

SWK 355/555:What would Dix find if she were to reappear and visit the jails of today ?

Dorothea Dix enlightened our nation on the harsh conditions of mental health incarcerated individuals in our jails and prisons before there was any legislation that advocated for the underserved population. Dix made it her mission in life until her death to make a change and create reform on this untouched topic . In the Reluctant Welfare State, Dix stated “ The issue is treatment of the mentally ill”. From her first experience visiting East Cambridge Jail for Women she realized mental health illness should not be a reason for incarceration .

If Dix could reappear and visit the jails today , she would see some of the same problematic issues that were concerning her back in the 1800's. Overcrowded prisons and jails , Prisoners not given mental health services while being incarcerated , Prisoners not given mental health services when being released to ensure reincarceration does not occur , and a small population of prisoners being provided medication management and mental health services are some of the continued concerns within our criminal justice system. The ongoing concerns which prompted Dix to advocate for this cause precedes her still in death .

During my research I found the Crisis Stabilization and Community Reentry Act of 2020 which authorizes the Department of Justice to award grants for states, Native American tribes, local governments, and community-based nonprofit organizations to provide clinical services for people with serious mental illness and substance use disorders who need mental health services upon release from a correctional facility.

This act shows the progress of forward thinking for legislators to decrease the rate of incarcerated individuals and provide stabilization. Similar acts such as this one, provides the community with hope that change can come from prison reform.

There still is work to be done. Even currently there is a Senate Bill s4872 which was introduced and is currently trying to be passed through the 2021 - 2022 Legislative Session with the New York Senate which would require mental health services for inmates with post traumatic prison disorder. Dix would not be disappointed with the progress that has been made however there is always more to go.