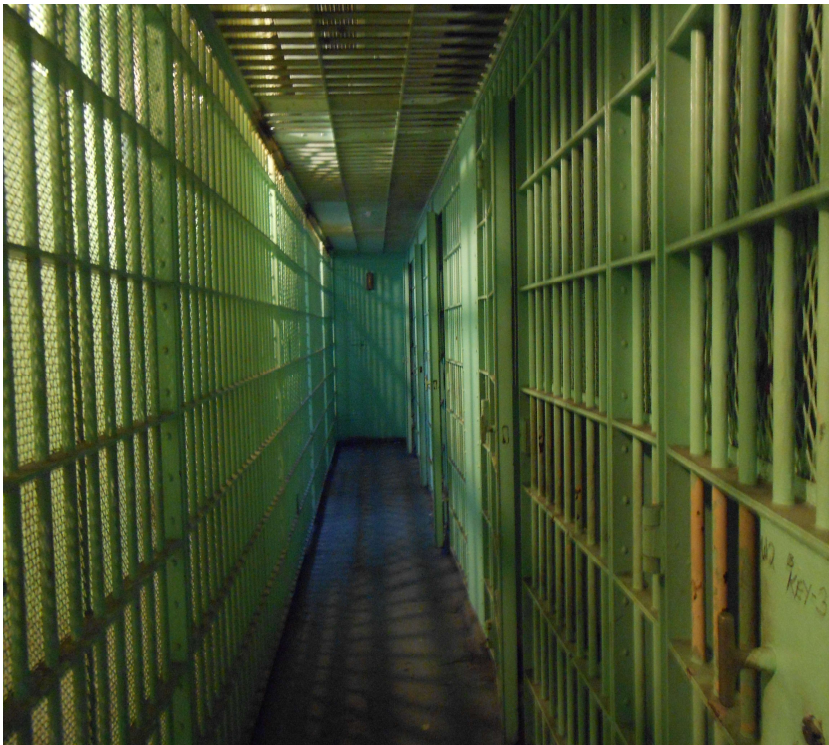
- Parole was abolished in Illinois on February 1, 1978 for all persons sentenced on and after that date.
- With the exception of persons who are terminally ill or medically incapacitated, executive clemency granted by the Governor is the only way for an incarcerated individual to seek early release in Illinois.



Illinois is one of only 16 States that abolished discretionary parole and have not reinstated it

