

Issue: Criminal Justice Reform

Legislator: Gov. Tom Wolf

Date: February 19, 2016

Content: Huge Week for Criminal Justice Reform in Pennsylvania

You may have read headlines like these this week:

- Pennsylvania Gives Ex-Criminals Chance for Clean Slate
- Nonviolent misdemeanors may be sealed under new law
- Gov. Tom Wolf, state leaders launch new look at Pennsylvania's criminal justice policies
- State launches new effort to revamp justice system

If you're wondering what changed this week, Governor Wolf took two big steps to change Pennsylvania's criminal justice system for the better – meaning lower costs for taxpayers, better outcomes for offenders, and less crime in the commonwealth.

Here's exactly what happened:

Reducing Recidivism through Opportunity for Rehabilitated Pennsylvanians

On Tuesday, Governor Wolf joined sponsors, Sen. Greenleaf (R-Montgomery) and Rep. Harris (D-Philadelphia), and supporters of Senate Bill 166 to sign the legislation into law. SB 166 makes it possible for low-level ex-offenders, who have served their time and not committed any crimes for 7 or 10 years, to ask the court to seal their criminal records, which will help them to get jobs and not return to prison.

What Governor Wolf said:

“The United States is the world leader in incarceration and a criminal record often carries a lifetime of consequences that often lead to poverty or re-incarceration. This law is a commonsense, positive and unprecedented step to help Pennsylvanians with minor or dated criminal records have a fighting chance at opportunities for gainful employment.”

Why this is important:

Too many first-time and low-level offenders are serving their time and unable to improve their lives after leaving the system because they have a criminal record. And, they are too likely then to return to the system. As Governor Wolf said, we must do more to break this cycle; it is robbing too many of their lives and it is costing taxpayers far too much.

Public Safety Initiative that will Tackle Drivers of Cost, Incarceration and Recidivism

On Thursday, Governor Wolf joined PCCD Chairman Josh Shapiro, Corrections Secretary John Wetzel, Parole Board Chairman Michael Green, and leaders from both political parties and all three branches of government to launch an extensive review of the state's criminal justice system as part of a new Justice Reinvestment Initiative designed to reduce ineffective corrections spending and invest those savings in proven public safety strategies.

What Governor Wolf said:

“A broken criminal justice system is a failure to deliver on the promise of a fair and just society, and we must all work together to ensure Pennsylvania leads the nation in rehabilitation and not incarceration. While much progress has been made, there is more we can do and today is the beginning of an important process to look at how we can improve our criminal justice system from sentencing guidelines to our bail system. Working together, we can make many significant changes that will make our system fairer, improve public safety and save millions of dollars.”

Why this is important:

Pennsylvania currently has the highest incarceration rate among all states in the Northeast, despite reducing its prison population in recent years. Between 2004 and 2014, corrections expenditures increased by 40 percent, from \$1.5 billion to \$2.2 billion. Over the same period, the state's incarceration rate increased by 20 percent. Conversely, New York and New Jersey saw their incarceration rates drop by 20 percent and 21 percent, respectively.

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