

A statement presented by Dr. Christine Billiups at the May 14, 2015 meeting in Springfield

Dear Governor Rauner,

We thank you for your current efforts to reform the Illinois criminal justice system. During your process we strongly encourage you to consider ways to improve the living situation for currently and formally incarcerated people and uphold their human dignity, while also saving money for the state. As the Restorative Justice Committee for the Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet we suggest attention to the following areas and proposed legislation. Collectively we have been involved with prison ministry and reform for over 150 years within jails, prisons, the diocese, and higher education.

A primary focus for the new administration should be to **reduce** the prison population substantially. Overcrowding, long sentences for non-violent offenders and an overextended budget are all reasons to move forward carefully but proactively and with alacrity. Some first reasonable steps that bear recommendation are as follows: enact alternative sentencing and treatment for those with mental illness and/or chemical dependency, reinstate meritorious good time and credit for program participation, eliminate the sentence of Life Without Parole for those who committed capital crimes as juveniles, eliminate mandatory sentencing of all sorts for juveniles and adults, and offenders who are given dual convictions at the state and federal levels for the same crime should be able to serve those sentences concurrently. (Current proposed bills that will support prison reduction efforts: **SB 1785, SB 1830, SB 1829, HB 3423, HB 1310**)

Support, resources, and opportunities for at risk young people will help with **prevention** and interrupt the “school to prison” pipeline. There are many cost-effective and evidence-based approaches to prevent incarceration: mentoring programs, at home family support, after school programs, and conflict resolution training. Prison reduction can be accomplished if state and federal legislation, court procedures, and policy proposals follow principles of restorative justice. The Youth PROMISE Act, the Redeem Act, Second Chance Act, and the Smarter Sentencing Act are such policy proposals.

Re-entry programs can significantly reduce recidivism. Re-entry preparation is needed within institutions for a successful return to the community. Collaboration among institutions, such as churches, local governments, non-profits, and returning citizens is needed. Re-entry homes and programs will save money by lowering recidivism and supporting previously incarcerated tax-paying citizens. We ask you to encourage Illinois communities to welcome re-entry programs and the persons they serve. (Current proposed bills that will support re-entry efforts: **HB 3284, HB 3149, HB 2758**)

High prison populations and misguided budget priorities in Illinois have prevented the IDOC from providing adequate physical and mental **health care** for those confined in prisons. Even basic human needs of nourishment and cleanliness are denied to detained persons. Failure to provide preventative medicine, adequate food, or basic health care is a violation of human rights. When we do not provide adequate and appropriate mental health care in our communities nor our penal institutions, criminal activity in our state increases. Providing good mental health care in medical facilities designed for this purpose makes practical and fiscal sense. Mentally stable persons can take responsibility for their health which reduces crime, prison population and expenditures for the state, as well as making

Illinois' families and communities stronger and safer. We ask the Commission to advocate for quality mental and physical health care in our communities and prisons. (Current proposed bills that will support adequate health care: **HB 3277, HB 1566**)

Addiction plays a major role in criminal behavior. Helping people become and stay sober is critical to efforts to decrease crime, protect our communities' safety, and reduce prison population. Good treatment programs can save our taxpayers considerable tax dollars. We ask the Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform to promote laws which divert non-violent, addicted persons to quality evidence-based treatment programs and to improve the treatment programs that once were more successful in our prison system. (Current proposed bill that will support adequate care for addicts: **SB 727**)

People of color are incarcerated at disproportionate rates (as quoted in your transition report) causing harm to their families, communities, and to us all. Recent events such as Ferguson and Baltimore illustrate the consequences of continuing these unjust practices. Also, the high incarceration rates of people of color raises the populations and costs of our prisons. We ask that Illinois Department of Correction Administration, high ranking officers, and the Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform members participate in an Antiracism Program to learn how racism is institutionalized in all of our institutions including our Criminal Justice System. An Illinois group offering such trainings is the Crossroads Antiracism Organizing and Training Program. (Current proposed bill that will support people of color: **HJR 14**)

Please continue to enforce legislation which **prevents for-profit prisons** from establishing institutions in the State of Illinois and extend this prohibition to Federal, ICE, and other jurisdictions. Forprofit prisons owe their allegiance to their stockholders, not the state, local community, employees, or residents of the institution. They have poor track records, multiple human rights infractions generating law suits, poor cooperation with and support of local communities. They consider residents of the institution as commodities and often do not function in humanitarian modes. There is a lack of transparency. They have a history of hiring administrative and professional staff from within their own institutions from other states denying higher-paying positions to local citizens and tax revenue to the state in which the prisons are located.

We welcome the opportunity to talk with you and the Commission on Criminal Justice and Sentencing Reform to elaborate on our points. We will continue to monitor the bills we have highlighted and any bills that support human dignity in the Illinois criminal justice system. Thank you for your attention and consideration of our concerns.

Sincerely,

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Roman Catholic Diocese of Joliet, Illinois
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