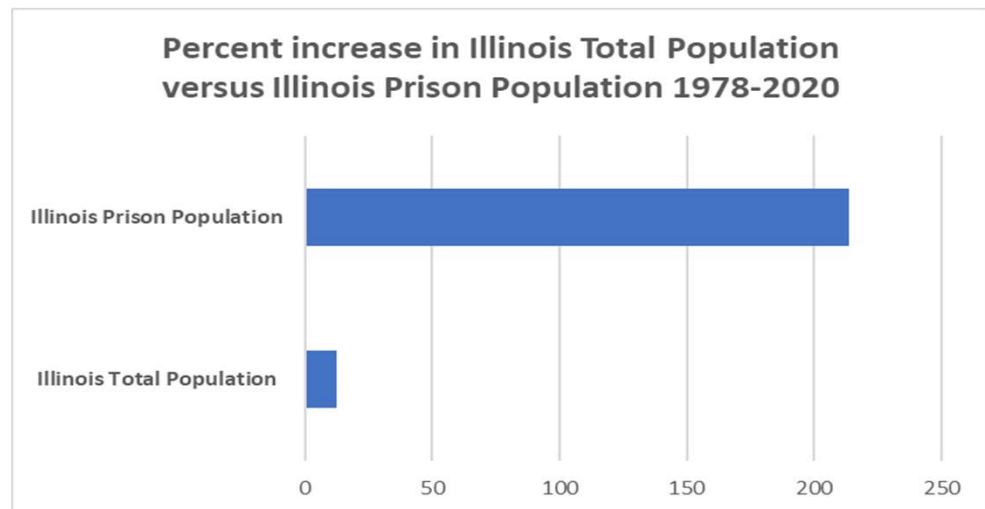
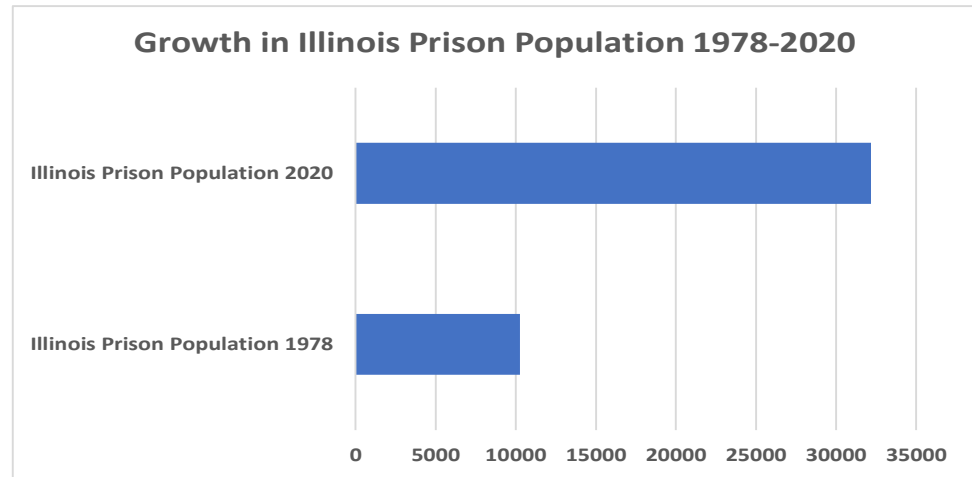
- During the 1970s through the 1990s, there was a shift in focus from rehabilitation to punishment in the U.S. generally
- Between 1976 and 2000, 16 States, including Illinois, abolished discretionary parole and had not reinstated it.
- The other 34 States have a parole process where the parole board has discretion in determining early release dates for most incarcerated persons.

During the 1970s through 1990s, Illinois Law also changed in other ways to impose longer sentences that keep individuals in prison longer and to provide fewer opportunities for early release



- Under the Illinois habitual offender statute, effective February 1, 1978, and expanded in 1980, a person convicted three times of certain felonies is given a mandatory life sentence without possibility of parole.
- In 1995, Illinois enacted “Truth-in-Sentencing” legislation which restricted the ability of individuals to reduce sentence lengths for certain violent crimes by earning good time credit.

Since 1978, following the shift from rehabilitation to punishment, the Illinois prison population tripled and the percentage increase far outpaced the percentage increase in the overall population of Illinois

