

Office of the Governor
State of Louisiana

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June 6, 2022

VIA HAND DELIVERY

Honorable Clay J. Schexnayder
Speaker of the House
Louisiana House of Representatives
Post Office Box 94062
Baton Rouge, Louisiana 70804-9062

RE: Veto of House Bill 544 of 2022 Regular Session

Dear Speaker Schexnayder:

Please allow this letter to inform you that I have vetoed House Bill 544 of the 2022 Regular Session.

This bill is a significant rollback of the 2017 Justice Reinvestment effort, passed by the legislature with strong bipartisan support. This effort arose from the Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force, a bipartisan group comprised of law enforcement, court practitioners, community members, and legislators. The 2017 reforms focused on non-violent and non-sex offenses in an effort to change Louisiana's status as the state with the highest incarceration rate in the country. Just five years in, these changes are working. Through June of 2021, the state has saved approximately \$114.8 million in taxpayer dollars resulting in significant reinvestments in juvenile justice programs, victim's services, and other initiatives designed to reduce recidivism.

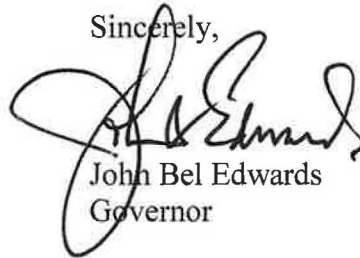
House Bill 544 would take us in the wrong direction. First, this bill would change the calculation for earning good time for some non-violent offenders, making it more difficult for early release, no matter the severity of the offense. In addition, and in a more significant reversal of the 2017 reforms, some non-violent and non-sex offenders would be required to serve sixty-five percent of a sentence before becoming eligible for parole. This is an enormous change even from the law prior to 2017, where someone was eligible for parole after having served forty percent of the imposed sentence. Thus, this bill would require a person to serve sixty percent more of his sentence before becoming parole eligible than before the 2017 reforms. It would result in over a one hundred percent increase in the time required to be served in the law after 2017.

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The people of this state are not served, nor are they made more safe, by imposing longer prison sentences on non-violent and non-sex offenders. The conclusions of the bipartisan Louisiana Justice Reinvestment Task Force, and the unmistakable results of the 2017 reforms, show that the way to reduce recidivism is to provide for job training and life skills that will assist individuals in becoming productive members of society. These efforts are working, and we should not change course.

Enclosed is the vetoed version of House Bill 544.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Bel Edwards". The signature is stylized with large, sweeping loops and a prominent initial "J".

John Bel Edwards
Governor

enclosure

cc: Honorable Patrick Page Cortez
Louisiana Senate President