



THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1787

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TESTIMONY BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA

HOUSE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

ON MOTIVATIONAL BOOT CAMPS

ANN SCHWARTZMAN
PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY
JANUARY 18, 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.

The Prison Society is a statewide organization whose mandate drafted in 1787 is to monitor conditions in Pennsylvania prisons and jails, to advocate for humane treatment and to advocate for an efficient, effective criminal justice system.

The Prison Society is encouraged by the growing concern and interest in criminal justice issues. Also we appreciate the fact that the House Judiciary Committee is sponsoring public hearings to discuss solutions, remedies, and alternatives to the corrections crisis.

Today, specifically, we are looking at proposals sponsored by Representative Hagarty and Representative Evans on the issue of boot camps. Although the Prison Society may not agree with specific provisions, we applaud these efforts in tackling the problems of crime, prison overcrowding and corrections.

The Boot Camp, or shock incarceration, is a relatively new concept in the United States but it is a popular one. It is rapidly being adopted by some 14 states including Kansas, Michigan, Mississippi, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Georgia, Oklahoma, Florida, Louisiana, New York, South Carolina, Alabama, Texas and Minnesota and on the federal level with proposed legislation, SR 1142, sponsored by Senator Lloyd Bentsen (D-Texas).

Boot camps are being used primarily as a short term alternative to traditional prison for (usually) first time non-

violent offenders. Emphasis is placed on rigorous physical activity and discipline similar to military training camps. Most programs include drug treatment and educational/vocational training.

Part of the appeal is the potential impact on reducing overcrowding by imposing shorter, albeit more intense, sentences, as well as potentially reducing recidivism rates by providing participants with basic skills/values needed to function in society. These two goals are critical to combatting the overcrowding crisis and, therefore, a viable alternative aimed at reaching them, such as shock incarceration, demands our attention.

The literature on boot camps is limited but growing. Limitations on research exist because it is so new. In spite of the attractiveness of the programs, however, it is too early to determine their effectiveness. Necessary research is being conducted but, for the most part, the jury is still out. The 1988 report by the United States General Accounting Office concluded that it was "too early to measure (the) effectiveness" of boot camps and a recent National Institute of Justice Report released similar results.

Georgia and Oklahoma have the oldest Boot Camp programs in the United States. These were established in 1983 and preliminary studies suggest that graduates of the programs returned to prison at a rate that was close to the same or worse than offenders released from traditional prisons. According to Business Week's May 8, 1989 article entitled the "Search for

Ways to Break Out of the Prison Crisis", 34% of Georgia's Boot Camp graduates were re-arrested while the return rate for ex-offenders from regular state prisons was 38%. The studies themselves, however, are suspect because of the lack of control groups used when the study was conducted. Mississippi Boot Camps suggest recidivism rates of 1/3 their regular rate and Travis County, Texas is about 1/2.

The makeup and goals of the Georgia and Oklahoma programs are very different. Georgia's Special Alternative Incarceration Program (SAP) focused on a punishment model that would shock the offender away from a life of crime. Oklahoma's Regimented Inmate Discipline Program (RID) added a rehabilitation component of treatment and individualized counseling.

Louisiana established a system of boot camps called the Intensive Motivational Program of Alternative Correctional Treatment (IMPACT) in 1987. This consists of two components including 1.) 90 to 180 days of rigorous boot camp type training and 2.) this training is followed by intensive parole supervision. A recent study of Louisiana's IMPACT Program conducted by Doris Layton Mac Kenzie of the National Institute of Justice and the Louisiana State University and James W. Shaw of the University of Maryland suggests that inmates who voluntarily continued in the program underwent positive changes during the shock incarceration program. Further research is necessary to determine the extent of these changes, their long or short term effects, and their impact on recidivism rates.

New York's shock incarceration program is a combination of

boot camp training and drug treatment. Inmates who successfully complete the program can reduce their sentences by up to six months. Thus, the impact on overcrowding is felt almost immediately.

Initial reports from New York indicate that the 300 shock veterans now under the New York Division of Parole are doing well or somewhat better than other parolees. This may be for short term periods, however, according to Edward Elwin of the Parole Division who stated "we have people who seem to be doing very well and then suddenly, they'll fall apart, to the extent that this is experimental, we still don't have the data to explain why".

Sean Mc Conville, Associate Professor of Criminal Justice at the University of Illinois cited problems associated with Britain's Boot Camp Detention. An English study in the early 1980's reviewed this program which has been in effect since 1948 and suggested no benefits in reducing recidivism.

In short, there is mixed reaction. As more intensive studies are completed, more reliable data will be revealed. The Prison Society strongly urges continued monitoring of these other states which are already employing shock programs before taking decisive action.

If, however, there is enough interest to go forward, we suggest a pilot program that would be closely monitored and evaluated. Senator Bentsen's proposal, for example, calls for four pilot programs on the federal level. In addition, we would urge adequate funding for a pilot program and thorough on-

going evaluations.

A major concern is the focus population of the program. Most states target the younger first time offender. We must ensure that those individuals who are going into the program are those who would have been incarcerated. Any program implemented should be designed to divert individuals from prison, rather than to include people who otherwise would have been sentenced to probation. The latter would only widen the net of social control and further exacerbate our overcrowding problem.

The goals of the program must be crystal clear. If it is in fact a program designed to reduce recidivism and therefore, help reduce overcrowding while increasing the public safety, we must look at the literature generated thus far. Elements that would steer toward those goals include 1.) Educational/vocational, treatment and counseling components, 2.) follow-up care such as intensive supervision, 3.) the voluntary nature of the program to encourage commitment and motivation, 4.) a targeted population that will not widen the net of social control, 5.) regulations and selections determined by the Department of Corrections, and 6.) constant evaluation and assessment of the program and its goals.

To this extent, the Prison Society feels the language and provisions of HB 2199 would be preferable especially with the inclusion of on-going evaluations. We would suggest however, that Pennsylvania begin with a pilot program to determine the most effective method which can then be revised or expanded.