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Denver

Restorative justice

Preparing to

reenter community

In response to "Crime Rate Going Up in Colorado Prisons," Jan. 18: The cost of sending people to prison and retaining them is too high. Over \$700 million of the Colorado state budget goes to the Department of Corrections. We can only afford to incapacitate so many people, especially when jails and prisons fail to rehabilitate and instead facilitate a robust cycle of recidivism.

Money that goes to incarceration could alternatively support our failing public education. Better public education means less crime, brighter futures for Colorado's youth, and a hope that higher education might someday again be affordable.

Rather than insulating ourselves by shutting away offenders, we need to find more sensible solutions that effectively address the problem.

Restorative justice is one possibility. For suitable cases, restorative justice uses a community-based approach to facilitate an understanding of the full impact that an offender's action has on the wider community, and in a cooperative process with all stakeholders works to repair harm.

Unlike our current prison system, alternatives to incarceration require much more than a lock and key. Organizations such as Teaching Peace, located in Longmont, require that we take a stand against the injustices of the criminal justice system, and work to truly restore individuals, relationships and the community.

When a restorative justice approach is not appropriate and incarceration is a requirement of sentencing, the time spent in prison needs to be constructive, rehabilitative and meaningful.

While some people may see programs such as education and mental health resources in prisons as luxuries inmates do not deserve, the reality is that the vast majority of individuals in prison will at some point reenter into our communities.

Instead of allowing offenders the opportunity to dive deeper into trouble and cause more harm to our communities, it is in our interest to ensure that these people have the opportunity to be positive members of society.

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