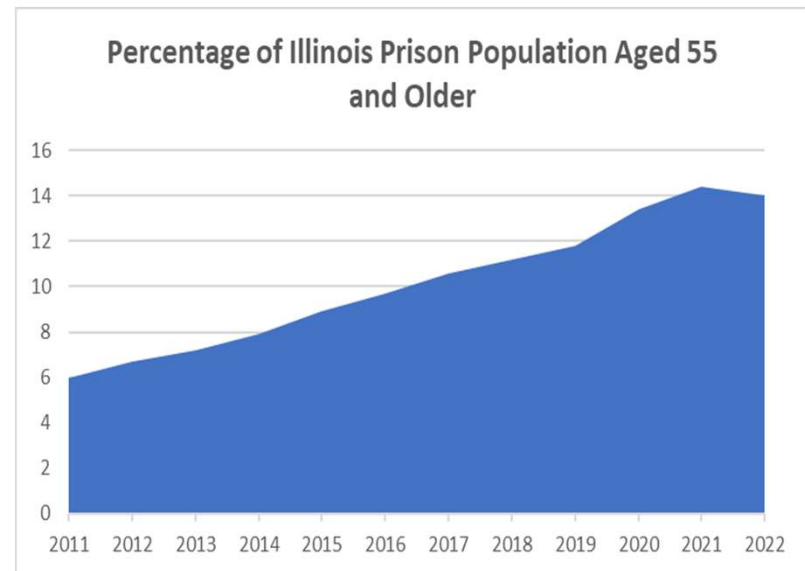
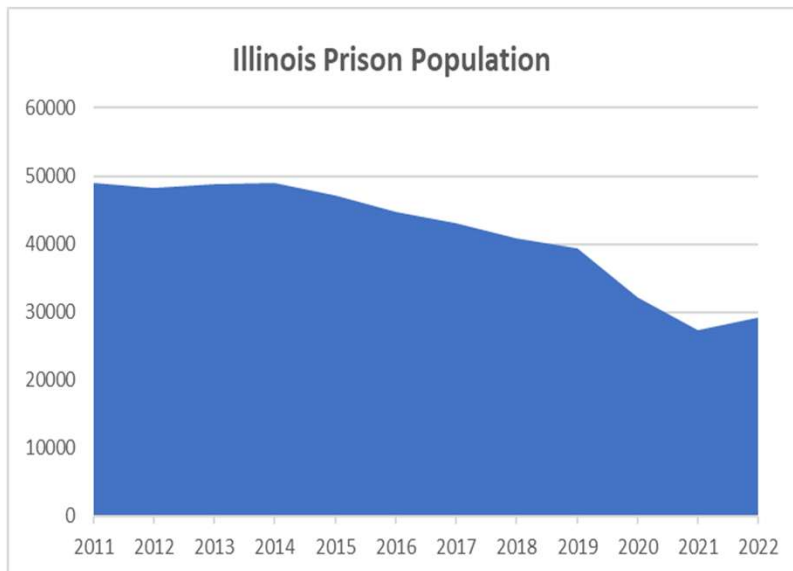


Persons who have life sentences imposed on or after February 1, 1978 are sentenced to age and die in prison

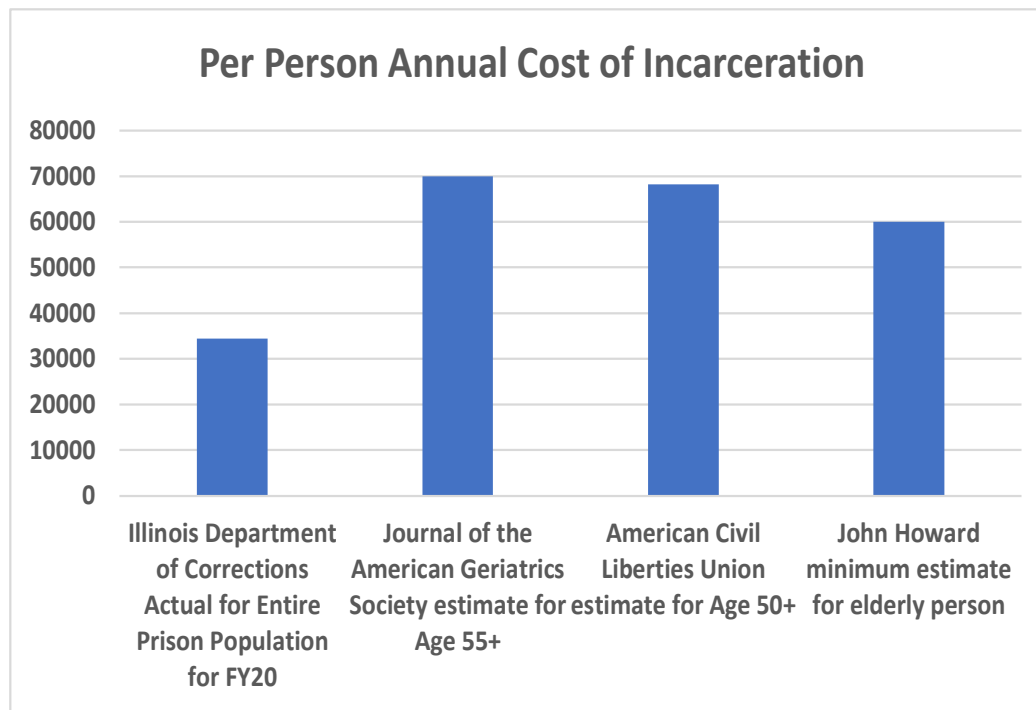
- As of September 30, 2024, there were 1504 persons in Illinois prisons who were sentenced to life on or after February 1, 1978.
- Unless granted clemency by the Governor, or a medical release based on terminal illness or medical incapacitation, these individuals will continue to age in prison and will die in prison.



