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THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

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HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 425 Session of  
1992

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

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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.