

# Do the Mentally Ill Receive Proper Care in Prison?

*Adam Forbes*

The United States prison system is suffering from overcrowding, and a good number of those inmates suffer from mental health issues of one type or another.

I, myself, was a guest of MCI Shirley, a prison in Massachusetts, and I witnessed first-hand a number of people with mental illness struggling to survive in a place that did not offer proper treatment. A lot of inmates complained about how it took a month or two to get an appointment. The inmate in the cell next to mine hanged himself. Ironically, they called for him over the loudspeaker the next day to tell him that he had a mental health appointment. The correctional officer did not find the man until seven p.m. cell check. If that man had better care, maybe he would not have taken his own life.

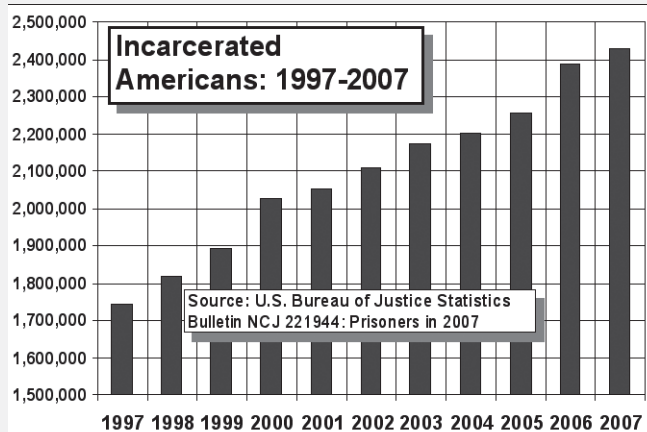
By placing these individuals in the prison system, the state of Massachusetts is only making

the mentally ill worse. We could begin to address the problem by at least putting the non-violent mentally ill offenders in a place that is equipped to deal with them instead of locked up behind barbed wire and concrete walls. The mentally ill offenders who are violent would need a higher security placement, but it should include adequate treatment. They might deserve their sentence but they don't deserve to be thrown into an already crowded prison that lacks the services they need.



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## Did You Know?



Source: <www.november.org>

Look at the chart on the left. Write three statements that you can make about the U.S. prison population based on this information.

1. \_\_\_\_\_
2. \_\_\_\_\_
3. \_\_\_\_\_