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Testimony in Support of HB-6684, HB-6685, and HB-6709

Good afternoon Rep. Lawlor, Sen. MacDonald and other members of the Judiciary Committee. I am here today to speak in support of Raised Bill No. 6684 An Act Establishing A Correctional Staff Health and Safety Subcommittee of the Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission. Additionally, I am here to support Raised House Bill No. 6685 An Act Concerning The Reporting of Inmate Population Density and Correctional Facility Specific Data.

Both of these measures are recommendations of the legislature's Prison Population and Correctional Staff Safety Task Force. This task force was established in July 2008 by House Speaker James A. Amann in response to a heightened number of inmate assaults upon correctional staff which were occurring in the spring of 2008 as well as a sharp upswing in the prison population since the summer of 2007.

This bipartisan Task Force, which also had representation by the Department of Corrections and correctional staff, was charged with evaluating health and safety standards for staff in the State's correctional facilities and making recommendations consistent with its findings.

Ultimately, the committee found that inmate on staff assaults increased over the past two years to a level that is not at a historic high, but a significant enough increase to call for concern. Of additional interest was the Department of Corerections current collection of data and documentation policies as they relate to inmate assaults on staff. More specifically, assaults of a very dangerous and volatile nature are being documented by the department in such as way that it does not necessarily reflect the significant nature of the incident.

A subcommittee within the already established Criminal Justice Policy Advisory Commission would provide for needed and continual oversight as it relates to the health and safety of correctional staff. As you can see from the bill, the subcommittee shall review the policies and procedures of the DOC with respect to staff health and safety to include:

- How inmate assaults are investigated, classified, and assigned points,
- How data on inmate assaults is collected and compiled, and
- How data on inmate assaults is reported to persons and agencies outside the department.

In regard to Raised Bill No. 6685 An Act Concerning The Reporting of Inmate Population Density and Correctional Facility Specific Data, this initiative addresses the issue of how we measure prison overcrowding. Ultimately, this legislation is aimed at assisting policy makers to determine whether or not there is a relationship between population levels and inmate assaults upon staff.

And finally, I would like to express support for HB 6709 An Act Concerning the Department of Correction. I specifically support a measure in the bill which would prohibit the disclosure of employee files to inmates and also language that would require that the Department of Correction be notified when a request has been made to a public agency for disclosure of information about a facility.

Thank you very much. I would be happy to answer any questions.