

COMMISSION ON SAFETY AND ABUSE in America's Prisons **NEWS RELEASE**

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PA LEGISLATORS EXAMINE STATE'S PRISON CONDITIONS AND POSSIBLE REFORMS

Harrisburg, PA - Today, the Pennsylvania House and Senate Judiciary Committees held a joint hearing to examine the state of corrections in Pennsylvania and hear ideas for reform. The hearing followed two major efforts to deal with the state's overcrowded prisons: Governor Ed Rendell's decision to reopen a state prison in Pittsburgh and a Philadelphia judge's decision to re-impose court monitoring of the city's jails, both in response to dangerous conditions caused by overcrowding in prisons.

The Committees heard testimony from two panels of corrections experts. The first drawn from the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons, a non-partisan, national commission which spent over a year studying the conditions in prisons and jails across the country.

The Commission's co-chairs, former U.S. Attorney General Nicholas de B. Katzenbach and John J. Gibbons, former Chief Judge of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit, praised the PA legislators, saying:

"By holding these hearings, Pennsylvania is sending a strong message to its citizens and to other states about the impact conditions inside prisons have on our communities and broader society. By following this inquiry with action the state can build on its successes and become a national leader in corrections."

Commissioners Tim Ryan, Director of the Miami-Dade County Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation; Pat Nolan, Vice President of the Prison Fellowship who served 25 months in a federal prison; and Ray Krone, a former death row inmate cleared by DNA evidence, discussed the Commission's findings and recommendations about violence and segregation, corrections labor and leadership, and oversight.

State Senator Stewart J. Greenleaf, Chair of the Senate Judiciary Committee, said, "The Senate and House Judiciary Committees were glad to hear from the Commission on Safety and Abuse in America's Prisons and discuss with members of the Commission the recommendations in their report."

Commission testimony was followed by a panel of Pennsylvania corrections experts and advocates who discussed the specific problems facing Pennsylvania's prisons and jails.

Last year, after completing an 18-month, nation-wide inquiry into the problems facing inmates, corrections officers, and administrators, the Commission on Safety and Abuse released its final report, *Confronting Confinement*, at a hearing of the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Corrections and Rehabilitation. The report received widespread praise for its recommendations, which included calls for creating safe and healthy environments for inmates and corrections officers, and increasing government and public oversight of correctional facilities. Members of the Commission include Hilary Shelton, director of the Washington, D.C. bureau of the NAACP; Stephen Bright, law professor and founder of the Southern Center for Human Rights; and Senator Gloria Romero, California Senate Majority Leader and the highest-ranking woman in the California Legislature.

To learn more about the Commission's work, read testimony from today's hearing, or to access the complete report, go to www.prisoncommission.org.

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