

RONALD G. WATERS, MEMBER
191ST LEGISLATIVE DISTRICT



COMMITTEES

APPROPRIATIONS
CHILDREN & YOUTH
HEALTH
JUDICIARY

PA LEGISLATIVE BLACK CAUCUS,
CHAIRMAN

- 6027 LUDLOW STREET, UNIT A
PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA 19139
PHONE: (215) 748-6712
FAX: (215) 748-1687
- ROOM 328 K. LEROY IRVIS OFFICE BUILDING
P.O. BOX 202191
HARRISBURG, PENNSYLVANIA 17120-2191
PHONE: (717) 772-9850
FAX: (717) 783-1516

House of Representatives
COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HARRISBURG

MEMORANDUM

TO: All Members of the House of Representatives

FROM: Representative Ronald G. Waters

SUBJECT: Request for Co-Sponsorship

DATE: July 10, 2012

In the near future, I will be introducing legislation that will establish the Pennsylvania Criminal Justice Commission Act.

I recently voted in favor of Senate Bill 100 which I believe was a step in the right direction to reforming Pennsylvania's current criminal justice system. However, it is important to note that there are many different aspects of the existing criminal justice system that are still in need of repair. Prisons are overcrowded, sentencing policies are uneven and often unfair, ex-convicts are poorly integrated into society, and the growing problem of gang violence has not received the attention it deserves. Its irregularities and inequities cut against the notion that we are a society founded on fundamental fairness. Our failure to address these problems has caused the nation's prisons to burst their seams with massive overcrowding as our neighborhoods become more dangerous. We are wasting millions of dollars and diminishing millions of lives.

The Pennsylvania Criminal Justice Commission Act will create a sub-commission under the Commission on Crime and Delinquency to look at every aspect of our state's criminal justice system with an eye toward reshaping the process from top to bottom. I believe that it is time to bring together the best minds in Pennsylvania to confer, report, and make concrete recommendations about how we can reform the process.

The Commission will review all areas of Pennsylvania's criminal justice practices and make specific findings, to include an examination of:

- Reasons for the increase in Pennsylvania's crime and incarceration rate;

- Prison administration policies, including the availability of pre-employment training programs and career progression for guards and prison administrators;
- Costs of current incarceration policies;
- The impact of gang activities;
- Drug policy and its impact on incarceration, crime, and sentencing;
- Policies as they related to the mentally ill in the prison system;
- Policies regarding reintegrating ex-offenders back into the community;
- Any other area that the Commission deems relevant.

The Commission will make recommendations for policy changes designed to:

- Re-focus incarceration policies to reduce the overall incarceration rate while preserving public safety, cost-effectiveness, and societal fairness;
- Decrease prison violence;
- Improve prison administration, including competence and career enhancement of administrators;
- Establish meaningful re-entry programs for ex-offenders;
- Reform our state's drug policies;
- Improve treatment of the mentally ill in the prison system;
- Reform any other aspect of the system the Commission determines necessary.

We need to fix the system. Pennsylvania needs a major recalculation of who goes to prison and for how long and of how we address the long-term consequences of incarceration. Please join me in co-sponsoring this legislation by contacting Nilda Jenkins at (717) 772-6955 or via e-mail at njenkins@pahouse.net.