

News for Immediate Release

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Pennsylvania Launches Justice Reinvestment Initiative

Governor Corbett Meets with Judicial, Legislative and Criminal Justice Leaders

Harrisburg – Governor Tom Corbett today encouraged members of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, a newly-formed panel of judges, lawmakers, state cabinet members and other officials, as they begin studying ways to increase public safety in Pennsylvania and reduce spending on corrections.

“The justice reinvestment working group is here to look at the numbers, the costs, the projections and the system,” Corbett told the gathering at the Governor’s Residence this morning. “We look to you to come up with solutions to make our system better. I expect this initiative will help reduce further our crime rate, decrease recidivism and manage corrections spending more efficiently.”

Led by Mark Zimmer, chairman of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, and Department of Corrections Secretary John Wetzel, the group will meet regularly during the next several months to review data analysis, hear from local government representatives, prosecutors and public defenders, victim advocates, treatment providers and others, before crafting policy proposals.

The Justice Reinvestment Initiative is a comprehensive,

research-based approach that identifies factors driving the growth and costs in prison and jail populations. The data-driven model is designed to:

- Develop and implement policy options to control and lower the costs of the state's corrections system;
- Improve offender accountability;
- Reinvest a portion of the savings into the justice system to further reduce corrections spending;
- Reinvest a portion of the savings into the community to prevent crime;
- Measure the impact of policy changes.

Contributing to the project is the Council of State Governments Justice Center in partnership with the Pew Center on the States and the U.S. Department of Justice.

The CSG Justice Center, which has helped policymakers in 15 other states using a justice reinvestment approach, reported the following about Pennsylvania at today's meeting:

- Between 2000 and 2010, the number of people admitted to prison climbed 46 percent, with much of this growth driven by increases in the number of people convicted of property and drug offenses serving relatively short minimum sentences.
- Over this same period, the number of people in prison grew 40 percent, from 36,602 to 51,312, and annual Department of Corrections spending increased 76 percent, from \$1.1 billion to \$1.9 billion.
- Despite significant state investments in resident programs for people on parole supervision, a 2011 study showed that recidivism has declined but remains high: nearly half of people

(44 percent) released from prison were re-incarcerated within three years.

“Today’s meeting identifies issues that need to be addressed, and I am confident this group will work hard to use the data and other information gathered to make legislative proposals which will try to strike the delicate balance between public safety and reducing costs through improved efficiencies and prison population reduction,” Zimmer said.

“The scale of this effort is exactly what Pennsylvania needs to see the complete connections that take place from the time someone is arrested all the way through discharge to parole supervision,” Wetzel said. “With the extensive data analysis and stakeholder input in this process, policy makers from across the political spectrum will develop strategies that answer a fundamental question we all ask ourselves: What more can we be doing to increase safety in our communities while getting a better return on taxpayers’ investment?”

“This is an excellent example of officials working together, across systems, levels of government and parties toward the common goal of improving the safety of our state,” Corbett said.

Visit PCCD online at www.pccd.state.pa.us. The Department of Corrections is online at www.cor.state.pa.us.

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Editor's Note: Here's what stakeholders have to say about Pennsylvania's Justice Reinvestment Initiative:

"In order to keep Pennsylvanians safe, the Commonwealth has in the past years invested hundreds of millions of dollars to build additional prisons, expand parole supervision, and increase community-based treatment. Nevertheless, recidivism rates have not decreased significantly," said **Senate President Pro Tempore Joseph Scarnati (R-Jefferson)**. "This welcomed initiative will aid Pennsylvania policy-makers by identifying concrete methods to reduce correctional costs as well as proposing ways to limit once-incarcerated individuals from returning to prison."

"The commonwealth judicial system has been innovative in its establishment of problem-solving courts with specialized dockets focusing on mental health, substance abuse, veterans, and community re-entry offenders," **said Chief Justice Ronald D. Castille**. "I welcome the opportunity for the judiciary to play a key role in this statewide project examining how best to use our criminal justice system's resources. We simply have to think smarter."

"Thirty years ago, criminal justice policymakers knew very little about how to stop the cycle of recidivism. Now we know a lot, and state leaders across the country are putting these research-based strategies into action," said **Adam Gelb, director of the Public Safety Performance Project as the Pew Center on the States**. "This partnership gives Pennsylvania an excellent chance to take advantage of the new knowledge and craft policies that will make communities safer and save taxpayer dollars."

“We are pleased to make available federal resources through our Justice Reinvestment initiative to assist state officials in Pennsylvania who have demonstrated a bi-partisan commitment to using data to identify and address challenges facing their state’s criminal justice system,” said **Denise O’Donnell, Director of the Bureau of Justice Assistance at the U.S. Department of Justice.**

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