

THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

SENATE RESOLUTION

No. 169 Session of 2017

INTRODUCED BY GREENLEAF, STREET, LEACH AND MENSCH, JULY 20, 2017

REFERRED TO JUDICIARY, JULY 20, 2017

A RESOLUTION

1 Urging the President and the Congress of the United States to
2 enact bipartisan legislation to provide for criminal justice
3 reform.

4 WHEREAS, Despite recent reductions, the United States has the
5 highest incarceration rate in the world, holding approximately
6 2.2 million people in prisons and jails on any given day, a 500%
7 increase over the last 40 years; and

8 WHEREAS, The Federal prison population has increased from
9 approximately 25,000 people in fiscal year 1980 to over 205,000
10 people in fiscal year 2015, an increase of 720% over that time
11 period; and

12 WHEREAS, The budget of the Federal Bureau of Prisons' (BOP)
13 has increased more than \$7.1 billion from \$330 million in fiscal
14 year 1980 to \$7.479 billion in fiscal year 2016; and

15 WHEREAS, The number of Americans incarcerated for drug
16 offenses has skyrocketed from 40,900 in 1980 to 469,545 in 2015;
17 and

18 WHEREAS, At the Federal level, individuals incarcerated on a
19 drug conviction make up nearly half of the prison population;

1 and

2 WHEREAS, The growth in the Federal prison population can be a
3 detriment to the safety of staff and prisoners; and

4 WHEREAS, The number of Federal statutory crimes has
5 skyrocketed from 3,000 in the early 1980's to more than 5,000
6 today; and

7 WHEREAS, In 2014, the Congress of the United States
8 established the Charles Colson Task Force on Federal
9 Corrections, to conduct an independent assessment of the Federal
10 corrections system and identify the dynamic driving increases in
11 the Federal Bureau of Prisons' population and costs and produce
12 recommendations for lasting reforms; and

13 WHEREAS, In January 2016, the Task Force issued its final
14 report and recommendations and stated that "the dramatic prison
15 population expansion was caused largely by drug and weapon
16 offenses and by the mandatory minimum sentences that, beginning
17 in the mid-1980s, dictated long prison terms for both types of
18 crimes. Other contributors were the abolition of parole, Federal
19 limits on the use of 'good conduct time' and other credits to
20 shorten sentences and increased enforcement of immigration
21 crimes"; and

22 WHEREAS, The Task Force estimated that the Federal government
23 could lower Federal Bureau of Prisons' prison population by
24 60,000 people and save \$5 billion over the next several years by
25 adopting their suggested reforms, which, in part, include
26 reserving prison beds for the most serious Federal crimes,
27 promoting a culture of safety and rehabilitation in prison,
28 ensuring successful reintegration by using evidence-based
29 practices and reinvesting savings to support necessary programs,
30 supervision and treatment; and

1 WHEREAS, The Congressional Research Service in May 2016
2 issued a report entitled "The Federal Prison Population Buildup:
3 Options for Congress" which stated that "Congress could consider
4 options such as (1) modifying mandatory minimum penalties, (2)
5 expanding the use of Residential Reentry Centers, (3) placing
6 more offenders on probation, (4) reinstating parole for Federal
7 inmates, (5) expanding the amount of good time credit an inmate
8 can earn, and (6) repealing Federal criminal statutes for some
9 offenses."; and

10 WHEREAS, States across the nation have instituted reforms
11 aimed at making their criminal justice systems smarter, fairer,
12 less costly and more efficient; and

13 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania has enacted a number of criminal
14 justice reforms, including a justice reinvestment initiative,
15 that have resulted in the prison population declining by more
16 than 2,000 people over the past four years and the closing of
17 one state correctional institution; and

18 WHEREAS, While reforms have taken place at the State level,
19 it does not absolve Congress of the need to enact criminal
20 justice reform at the Federal level; and

21 WHEREAS, A number of criminal justice reform proposals, such
22 as S. 2123 - Sentencing Reform & Corrections Act of 2015, H.R.
23 759 - Corrections & Recidivism Reduction Act of 2016, H.R. 2944
24 - Sensenbrenner-Scott SAFE Justice Reinvestment Act of 2015,
25 H.R. 3713 - Sentencing Reform Act of 2015 and H.R. 4002 -
26 Criminal Code Improvement Act of 2015, were introduced and some
27 of them were reported from committee during the 114th Congress
28 (2015-2016), which, in part, included reducing mandatory minimum
29 sentences for nonviolent offenses and examining stronger
30 recidivism reduction programs in Federal prisons, but failed to

1 be approved; therefore be it

2 RESOLVED, That the Senate of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania
3 urge the President and the Congress of the United States to
4 enact bipartisan legislation to provide for criminal justice
5 reform; and be it further

6 RESOLVED, That copies of this resolution be transmitted to
7 the President of the United States, the presiding officers of
8 each house of Congress and to each member of Congress from
9 Pennsylvania.