

Readers React Jerry Brown gets religious about parole for 'lifers' (Letters to the editor)

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To the editor: The article observes that of the 1,963 "lifers" paroled under Gov. Jerry Brown's administration, 33 returned "to prison or jail" after being "accused" of various offenses, whereas according to a study we conducted, of 860 lifers released from 1995 to 2010, five were returned to prison "for new felony charges."

A reader may be given the wrong impression that the recidivism rate for lifer parolees has roughly tripled. The 33 mixes those returned for technical parole violations with those convicted of new crimes — indeed, one of the article's examples is a parolee who absconded from supervision (a parole violation).

By contrast, our study refers to parolees convicted of new felonies.

Thus, while any instance of a parolee violating the conditions of parole is unfortunate, any critique of parole policy requires a consistent definition of recidivism.

Moreover, the suggestion that the recidivism rate for lifer parolees warrants worry is misguided. Even if we use the broader definition of recidivism to get to 33 new returnees under Brown, a 1.7% recidivism rate is one any department of corrections and rehabilitation would envy.

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