

Justice Reinvestment in Pennsylvania

A Comprehensive Public Safety Plan for the Commonwealth

Key Messages (May 23, 2012)

Background

- Public safety is a primary function of government, but the rising cost of corrections is stretching the Commonwealth's budget. In January 2012, Governor Corbett, Chief Justice Castille, and legislative leaders convened a bipartisan, inter-branch working group in order to develop a plan to improve public safety and lower the bill to taxpayers.
- Pennsylvania's criminal justice system is complex. To assist, state leaders brought in the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, the Pew Center on the States, and the U.S. Department of Justice Bureau of Justice Assistance. Experts at these organizations have helped states like Texas and Ohio reduce costs and crime.
- Over the past five months, the CSG Justice Center and the working group developed a comprehensive public safety plan by analyzing Pennsylvania's corrections system and consulting a wide range of stakeholders. The plan reduces crime, holds offenders more accountable, and reduces costs for taxpayers.

Justice Reinvestment Plan

The CSG Justice Center presented the working group with a policy framework that:

- Generates savings by addressing costly inefficiencies in the parole process;
- Focuses community corrections centers and contract facilities on reducing recidivism and associated costs among parolees with swift sanctions, while keeping individuals still serving their minimum sentences in prison;
- Reinvests millions in county criminal justice agencies to manage offenders serving short minimum sentences, and to bolster probation resources to reduce recidivism; and,
- Provides new resources for law enforcement to aid police departments in using the latest crime fighting strategies and all agencies through statewide improvements in training and data systems.

Why are these policy changes needed in Pennsylvania?

- Budget cuts have left police with fewer resources, and crime rates are on the rise in many counties.
- Thousands of offenders cycle through prison with minimum sentences of less than one year, making it difficult for them to complete assigned programs and be paroled in a timely manner.
- Inefficiencies in the parole process keep offenders in prison after being granted parole. Conversely, some offenders are released to community facilities prior to completing their minimum sentence.
- Pennsylvania's investment in community corrections centers and contract facilities could be more effective at reducing recidivism if targeted at higher risk populations.

How much does the plan save taxpayers & reinvest in safer communities?

- Over the next five years, this plan would save Pennsylvania's taxpayers \$351 million in reduced costs. In FY2013, the plan could save an initial \$9.5 million.
- To increase public safety, the plan calls for reinvesting \$8.5 million in FY2013, and \$88 million over the five year period, in strengthening law enforcement, probation, parole & victim services.
- On balance, the plan increases public safety while reducing net spending by more than a quarter-billion dollars over the next five years compared with doing business as usual.