

TESTIMONY OF JAMES E. HUBER, CHAIRMAN OF THE LANCASTER COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

BEFORE THE PENNSYLVANIA HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

FEBRUARY 12, 1992

Mr. Caltagirone, Members of the House Judiciary Committee:

I am Jim Huber, Chairman of the Lancaster County Commissioners and a member of the Pennsylvania State Association of County Commissioners' (PSACC) Justice and Public Safety Committee. In addition, I am:

- President of the Lancaster County Prison Board
- A member and past president of the National Association of Counties' (NACo) Justice and Public Safety Steering Committee
- A member of the Board of Directors of NACo
- A member of the PSACC Executive Committee
- A member of the Pennsylvania Advisory Committee of the Justice Fellowship

Accompanying me today is Stover Clark, Prison Overcrowding Project Director of the PSACC.

We are exhilarated to have this opportunity to present our comments on House Bill 2375, The Prison and Jail Based Joint Venture Legislation, a top priority for Pennsylvania's 67 counties and over 3,000 counties in the nation. Why is this a top priority? Some salient statistics are relevant. On any given day, approximately 1.3 million people are confined to prisons in the United States--twice the population of North Dakota, twice the population of Delaware, more than the population of Wyoming and South Dakota combined, more than the population in New Hampshire--735,000 in all state jails and prisons; 408,000 in county jails and prisons; 69,500 in federal prisons; and 60,000 in juvenile detention facilities.

The overwhelming majority of these inmates face major periods of idleness. It is time as a nation, as a state, as counties, we provide these individuals an opportunity to engage in productive, relevant work activity

Prison inmates, as you hear, typically spend their time playing cards, watching television, contemplating how they plan to sue the county, or getting in trouble. While a large number of counties have established successful work release, education and training programs and have provided relevant work experiences outside of the prison setting, only a very small number actually provide both real work and real pay during confinement.

In August of 1990, I, along with Lancaster County Prison Warden Vincent Guarini and Lancaster County Director of Treatment Services Bob Siemasko, attended a jail industry workshop sponsored by the National Institute of Corrections and the National Association of Counties in Hennepin County, Minnesota, one of the most successful prison industry programs in the nation. This workshop helped to confirm my suspicions that a prison industry program makes jails and prisons productive and the benefits are many and varied.

Hennepin County, Minnesota, as many other counties throughout the United States, has realized enormous benefits from its prison industry program. The benefits include:

- Relieving overcrowding
- Reducing inmate idleness
- Reducing inmate tension and mischief
- Becoming self-sufficient (and sometimes "profitable")
- Providing inmates with meaningful work experience and income
- Providing inmates with a better start upon release
- Providing positive publicity
- Providing another inmate management tool to promote better inmate behavior
- Providing financial resources to the inmates to make restitution, pay fines and costs and contribute to the inmates keep.

Counties that operate prison industries, joint venture programs, agree that it offers one of the few "win/win" opportunities in corrections.

Everyone benefits from a successful industry program--the prison, the taxpayers, the communities, families, the inmate.

Unfortunately, existing legislation in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania prohibits or greatly limits the prison industry joint venture concept from becoming a reality in the state's 67 counties.

Fortunately, House Bill 2375 provides the legislation necessary for the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania and its 67 counties to realize the many and varied benefits of prison and jail based joint ventures, the prison industry concept.

I would like to commend Chairman Caltagirone, Representative Schuler of Lancaster County, and members of the House Judiciary Committee for developing House Bill 2375. House Bill 2375 will create the opportunity to make jails and prisons in Pennsylvania productive and will benefit the jail and prison industries, the taxpayers, the inmates, their families, and the communities while providing the necessary safeguards to ensure that civilian jobs are not undercut or displaced.

The State Association of County Commissioners, the National Association of Counties, and the National Sheriffs' Association view this legislation as a viable, invaluable tool that can be used to better manage overburdened, overcrowded, prohibitively expensive prisons and jails while reducing recidivism.

I urge you, the Pennsylvania State Association of County Commissioners urges you, the National Association of Counties urges you, and the Commissioners throughout the state urge you to move this bill out of committee expeditiously so that one of the nation's, one of the state's, one of the counties' most critical problems--prison overcrowding, the prohibitive cost of incarceration, the high recidivism rate of prisoners--can be addressed in a practical, humanitarian, cost-effective manner.

Again, thank you for this opportunity to present our comments

available to answer any questions you may have concerning this important
legislation.