THE MAIL

RESTART Me Up

We live in a strange time. Maryland Republicans want to increase the budget to help ex-offenders, state Democrats oppose spending money in this way, and *City Paper* goes out of its way to write stories that criticize a "more social-worker oriented" program to "turn imprisoned, drug-addicted criminals into productive members of society." Sounds like just the thing *City Paper* should attack (note sarcasm).

In his second article on RESTART ("**RESTARTing From Scratch**," Quick and Dirty, March 22), Edward Ericson Jr.'s main point seems to be that research on other programs like RESTART shows mixed results. Maybe so. The fact is, research is almost always, at best, mixed on the success of social programs, because one size never fits all. One of the reasons why a program like RESTART may show mixed results is because it has never been fully implemented. The governor's budget seeks to expand the program so that it can help ex-offenders just as they prepare to leave the institution. If we don't do this, there is a strong possibility that the potential positive impact of RESTART will be lost as ex-offenders wait months to be released without services. Poisoning the program this way may give Mr. Ericson and other critics an "I told you so," but it would do nothing to help the 12,000 inmates who get released from Maryland prisons every year.

The reality of running social programs, whether within government or outside, is that you don't have the luxury of waiting for a perfect solution that has undisputed positive results for everyone it touches. It may not be coming anyway. Instead, you have to put together services to help real people at your door who desperately need assistance. Twelve thousand people need assistance right now. RESTART is a sensible, research-based approach to help them. Let's stop the politics and give it a chance to succeed by providing sufficient funding so that it is available to those who need it most.

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