



Justice Reinvestment in Pennsylvania: Dynamic Strategies for Reducing Corrections Costs and Improving Public Safety

In October 2012, state leaders in Pennsylvania enacted comprehensive legislation designed to increase public safety and save hundreds of millions of state taxpayer dollars. Using a data-driven “justice reinvestment” approach, Pennsylvania received 10 months of intensive technical assistance from the Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG Justice Center), in partnership with The Pew Charitable Trusts and the U.S. Department of Justice’s Bureau of Justice Assistance. The resulting legislation contains a framework for reinvesting a portion of the savings generated by more effective corrections and parole policies in strategies that assist local law enforcement in crime prevention, provide more resources to probation departments, support crime victim services, and expand the utilization of risk assessment.

Pennsylvania’s Justice Reinvestment Process

Between 2000 and 2011, Pennsylvania’s spending on corrections increased 76 percent, from \$1.1 billion to \$1.9 billion, while the number of people in prison increased 40 percent, from 36,602 to 51,312 people. By the end of that period, the amount of federal and state funding awarded to local law enforcement projects across the state had decreased 87 percent, from \$15 million in 2007 to \$2 million in 2011. These cuts hindered the ability of police departments to implement data-driven crime prevention strategies, such as intelligence-led, “hot spot,” and problem-oriented policing.

In response to the growing strain of corrections costs on the state’s budget and the negative impact of budget cuts on local law enforcement, in 2011, Governor Tom Corbett, Chief Justice Ronald Castille, and legislative leaders asked the CSG Justice Center to conduct a detailed analysis of Pennsylvania’s criminal justice system and develop a comprehensive policy framework to cut crime and reduce recidivism, both at a lower cost to Pennsylvania taxpayers. The Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency established a bipartisan, inter-branch working group to oversee the data analysis and policy development provided by the CSG Justice Center, which identified three significant challenges.

First, a third of individuals sentenced to prison had less than one year to serve on their minimum



“The answer isn’t always to build bigger prisons,” said Governor Tom Corbett, signing House Bill 135 (above). “Sometimes the answer lies in smarter solutions that help us build fewer prisons and better communities.”

sentences, leaving little time for them to participate in treatment programs in prison and making it challenging for the Parole Board to review their cases in a timely manner. The number of prison admissions with such short sentences has more than doubled, increasing 138 percent between 2000 and 2011, from 1,641 to 3,903 people.

Second, because everyone in prison must be considered for parole after reaching his or her minimum sentence, the rising number of admissions had resulted in a growing backlog of cases for review. For example, 70

percent of the parole reviews that should have taken place each month were delayed due to inefficiencies that likely could have been avoided with greater coordination between agencies. In addition, despite having been approved for parole, thousands of people remained in prison because of delays in identifying housing plans, completing required programs, or paying fees and fines.

Third, community-based residential programs funded by the state at over \$100 million each year to reduce recidivism were not being used to target individuals on parole who could benefit the most. As a result, thousands of parolees continued to fail to complete their supervision in the community and were returned to prison at a huge cost, despite the state's significant investment in residential programs. At the same time, district attorneys, victim advocates, and others raised public safety concerns over the significant number of people who were being released to these programs even though they had not served their minimum prison sentences.

Pennsylvania's Justice Reinvestment Framework

After the working group reached consensus on a policy framework to address these challenges, state lawmakers, including Representative Glen Grell (R-Cumberland), Representative Thomas Caltagirone (D-Berks), and Senator Daylin Leach (D-Delaware), incorporated the policies into House Bill (HB) 135 and Senate Bill (SB) 100, which supplemented a number of other criminal justice policy reforms authored by Senator Stewart Greenleaf (R- Bucks).

By FY2017, the framework is projected to generate up to \$253 million in cost savings and increase public safety through five key changes to policy and practice:

- Reduce by 30 percent the number of people admitted to prison for very short sentences by 2017 by providing performance-driven funding to counties that volunteer to house these individuals.
- Require people convicted of the two lowest-level misdemeanor offense categories to serve a local sanction rather than sentencing them to prison.
- Address inefficiencies in the current corrections and parole systems by increasing by 20 percent the number of parole cases reviewed each month by 2015.
- Hold people on parole more accountable for violations of conditions of supervision with community-based, shorter, and more cost-effective sanctions.
- Prioritize community correction programs for individuals whose level of need is compatible with the intensity of the program delivered.

HB 135 established a formula that requires a portion of these cost savings to be reinvested in public safety improvements over the next six years. For example, under the law, a portion of the savings must be reinvested in data-driven law enforcement strategies, strengthening county probation and parole departments, and improving victim notification.

SB 100 was approved by unanimous votes in the House and Senate before being signed into law by Governor Corbett on July 5, 2012. HB 135, also approved unanimously by the General Assembly, was signed into law on October 25, 2012.



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The Council of State Governments Justice Center (CSG Justice Center) is a national nonprofit organization that serves policymakers at the local, state, and federal levels from all branches of government. The CSG Justice Center provides practical, nonpartisan advice and consensus-driven, evidence-based strategies to increase public safety and strengthen communities.

The CSG Justice Center's work in justice reinvestment is done in partnership with the Pew Charitable Trusts and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance. These efforts have provided data-driven analyses and policy options to policymakers in 18 states.

For additional information about Justice Reinvestment in Pennsylvania, please visit csgjusticecenter.org/jr.