

To the Citizen's Commission on the Courts;

I believe the courts need to place more of an emphasis on Restorative Justice rather than just on retribution. Non-violent offenders should not be sent to jail unless they are repeat offenders. Sending non-violent, first time offenders to jail (especially county jail) is a complete waste of time and resources. The offender loses their job and health insurance (if they have it); the offender's family loses a bread winner; the county is overburdened by the costs of housing and caring for the offender; and the victim doesn't receive restitution. The offender is held in county jail for up to a year. County jails provide very little (if any) in programs and rehabilitation. The offender basically vegetates for the allotted time period. When they are released, there are no programs available to assist them with finding employment, which is further impeded by the fact that they now have a criminal record. It's a lose-lose situation.

The emphasis should be on Restorative Justice. Every attempt should be made to hold the offender accountable and to keep the offender employed and motivated to pay restitution. Incarceration should be the LAST resort, not the first.

Many inmates in county jails are there for drug related crimes. Many are sentenced to several months in county jail and then to rehabilitation. Why aren't there rehabilitation programs in the county jails? An inmate wastes several months sitting in jail, doing nothing, and then they go into a rehab program (if they can find one that will accept them.) Doesn't it make more sense to bring the rehab programs to the county jails? County jails are the last stop before an offender goes to state prison. THIS is the place to put money into programs. THIS is the community's last chance to turn a person around, away from crime. Instead, county jails act as holding pens, and nothing is accomplished there except a waste of time and resources. We can do better than that.

Sincerely,

Sheila Dion  
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