Although the overall prison population in Illinois has declined in recent years, the percentage of the population consisting of older persons imprisoned in Illinois has been growing

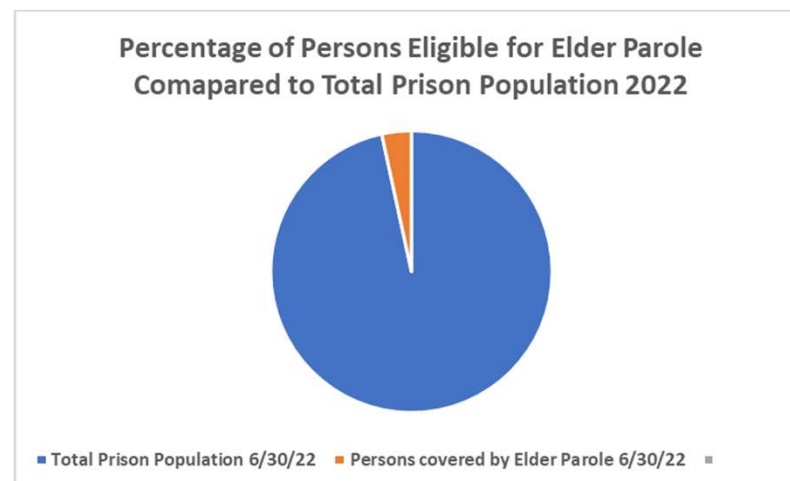


The estimated cost of incarcerating an older person is about twice or more of the average per person cost of incarceration in Illinois



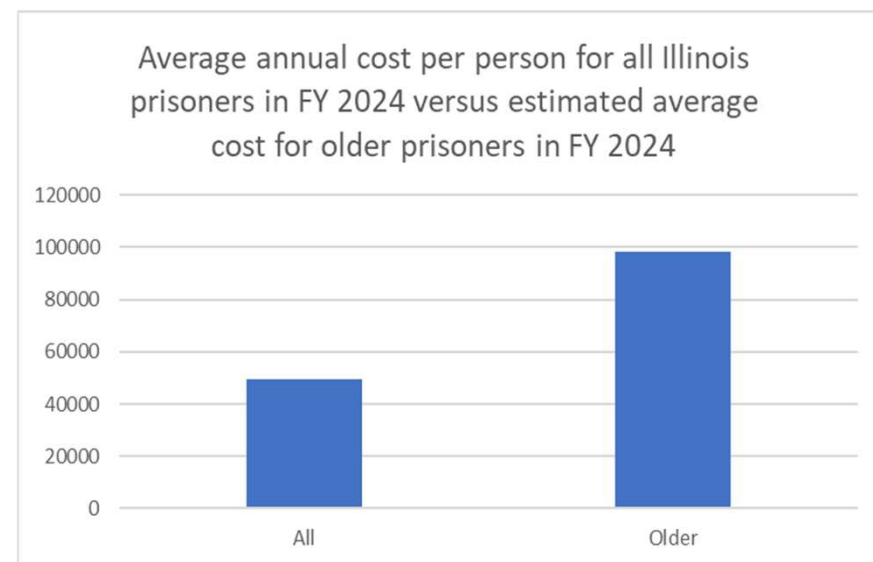
Elder Parole Eligibility Would be Limited to a Small Percentage of the Total Prison Population

As of September 30, 2024, the number of individuals who would qualify for the proposed elder parole process was 1054, which was only 3.6% of the total prison population.



