
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE RESOLUTION

No. 115 Session of
2021

INTRODUCED BY LEE, HILL-EVANS, FRANKEL, SANCHEZ, KENYATTA,
KRAJEWSKI, ZABEL, KINSEY, ISAACSON, FIEDLER, A. DAVIS,
BROOKS, SCHWEYER, SCHLOSSBERG, KINKEAD, FREEMAN, NEILSON,
HOHENSTEIN, O'MARA, GALLOWAY, WARREN, HARRIS, DEASY,
PISCIOTTANO, INNAMORATO AND OTTEN, JUNE 14, 2021

REFERRED TO COMMITTEE ON JUDICIARY, JUNE 14, 2021

A RESOLUTION

1 Directing the Joint State Government Commission to conduct a
2 study on the access to social workers for incarcerated
3 individuals in Pennsylvania and the optimal ratio of social
4 workers to incarcerated individuals and issue a report of its
5 findings and recommendations to the House of Representatives.

6 WHEREAS, The Department of Corrections oversees more than
7 39,000 incarcerated individuals in an overburdened State
8 correctional system in this Commonwealth; and

9 WHEREAS, The Department of Corrections currently employs 49
10 correctional social workers at 25 institutions covering 39,391
11 incarcerated individuals, resulting in a ratio of 1 social
12 worker for every 803 incarcerated individuals in this
13 Commonwealth; and

14 WHEREAS, The absence of licensed social workers and
15 psychological managers places reliance on correctional officers
16 who are not qualified to give legal or personal advice, nor
17 required by law to advise in the best interest of incarcerated
18 individuals; and

1 WHEREAS, The insufficient capacity of the Commonwealth's
2 overburdened correctional system places an extraneous onus on
3 incarcerated individuals to function as their own advocates and
4 learn the laws particular to their sentencing without adequate
5 access to resources; and

6 WHEREAS, The dearth of resources and the inability for
7 incarcerated individuals to seek proper counsel are egregious
8 flaws in our judicial system that contribute to correctional
9 social workers being extremely overworked; and

10 WHEREAS, The unreasonable volume of case work leads to
11 lengthy administrative backlogs for filing necessary paperwork
12 and appointments, which lead to untreated, frustrated and
13 neglected incarcerated individuals, decreasing the overall
14 quality of life for incarcerated individuals; and

15 WHEREAS, According to a study conducted by the University of
16 Connecticut, when incarcerated individuals have difficulty
17 consulting with administrative professionals, the role of the
18 social worker is transformed from the traditional mental health
19 advocate role and extended to advocacy, discharge planning,
20 professional skills development and implementation of safety and
21 wellness programs; and

22 WHEREAS, Oftentimes, a correctional social worker may be an
23 incarcerated individual's main resource for mental health
24 services, and to restrict access to a social worker is to
25 belittle the reality of mental illness in incarcerated settings;
26 and

27 WHEREAS, The Department of Corrections observed that
28 approximately 33.6% of the population of incarcerated
29 individuals in this Commonwealth is treated for mental illness,
30 with approximately 31.6% of the male population actively

1 receiving mental health treatment and approximately 65.4% of the
2 female population currently receiving mental health treatment;
3 and

4 WHEREAS, Approximately 43.8% of individuals released from
5 institutions will be reincarcerated within three years; and

6 WHEREAS, Pennsylvania's high recidivism rate directly costs
7 taxpayers approximately \$224 million every year in addition to
8 the high social and economic burden on this Commonwealth with
9 more than \$2 billion in annual costs that are borne by
10 incarcerated individuals, families and communities, which
11 include lost wages, reduced lifetime earnings, eviction costs,
12 visitation costs, interest on criminal justice debt, adverse
13 health effects, increased infant mortality, decreased children's
14 education levels and subsequent wages as adults, children
15 rendered homeless by parental incarceration, child welfare
16 costs, divorce, decreased property values and the criminogenic
17 nature of prison; and

18 WHEREAS, To hold our institutions accountable on the promises
19 for rehabilitation, every resource provided should prevent
20 recidivism, beginning with the recognition that correctional
21 social workers provide a crucial role in developing healthy
22 wellness skills and addressing psychosocial issues for holistic
23 and permanent rehabilitation; therefore be it

24 RESOLVED, That the House of Representatives direct the Joint
25 State Government Commission to conduct a study on the access to
26 social workers for incarcerated individuals in Pennsylvania and
27 the optimal ratio of social workers to incarcerated individuals
28 and issue a report of its findings and recommendations to the
29 House of Representatives; and be it further

30 RESOLVED, That the recommended number or ratio of social

1 workers to incarcerated individuals within the prison systems of
2 this Commonwealth:

3 (1) be based on the current number of Department of
4 Corrections social workers; and

5 (2) quantify the gap in current versus target caseload
6 per social worker;

7 and be it further

8 RESOLVED, That the study advise the best course of action to
9 protect the rights of incarcerated individuals in this
10 Commonwealth and grant incarcerated individuals access to
11 compassionate and rehabilitative care; and be it further

12 RESOLVED, That the Joint State Government Commission report
13 its findings and recommendations to the House of Representatives
14 no later than one year after the adoption of this resolution.