



[Home](#) > [News](#) > [Headlines](#) > In the News

N.J. Gov. Against Softening Drug Policy for Recovering Inmates

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News Summary

New Jersey Gov. James McGreevey disagrees with Corrections Commissioner Devon Brown's proposal to ease a zero-tolerance rule for drug use by state inmates in halfway houses, the [Newark Star-Ledger](#) reported April 27.

"I think that's wrong," McGreevey said. "I am a former assistant prosecutor. If it's children under the age of 15, I believe in tough love and trying to correct them. But when you are talking about adults and you are talking about giving people the opportunity to be in a halfway house who have served in a penal institution, I just strongly disagree."

Currently, halfway-house residents who fail a drug test are immediately returned to prison. Brown's proposal would send the individuals to a prison processing center, where officials would decide whether to give them a second chance.

Brown said easing the zero-tolerance rule would reduce the number of inmates fleeing halfway houses. He added that inmates would also benefit more from being returned to treatment and a halfway house rather than prison.

"Halfway houses serve the fundamentally important role of transitioning inmates into the community," he said. "Anyone who is an addiction expert will tell you when you're dealing with abuse at this magnitude, the likelihood of relapse is significant. It shouldn't be grounds to toss them back automatically without a review."

But Brown said he would drop his proposed policy change if the governor asked him to do so. "He is the highest elected official," he said. "But I would ask the governor give me the courtesy of explaining the basis of what we promulgate so he would have a full understanding."