Significant cost savings could be achieved even with only 3.6% eligible to apply for parole

- Over \$51 million is spent to incarcerate the 1054 individuals eligible to apply for parole for a single year at the average per-person cost of \$49,271 in Illinois, and over \$103 million is spent in a single year at the higher estimated per-person average cost of \$98,542 for incarcerating older persons.
- Not all who apply for parole will be approved, but savings could be significant with only some being approved.



The Illinois Department of Corrections is required by consent decree to provide adequate medical care to incarcerated persons with serious medical needs

The consent decree in *Lippert v. Baldwin*, entered May 9, 2019, requires the Governor, Director of IDOC and Director of Health Services for IDOC to provide adequate medical care to those incarcerated in the IDOC with serious medical needs.



The court-appointed Monitor, Dr. John Raba, found that the medical needs of aging persons required by the consent decree are an increasing burden on IDOC's health care system

Men and women with various types of dementia, cerebrovascular accidents (CVA), advanced cancers, cardiovascular disease, and increasing fragility with risk of falls are housed in many of the IDOC facilities.”



Dr. Raba Found that elder abuse is taking place in Illinois prisons

- Persons in prison are not given the medical care they need
- Preventable deaths are occurring in Illinois prisons due to inadequate medical care
- This is elder abuse



Parole for older persons would help relieve IDOC of the burdens of old age care and end of life care by releasing individuals to their communities while they are still capable of returning to society as productive citizens



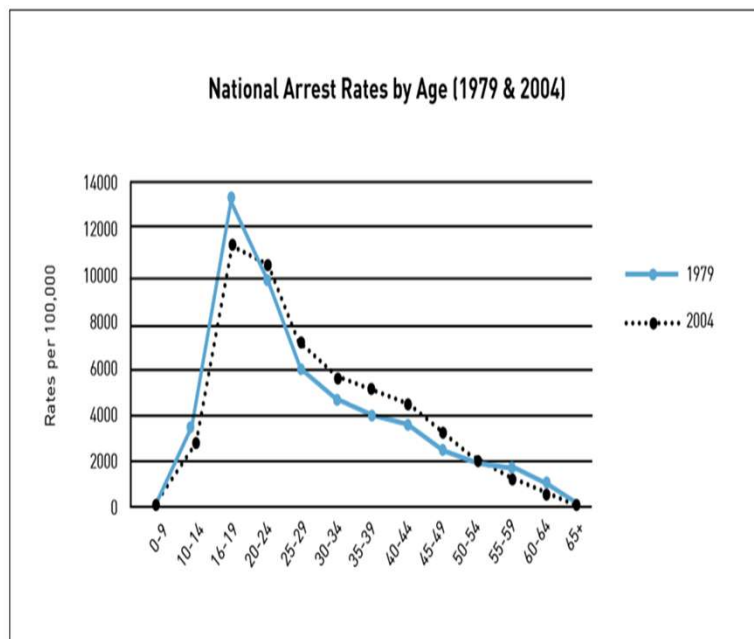
- Per Dr. Raba: “[T]he IDOC must take the lead to create a pathway to discharge those men and women whose mental and medical conditions make them no longer a risk to society to appropriate settings in the community.”
- An opportunity for parole for prisoners in their 60s would allow these individuals to be restored to useful citizenship while they are still capable of contributing to society

The cost to the State of medical care would be significantly less in community settings

