



# THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1787

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## TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE ON PRISON DISTURBANCES

PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY  
WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 17, 1990



Thank you for the opportunity to present testimony today. My name is Ann Schwartzman and I am the Director of Advocacy for the Pennsylvania Prison Society. Along with me is Michael Hackman, the Society's Director of Volunteers.

The Pennsylvania Prison Society is a statewide organization whose mandate, developed in 1787, calls for monitoring prison conditions, advocating for humane treatment for those involved in the system and advocating for an effective, efficient criminal justice system.

We are all aware of the problems existing throughout corrections. Newspaper headlines and TV News Programs show clear evidence of a system in crisis.

We are now incarcerating more people than ever before. For the first time, the United States reached the one million mark for those incarcerated and at least one out of every 53 men and women are under some form of correctional supervision.

In Pennsylvania, 20,000 men and women are incarcerated in the state system and another 17,000 are in county jails. Projections are constantly changing, but the state system alone is expected to reach 40,000 by the year 2000.

Population numbers are increasing drastically, but space and programs are not. The state system's population is 150% of capacity. In spite of accelerated prison construction, the system will remain over capacity for years to come.

During 1989, there were prison riots at the State Correctional Institution at Rockview, Camp Hill, Huntingdon, Graterford and in the Philadelphia Prisons of Holmesburg and the House of Corrections. Although many factors contributed to these incidents, overcrowding played a major role.

Overcrowding effects every aspect of corrections. Housing becomes the top priority while educational and vocational programs, treatment, and counseling are sacrificed. The Adams Commission found that nearly 1/3 of the inmates at Camp Hill were idle and at least 500 were on waiting lists. Studies show that 70% of inmates today have some addiction problem yet, at Camp Hill, prior to the riot, only 322 out 2,572 inmates were in drug treatment programs.

Prisons are experiencing physical plant problems, structural defects, limited space for classrooms and volunteer programs, shortage of staff, increased overtime, increased tensions and more incidents. Prisons are becoming America's dumping ground for the poor, the illiterate, the homeless, and the mentally ill yet they are not capable nor are they prepared for this burden.

More and more, prisons are looked at as the sole answer to society's problem of crime, yet, recidivism remains high. 90% of Pennsylvania's inmates return to our neighborhoods, most with no skills, and few if any have any expectations of securing decent paying jobs or becoming contributors to society.

Public safety is an integral part of any discussion on corrections. If the goal is to secure public safety, we need only look at the riots last year to realize public safety is jeopardized. Substantial system-wide changes are necessary so that overcrowding will be reduced and people released from prison will get out and stay out.

The Adams Commission cited overcrowding as a factor in the prison disturbances. They also made recommendations similar to those from the 1982 Report on the Graterford Hostage Incident, the 1985 PCCD Task Force Report on Overcrowding, the 1987 Interdepartmental Task Force Report on Corrections, 1988 Legislative Budget and Finance Committee Audit of the Department of Corrections, and the recent Auditor General's Report on Camp Hill.

Pennsylvania needs action on these and other recommendations such as increased usage of half-way houses, intensive supervision programs, Earned Time, Lifers parole review, increased commutations not more reports. In addition to implementation of the recommendations, we must look at individuals involved in the system-not just groups or in this case, numbers.

The Prison Society has heard from many individual inmates and their families and we would like to share their concerns with you.