

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 847 Session of 2010

INTRODUCED BY JOHNSON, WHEATLEY, BELFANTI, BRENNAN, BRIGGS, BROWN, CARROLL, COHEN, GEORGE, GIBBONS, HALUSKA, HORNAMAN, JOSEPHS, KIRKLAND, MAHONEY, MANN, MICOZZIE, MUNDY, MURPHY, MURT, PAYTON, ROEBUCK, SANTONI, SIPTROTH, THOMAS AND YOUNGBLOOD, JUNE 14, 2010

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY, JUNE 14, 2010

A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a
 2 literature review of research and evaluation related to
 3 current State criminal justice policies and practices to
 4 better inform the General Assembly as the commission
 5 undertakes to improve the policy environment for improving
 6 public safety, cost effectiveness, overall prison
 7 administration and fairness in the implementation of
 8 Pennsylvania's criminal justice system; to compile and
 9 publish a compendium of completed studies, summaries of the
 10 study findings and abstracts of relevant ongoing or
 11 incomplete studies; and to make this compendium available to
 12 the General Assembly within one year from the date this
 13 resolution is adopted.

14 WHEREAS, In comparison to bordering states, Pennsylvania's
 15 violent offenses rate is higher than the rates for New Jersey,
 16 New York, Ohio and West Virginia; and

17 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania's 2008 reported murder rate of 5.6 per
 18 100,000 persons was greater than both the national rate of 5.4
 19 and the northeastern regional rate of 4.2; and

20 WHEREAS, Of counties reporting murders in 2006, rates ranged
 21 from 0 in 17 counties and 0.6 in Butler County to 22.7 in
 22 Philadelphia County; and

1 WHEREAS, Minorities make up a disproportionate share of
2 prison populations, and incarceration for drug crimes has had a
3 lopsided impact on minority communities; and

4 WHEREAS, Black males have a 32% chance of serving time in
5 prison at some point in their lives, Hispanic males have a 17%
6 chance and white males have a 6% chance; and

7 WHEREAS, The State prison population at the end of 2009
8 totaled 51,487 offenders. This was a 21% increase from 2005 and
9 more than a 130% increase from 1990; and

10 WHEREAS, Existing practices can incarcerate people who do not
11 belong in prison and distract from locking up more serious,
12 violent offenders who are a threat to our communities; and

13 WHEREAS, A total of 50,444 violent offenses were reported in
14 Pennsylvania during 2008. This was a 4% increase over the number
15 reported in 2005; and

16 WHEREAS, A longer trend shows reported violent offenses
17 increased 5.4% over ten years since 1998 and 4.6% since 2000;
18 and

19 WHEREAS, It is an extraordinary challenge for reentry
20 programs to maintain public safety while assisting ex-offenders
21 to become full, contributing members of society; and

22 WHEREAS, The national and northeast regional violent offense
23 arrest rates have increased over the past several years. While
24 New Jersey's rates and West Virginia's rates have decreased,
25 Pennsylvania's rates and its other contiguous states' rates have
26 increased; and

27 WHEREAS, Those addicted to and abusive of illicit drugs are
28 an estimated 10% to 20% of the drug-using population, but
29 account for an estimated half of all illicit drug consumption.
30 Treating addiction will significantly help decrease demand; and

1 WHEREAS, Prisons and jails nationwide have been characterized
2 as holding facilities for the mentally ill. An estimated 350,000
3 men and women with serious mental disorders are in prisons and
4 jails and are 12 times more likely to be in prisons than in
5 mental health facilities; and

6 WHEREAS, Prisoners are two to four times more likely to be
7 schizophrenic, depressed, bipolar or suffering from
8 posttraumatic stress disorder. Approximately 73% of mentally ill
9 inmates suffer from a substance abuse disorder; and

10 WHEREAS, Prison administration can often be uneven, lacking
11 clear, affirmative standards of training and performance,
12 varying greatly from institution to institution, locality to
13 locality and among Federal, State and local jurisdictions; and

14 WHEREAS, According to a 2007 Bureau of Justice Statistics
15 survey, an estimated 64.5% of all Federal and State inmates
16 experienced one or more incidents of sexual victimization
17 involving other inmates or staff; therefore be it

18 RESOLVED, (the Senate concurring) That the General Assembly
19 direct the Joint State Government Commission to undertake a
20 thorough review of research and evaluation studies which examine
21 the impact, cost and effectiveness of programs and policies
22 designed to:

23 (1) Reduce the overall incarceration rate while
24 preserving public safety, cost effectiveness and societal
25 fairness.

26 (2) Decrease prison violence.

27 (3) Improve prison administration, including competence
28 and career enhancement of administrators.

29 (4) Establish job, vocational and life skills training
30 of inmates in preparation for their transition to the

1 community.

2 (5) Establish reentry programs for ex-offenders that
3 decrease the rates of recidivism.

4 (6) Improve our Commonwealth's drug policies relating to
5 the criminal justice population.

6 (7) Improve treatment of the mentally ill in the
7 criminal justice system and prison system.

8 (8) Reduce disproportionate representation of minorities
9 in the system.

10 (9) Improve responses to youth and gang violence;
11 and be it further

12 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission compile
13 the results of the study into a comprehensive compendium; and be
14 it further

15 RESOLVED, That the compendium contain a study abstract,
16 summary of findings and recommendations for each study reviewed;
17 and be it further

18 RESOLVED, That the compendium contain a study abstract for
19 each study found that is ongoing, in progress or incomplete; and
20 be it further

21 RESOLVED, That the compendium be published in both print and
22 electronic format for the members of the General Assembly; and
23 be it further

24 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission submit
25 the compendium to the General Assembly as soon as possible, but
26 no later than one year following the adoption of this
27 resolution.