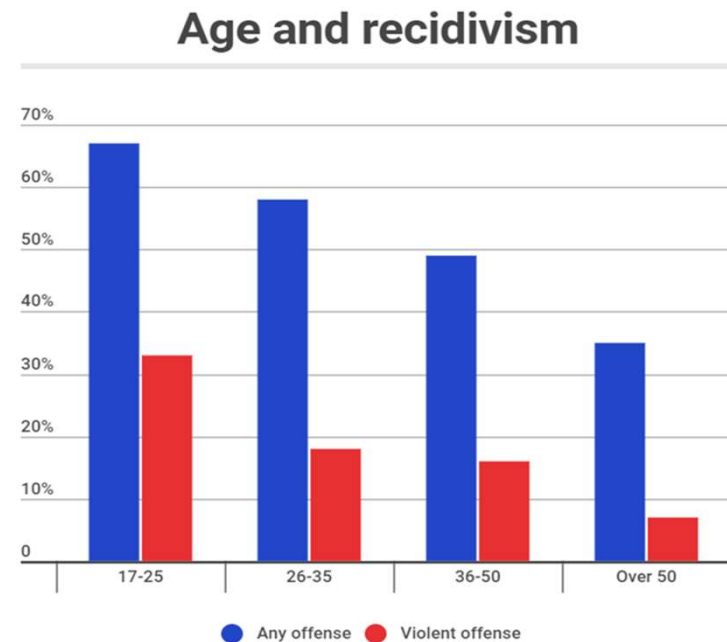


- No security costs
- Medicaid available to those without means to obtain other insurance
- Medicaid costs shared by federal government

Recidivism declines with age as individuals “age out” of criminal tendencies



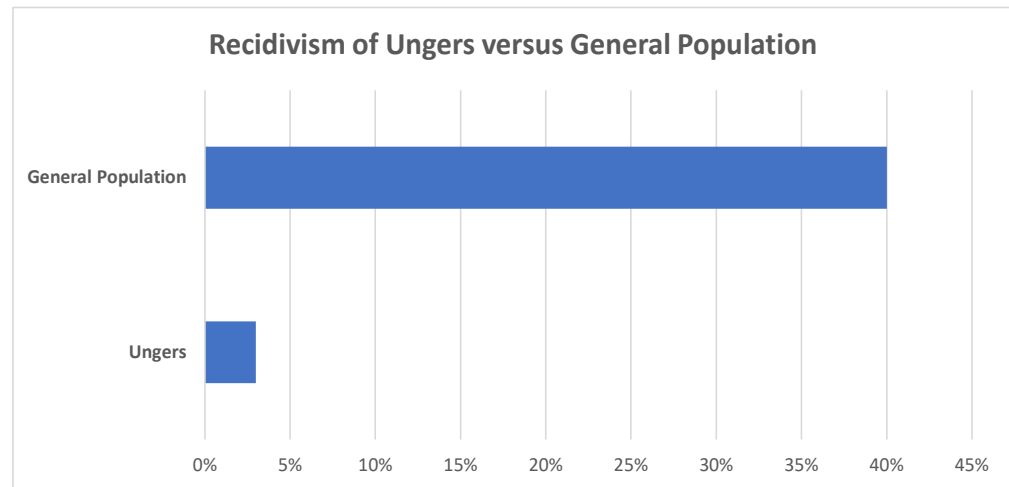
Source: Bushway et al., *Has the U.S. Prison Boom Changed the Age Distribution of the Prison Population?* (2011).³²



This chart shows the re-arrest rate by age of persons released from the Illinois Department of Corrections to McLean County over the period of 2011-2014. Source: *Bloomington Pantagraph*.

Experience in Maryland shows the low recidivism rate of a group of older persons with life sentences who were released early from prison

- In 2012, in *Unger v. Maryland*, the Maryland Court of Appeals ruled that persons convicted under flawed jury instructions given before 1981 be granted new trials.
- As of March 2020, 199 people, ages 51-85, known as the “Ungers,” who had been sentenced to life for violent crimes, and had been released as a result of the *Unger* decision, had a recidivism rate of 3% versus a recidivism rate for the general prison population in Maryland of about 40%.



