

DRAFT MINUTES

SENATE COMMITTEE ON STATE AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS HOUSE COMMITTEE ON STATE AGENCIES AND GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

Meeting Jointly

Tuesday, August 19, 2014

The Senate and House Committees on State Agencies and Governmental Affairs met jointly on Tuesday, August 19, 2014, at 10:00 a.m. in Room A of the MAC Building.

Members in Attendance

The following committee members attended: Senators Eddie Joe Williams, Chair; Bobby Pierce, and Jimmy Hickey. Representatives Andrea Lea, Chair; Bob Ballinger, Nate Bell, Fonda Hawthorne, Mary Hickerson, Debra Hobbs, Karen Hopper, John Hutchison, Josh Miller, Jim Nickels, and Betty Overbey.

Other legislators in attendance were: Senators Missy Irvin, Michael Lamoureux, Bill Sample, and Jon Woods. Representatives Randy Alexander, Harold Copenhaver, Andy Davis, Gary Deffenbaugh, Douglas House, Joe Jett, Sheilla Lampkin, Homer Lenderman, Stephanie Malone, Walls McCrary, Mark McElroy, Micah Neal, and Mary Slinkard.

The meeting was called to order by Senator Williams.

Consideration to Approve the Minutes

[EXHIBITS B.1 and B.2]

Senator Williams made a motion to approve the June 18, 2014 and July 17, 2014 meeting minutes. Without objection, the motion was approved by the Committee.

Presentation of Pathway to Freedom Program

[EXHIBIT C]

Representative Bob Ballinger introduced Mr. Nick Robbins from the Pathway to Freedom Program and asked the committee to be open to alternative solutions in reducing the prison population.

Mr. Nick Robbins, Re-Entry Specialist, Pathway to Freedom Program, stated currently in Arkansas the prison population is 17,374 with an average yearly cost of \$22,969 per offender, the average length of time served is three years and 11 months, and on average 35-40% of offenders are released each year. Mr. Robbins briefly explained the "Earn Your Release Program" that could impact prison overcrowding by reducing the population, lowering the yearly cost per offender, reducing the average length of time served, and increasing the average number of offenders released each year. This program focuses on mentoring, personalized case management, and pre-release entry classes. The Earn Your Release Program is a work release program for offenders within 18 months prior to release. This program will include a six-month reentry program, one-year early conditional release, and a six-month post release programming. The yearly funding needed for the program is estimated at \$10 million, for an estimated cost of \$3,600 per participant. This program would support 2,778 offenders. The program would save the state approximately \$19,400 per offender with a total cost savings of \$53.9 million yearly. This program would also increase the average number of offenders released each year to the national average of 60 to 66 percent.

Discussion of Request for a Study of Prison Overcrowding

Senator Eddie Joe Williams stated the Department of Correction plans to present a proposal, during the next session, to build a 1,000 bed prison facility. There is a need to develop an alternative plan that is sustainable and effective. He proposed for the committees to meet each month, for the remainder of the year, to discuss alternative solutions in order for the committee to make an informed decision during the next session.

Richard Wilson, Assistant Director, Bureau of Legislative Research, presented his findings on financial requirements of building a 1,000 bed prison facility. He explained the projected \$2 per decal increase will not be enough to fund the \$100 million project. Based on average decal sales from the past 10 years, the projected increase would amount to \$5.34 million in proceeds. The current interest rate on tax exempt bonds is averaging 2.65 percent for a 15 year bond and 3 percent for 20 years. The prison project would need funding of \$8.7 million per year for a 15 year bond, requiring a minimum increase of \$3.60 per decal, or \$6.7 million per year for the 20 year bond, a \$2.50 increase per decal. Interest rates for tax exempt bonds are projected to increase.

Dr. Brent Benda, Senior Legislative Analyst, Bureau of Legislative Research, presented his cost-benefit analysis of correctional interventions report. He stated a 10% increase in the state incarceration rate would lead to a 2 to 4% reduction in the crime rate. However, due to diminishing marginal returns, an increase in the incarceration rate today avoids fewer crimes than it did a decade ago. Incarcerating violent and high-volume property offenders continues to generate more benefits than costs, although incarcerating drug offenders generates more costs than benefits. He concluded that some research-based rehabilitation and prevention programs, particularly family-based approaches for juvenile offenders and drug treatment for adult offenders, provide a better return on state dollars than prison expansion for certain offenders.

Senator Williams made a motion for the Bureau of Legislative Research to do an in-depth analysis on the program presented by Mr. Nick Robbins, to do an analysis on building a new prison versus expanding current facilities, and to provide a compilation of all information presented in this meeting and during future meetings. Without objection, the motion passed.

Date of Next Meeting

The next committee meeting will be on September 24, 2014 at the Department of Correction, Willis H. Sargent Training Academy in England, Arkansas.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 11:45 a.m.