



**TESTIMONY ON
SB 500, SB 501, SB 502
JUSTICE REINVESTMENT INITIATIVE II**

Presented to the House Judiciary Committee

By
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Good morning. I am Brinda Penyak, Deputy Director for the County Commissioners Association of Pennsylvania. The CCAP is a non-profit, non-partisan association providing legislative, educational, insurance, research, technology, and similar services on behalf of all of the Commonwealth's 67 counties.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide our written remarks on Justice Reinvestment, focusing on the package containing Senate Bills 500, 501 and 502. Corrections costs are a significant concern for counties as well as state government. At the county level, costs for incarceration and supervision can represent one of the largest expenditures within the budget. Counties fund corrections costs wholly through local property tax funds – they are not funded by the state or federal government, so commissioners and their counterparts take these issues very seriously.

The Justice Reinvestment Initiative (JRI) – a comprehensive effort involving the Department of Corrections, the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, other state agencies, legislators, counties and other stakeholders – is aimed at reducing the prison population through criminal justice reform. This is accomplished by directing resources saved by reducing prison admissions to the front end of the system and by providing support for law enforcement and counties to employ alternatives to incarceration that result in better outcomes and reduced recidivism. An approach that recognizes all sectors of the system as partners is critical and the appropriate use of such limited resources is a shared goal. This assumes a data driven approach to the use of best practices, and increases the likelihood that re-entrants will succeed once they return to the community, and assumes that other non-institutional settings can achieve criminal justice goals effectively when provided with appropriate resources and information.

The bills being considered by the committee are part of the second phase of the JRI. Specifically, Senate Bill 500 will create a County Adult Probation and Parole Advisory Committee to advise the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency on funding, standards and training for county adult probation and parole departments. The bill will also seek to redistribute savings achieved by other legislation to assist in improving these programs, which counties utilize to support community supervision options for non-violent offenders. Without the less expensive option for community-based supervision, more non-violent offenders are likely to be diverted to more costly prison sentences. Funding for county adult probation has been stagnant for many years, even while caseloads have increased, and expectations of probation staff evolve with the implementation of evidence-based practices. We believe this approach will allow more comprehensive decision making where funding for adult probation is concerned, in addition to providing additional dollars.

Senate Bill 501 will enhance the intermediate punishment program through establishment of a state drug treatment program which provides community alternatives for non-violent offenders. By diverting these offenders from jail and incorporating drug and alcohol treatment to assist in changing behaviors, the need for incarceration is reduced. Studies have shown that alternatives yield the best chance of offenders productively changing behaviors. Counties have utilized intermediate punishment programs for many years, allowing for appropriate use of resources, and keeping incarceration options for violent offenders. The legislation also updates the current

sentencing process to a simpler placement that would be similar to the Department of Corrections motivational boot camp.

Finally, Senate Bill 502 amends the Crime Victims Act to provide better information and compensation to victims.

CCAP has been a strong supporter of justice reinvestment because we believe these approaches focus on utilizing the most appropriate option for the actual circumstances presented by an offender. Justice reinvestment allows for the redirection of resources so that change is not hindered by a lack of funding. We believe that the criminal justice system works better when decisions are made with all of the stakeholders at the table, and we urge the Committee to adopt these bills at the earliest convenience.

Thank you for your consideration of these comments. We would be pleased to follow up on any questions these remarks may generate.