Procedure for Seeking Parole under the Elder Parole Legislation

- Parole decisions would be based on individual factors such as :
 - why the individual should be paroled
 - evidence of rehabilitation and remorse
 - character references and community support for the release
 - the individual's plans for housing and employment
- Victims' families would have the opportunity to be notified and have an opportunity to be heard
- The Prisoner Review Board would make an individualized determination as to whether parole should be granted in each case.

The structure is already in place to provide a parole opportunity

- Since 1978, the Illinois Prisoner Review Board has continued to act as a parole board for individuals sentenced before February 1, 1978.
- The Prisoner Review Board continues to hold hearings and rule on parole applications made by these persons.
- The same structure would be used under the elder parole legislation to decide, on an individual basis, which persons should be granted parole.

The General Assembly Should Approve SB 86



Credits/Sources

1. Photo by Donald Tong.
2. Photo by QuinceMedia—1031690.
3. Photo by Bich Tran.
4. The Oxford Handbook of Sentencing and Corrections, edited by Joan Petersilia and Kevin R. Reitz, Introduction (2012); “Parole and Early Release” by Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), Report 19-13 (November 2019).
5. Photo by TryJimmy-8789.
6. Data used to calculate Illinois General Population Increase from <https://www.macrotrends.net/states/illinois/population> Illinois Population 1900-2019 and from U.S. Census data. Data used to calculate Illinois Prison Population Increase from Illinois Department of Corrections (IDOC).
7. Data from IDOC.
8. Data from IDOC and photo by Truthseeker 08.
9. Data on actual cost from IDOC. Journal of the American Geriatrics Society Data from Being Old and Doing Time: Functional Impairment and Adverse Experiences of Geriatric Female Prisoners, by Brie A. Williams, MD, Karla Lindquist, MS, Rebecca L. Sudore, MD, Heidi M. Strupp, Donna J. Willmott, MPH, and Louise C. Walter, MD, in Journal of the American Geriatrics Society (April 2006). American Civil Liberties Union Data from At America’s Expense: The Mass Incarceration of the Elderly, by American Civil Liberties Union (June 2012). John Howard Association estimate from Aging prisoners left to arbitrary process to win release, by Emily Hoerner and Jeanne Kuang, published by Injustice Watch (October 2, 2017).
10. Data from IDOC.
11. Data from IDOC and sources cited for Slide 9.

Credits/Sources (continued)

12. Photo by truthseeker08.
13. *Lippert v. Jeffreys*: First Report of the Monitor, November 24, 2019, Prepared by: John M. Raba, MD; photo by Geralt from Pixabay.
14. *Lippert v. Jeffreys*: Fifth Report of the Monitor, June 22, 2022, Prepared by: John M. Raba, MD; photo by Rob Van Der Meijden from Pixabay.
15. *Lippert v. Jeffreys*: First Report of the Monitor, November 24, 2019, Prepared by: John M. Raba, MD; photo by SHVETS production from Pexels.
16. "Medicaid 101," by Illinois Department of Healthcare and Family Services.
17. National data from Bushway et al., "Has the U.S. Prison Boom Changed the Age Distribution of the Prison Population?" (2011), as found in "At America's Expense: The Mass Incarceration of the Elderly," by American Civil Liberties Union (June 2012); Illinois data from Loyola University's Center of Research, Policy and Practice, as published in Bloomington Pantagraph in "Age, criminal history define recidivism" by Edith Brady-Lunny, March 19, 2018.
18. Data from "Growing old in prison: How Maryland is working to ease the path to release for a low-risk, high-cost population," BY ANGELA ROBERTS - APRIL 30, 2020, Capital News Service, <https://cnsmaryland.org/>
19. Proposed legislation.
20. Information from Prisoner Review Board website.
21. Photos (from left to right) by Gustavo Fring, RobinHiggins – 1321953, and Lukas.

This presentation was prepared by William J. Nissen

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