

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 425 Session of
1992

INTRODUCED BY CARN, CALTAGIRONE, GEIST, KOSINSKI, HARPER,
GODSHALL, BISHOP, JOSEPHS, SAURMAN AND SALOOM,
NOVEMBER 24, 1992

INTRODUCED, NOVEMBER 24, 1992

A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing to examine
2 life sentences in Pennsylvania.

3 WHEREAS, A life sentence in Pennsylvania means until the
4 inmate shall die in prison or until the Governor shall commute
5 the sentence; and

6 WHEREAS, The constitutionally provided-for commutation
7 process has seemingly not been implemented in a consistent or
8 definitive manner throughout the years; and

9 WHEREAS, Governor Shaffer commuted 95 "lifers," Governor
10 Shapp commuted 317, Governor Thornburgh commuted 7 and Governor
11 Casey has commuted 23, whose average length of incarceration was
12 22.5 years; and

13 WHEREAS, The life-sentence population in Pennsylvania has
14 grown to 10% of the total prison population or to more than
15 2,400 inmates with a projected increase of 126 new inmates
16 sentenced to life each calendar year; and

17 WHEREAS, Forty-seven states provide for life sentences with

1 parole reviews under certain circumstances; and

2 WHEREAS, National studies show that the risk of criminality
3 decreases in general as a person ages and prisoners with life
4 sentences who are released in other states have the lowest
5 recidivism rates of all categories of prisoners; and

6 WHEREAS, Many Pennsylvania life sentenced prisoners have
7 undergone a maturation process where they are consistently
8 acknowledged as the role models of the correctional facilities;
9 and

10 WHEREAS, The cost of providing the aging "lifer" over 50
11 years of age with medicine and secure detainment facilities
12 increases with the length of incarceration; and

13 WHEREAS, Only one woman's life term has been commuted in the
14 last 12 years, from a population of more than 93 women sentenced
15 to life imprisonment; and

16 WHEREAS, The majority of "lifers" are four times more likely
17 to die in prison than to be commuted; and

18 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania's life-sentencing system treats
19 different offenders with unwarranted disparity, giving similar
20 sentences for a wide range of culpability; therefore be it

21 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives direct the
22 Pennsylvania Sentencing Commission to study Pennsylvania's life-
23 sentencing procedures for offenders convicted of homicide. The
24 Commission's legislative mandate shall include making
25 recommendations to the General Assembly that shall compare
26 Pennsylvania's life-sentencing system with other states, examine
27 recidivism rates of offenders in Pennsylvania and elsewhere who
28 received life sentences and have been released through
29 commutation and/or parole to assess whether they have proven to
30 be a danger to society and provide an analysis of the various

1 options that the General Assembly should consider in providing
2 for life sentences; and be it further

3 RESOLVED, That the Pennsylvania Commission on Sentencing
4 shall provide this analysis to the General Assembly no later
5 than March 30, 1993.