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MEMO



Senate of Pennsylvania

December 8, 2010

TO: ALL SENATORS

FROM: Stewart J. Greenleaf *Stewart*

SUBJECT: Cosponsorship -- National Guard Youth Challenge Program

I am reintroducing **Senate Bill 518**, directing the Department of Military Affairs to establish the National Guard Youth Challenge Program. The purpose of the youth challenge program is to improve the life skills and employment potential of at-risk youths between 16 and 18 years of age by providing structured military-based training and supervised work experience. The program's core components assist participants in earning a high school diploma or its equivalent, facilitating leadership development, promoting fellowship and community service, developing life-coping skills and job skills, and improving physical fitness and health and hygiene.

The youth challenge program includes at least a 22-week residential program and a 12-month post-residential mentoring period. A program participant must be a resident of Pennsylvania and not be attending secondary school. The participant shall not have a felony conviction or be on parole or probation, and shall be subject to drug-testing. Participation is voluntarily and the program is free of charge to its participants.

The youth challenge program began in 1993 by an act of Congress as a ten-state pilot program. In 1998, following a comprehensive evaluation, Congress approved the youth challenge program as a permanent program. Administered by the National Guard Bureau in the Department of Defense, there are now 34 youth challenge programs in 29 states and the territory of Puerto Rico. New Jersey, Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia are among the nearby states with programs. Currently the federal government provides 60% of the costs of operating a state's program. The program is directed at high school dropouts. In 2005, nationwide, the National Guard Bureau reported graduating 6,806 students, with over 70% of those graduates earning a high school equivalent diploma; 57% joining the work force; 12.3% joining the military; and 26.7% continuing their education. The program is considerably less expensive than the cost of private military-style programs or for incarceration.

One reason the youth challenge program has been successful is the mentoring component of the program. Youth in the program are trained and matched with qualified adult mentors by the 13<sup>th</sup> week of the program. Following the match, mentoring relationships are closely monitored and supported by case managers for 14 months. During this time, mentors are actively involved in assisting participants in the implementation of a life plan developed during the residential phase. Mentors provide the continuity that is needed for a seamless transition for participants from the residential phase back into the community. Over 85% of the participants engaged in mentoring relationships are productively employed or attending school 12 months after leaving the residential phase of the program.

The New Jersey program has the following mission statement: "The mission of the New Jersey Youth Challenge Academy is to provide a highly disciplined environment fostering academics, leadership development, physical training and personal growth to educate and train unemployed youth who have ceased to attend high school." This legislation will establish the same program in Pennsylvania with the same laudable mission.

*If you would like to cosponsor this legislation, please contact Pat Snively of my office by e-mailing her at [psnively@pasen.gov](mailto:psnively@pasen.gov).*