

## Task force to study criminal justice system



Written by

**CHAD LIVENGOOD**  
The News Journal

12:21 AM, Jul. 26, 2011

**WILMINGTON** -- The state of Delaware is undertaking a study of its criminal justice system to find ways to slow prison growth and prevent ex-convicts from committing new crimes.

The U.S. Department of Justice has selected Delaware as a "Justice Reinvestment" site to evaluate what's right and wrong about the current system.

Gov. Jack Markell established a task force Monday that will use evidence-based data to suggest ways to reduce recidivism and improve public safety. The recommendations could lead to changes in state law.

The federal government, which is paying for the six-month study, has hired New York-based Vera Institute of Justice to conduct the review in partnership with a task force chaired by Lt. Gov. Matt Denn.

Law enforcement officials said they're not

ruling out any idea, including building additional prisons.

"If you tell us that what would be more effective is more prison cells, we're in," Chief Deputy Attorney General Charlie Butler said. "I'm not afraid to build more prisons. I'm not afraid to advocate for that. I think that's good policy."

But "if the science" says sustained incarceration isn't working, Butler said, the state's prosecutors would accept that finding as well.

"We want to know what works and when you tell us, we'll do everything we can to make that happen," Butler said.

The Vera Institute of Justice has worked on similar initiatives in Alabama and Louisiana, where a commission is considering changes to sentences and probation practices.

The end goal is to find new ways to control escalating costs of correcting bad behavior, Markell said.

Advertisement

**Make it Yours™**

Browse thousands of designs for over 3,000 devices.  
Get 15% off with code: SAVE15

**15% OFF**

**Browse Designs**

**skinIt**

Print Powered By FormatDynamics™

"All of these approaches are trying to make sure that the money spent in the corrections system is spent in the most efficient way possible," said Julie James, senior policy associate at the Vera Institute of Justice.

The cost for Delaware taxpayers to support the criminal justice system has skyrocketed over the past 10 years.

Despite cutbacks in recent years, the Department of Correction's \$254 million budget for the 2012 fiscal year is up 40 percent from 2002. The annual cost to incarcerate an inmate in Delaware rose from \$28,000 in 2005 to \$34,000 in 2010, according to the Department of Correction.

The Department of Safety and Homeland Security, which included the Delaware State Police, also has seen its budget rise by 40 percent over the past 10 years.

Even after the Legislature eliminated the Board of Parole's \$500,000 budget this year, the state's legal budget that has funded parole oversight and the Attorney General's and Public Defender's offices has increased 54 percent over 10 years, state data show.

Markell signed an executive order Monday establishing the Delaware Justice Reinvestment Task Force with 18 members, including lawmakers from both political parties, judges and municipal police chiefs.

Denn indicated he will keep the task force focused on the goal of improving public safety in Delaware and not delve into turf wars that are common in the criminal justice system.

"There are going to be times over the next several months where people are going to have to put egos aside," Denn said. "And there are going to be times where people are going to have to take political risks."

Advertisement



Make it Yours™

Browse thousands of designs for over 3,000 devices.  
Get 15% off with code: SAVE15

15% OFF

Browse Designs

skinit

Print Powered By  FormatDynamics™