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## Michigan news

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### Keeping tabs on ex-convicts to get harder

#### Citing improper use, state to pull files from Web database

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**BY DAWSON BELL**  
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

State prison officials plan to remove information on about 215,000 ex-convicts -- including rapper Eminem -- from their popular online database because they believe the system is being improperly used by employers and others to run criminal background checks, state officials said Wednesday.

An average of about 120,000 searches are made on the database every day.

All of those who are no longer in the department's custody, on parole or on probation will be removed from the Offender Tracking Information System (OTIS) on March 21, said Russ Marlan, a spokesman for the Michigan Department of Corrections. Besides Eminem, who pleaded no contest to weapons charges in Macomb County in 2000, the database would be purged of everyone from violent criminals who have finished their sentences to people like Keith Stallworth, a former state representative and county commissioner from Detroit whose 2-year probation sentence for voter and driver felonies ended last year.

Information and photographs of nearly 144,000 current prisoners, parolees and probationers will remain on the system, he said.

Corrections Director Patricia Caruso said the incomplete records on inactive offenders -- OTIS has no data on arrests, misdemeanor convictions or post-release criminal activity -- can give users a false sense of security.

"We don't keep the official criminal records," Caruso said.

Critics of the move said removing easy access to department records has the potential to compromise public safety. OTIS handles about 3.7 million searches a month. The system can be used by anyone, including someone checking out a potential date or a neighbor.

"This is public information. It is soft on crime to allow maximum security prisoners to discharge and purposefully not tell the public about it," said Matt Davis, a former MDOC employee who helped develop OTIS in the late 1990s. Davis was a Free Press reporter before going to work for the state.

#### Most-searched names on OTIS

**1. Jack Kevorkian:** The assisted suicide doctor was sentenced in 1999 for second-degree murder; he's serving a minimum 10-year sentence.

**2. Frankie McGraw:** Convicted of writing bad checks, she escaped from a state prison in 1974 and has not been captured.

**3. Marshall Mathers,** aliases Eminem and Slim Shady: The rapper received 2 years probation after pleading no contest to carrying a concealed weapon and brandishing a firearm in public in connection with an incident outside a Warren club in 2000. OTIS lists the locations of Mathers' six tattoos.



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A spokeswoman for the American Civil Liberties Union, which has voiced concerns about possible abuse of online databases that contain old criminal records, said the department's decision is "in everybody's best interest."

"This will allow people to get on with the rest of their lives without a permanent scarlet letter," said Wendy Waggenheim.

Caruso strongly denied the department was motivated by concern for prisoner reintegration.

Department officials said they did not have a complete profile of the users of OTIS. The concern that it was being used for improper purposes was driven by the high number of searches from people who obviously assumed that it contained complete criminal histories, Marlan said.

Those seeking a more complete and official record should use the Michigan State Police online system, ICHAT, Marlan said.

ICCHAT is more cumbersome to use, costs \$10 per search and requires users to provide a birth date.

The ease and accessibility provided by OTIS has made it popular with the media and the public.

Corrections officials said information on inactive offenders will continue to be available to the public by calling 517-373-6391, during business hours.

Free Press Editor and Publisher Carole Leigh Hutton, said: "It's dismaying to see the state put barriers between the public and easy access to public information."

To access OTIS, visit [www.state.mi.us/mdoc/asp/otis2.html](http://www.state.mi.us/mdoc/asp/otis2.html). For ICHAT, go to <http://mi-mall.michigan.gov/webapp/wcs/stores/servlet/StoreCatalogDisplay?langId=-1&catalogId=10201&storeId=10201>.

Contact **DAWSON BELL** at 313-222-6604 or [dbell@freepress.com](mailto:dbell@freepress.com).

   
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