

Letters to the Editor  
Winnipeg Free Press  
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Dear Editor:

Stephen Harper's recent proposal to raise minimum life sentences to 25 years would suggest that the current system is not doing enough to protect Canadians from those who have been convicted of murder. However, the evidence is to the contrary and shows that once released from jail, a 'lifer' is the *least* likely of any offender to re-offend.

Those sentenced for murder are convicted for *life*, with the opportunity to *apply* for parole after a certain period of time (generally 10 years for murder in the second degree). There is no statutory release for 'lifers' (i.e. their sentences do not come to an end after a certain length of time has expired); *they will only be released after convincing a parole board that don't pose a risk to the community*. If released they remain on parole for the rest of their lives and any breach of condition or re-offence, no matter how small, will send them back to prison for a minimum of two years. The recidivism rate for those paroled from a life sentence is less than rates for any other groups of offenders, such as those convicted for sex crimes or property offences. According to the Parole Board records only 8% of lifers re-offend, and only 3% re-offend violently. The vast majority (79%) neither violates a condition of parole nor re-offends in any way.

Despite the facts that this group of offenders represent a very low risk to the public, Harper is proposing to keep lifers in jail for a minimum of 25 years instead of 10. This is a very expensive proposition and will result in additional operating cost of over a million dollars *per inmate*. As well, the proposed changes will likely lead to more violence inside of prisons, affecting staff and prisoners alike; currently lifers have an incentive to behave well, as it could lead to parole after 10 years – with no parole eligibility for 25 years, this incentive will largely disappear.

Canadians have many legitimate concerns for safety, but these concerns aren't being met by our government spending huge amounts to fix a part of the system that *isn't* broken,

Sincerely,

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