



THE PENNSYLVANIA PRISON SOCIETY

FOUNDED 1787

Three North Second Street
Philadelphia, PA 19106-2208

FAX (215) 351-2312

DIRECT DIAL NUMBER:

(215) 351-2304

Janet A. Leban
Executive Director

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Finn Hornum
President

Cindy Charleston-Pinnola
First Vice President

The Rev. Robin M. Hynicka
Second Vice President

Mrs. P. Blair Lee
Vice President Emeritus

Franklin H. Spitzer, Esq.
Solicitor

Ellis L. Levin
Treasurer

Alexine L. Atherton, Ph.D.
Cathy Bucher
Hiram M. Carmona
Stover K. Clark
Paul T. Donovan
Jules Epstein, Esq.
Brenda Frazier-Clemons, Esq.
Richard H. Fulmer, Ph.D.
Julia G. Hall, Ph.D.
Philip Harris, Ph.D.
Mamie K. Henretig, M.S.W.
Martha A. Johnson
Norman Johnston, Ph.D.
Hal Kirn
Ted Klugman
David W. Lauder
Angus Love, Esq.
M. Kenneth Paull
Henry T. Reath, Esq.
Glenn W. Sheehan
Pamela S. Tucker

ADVISORY COUNCIL

Thomas G. Frame
M. Kay Harris
Allen Hornblum
William J. Kennedy, Esq.
David Rudovsky, Esq.
The Hon. Edmund B. Spaeth, Jr.
The Rev. Paul M. Washington
Marvin E. Wolfgang, Ph.D.

Testimony Before the Pennsylvania House Judiciary Committee on HB 2375, the Joint Ventures Act

Ann Schwartzman
Pennsylvania Prison Society
February 12, 1992



Thank you for the opportunity to testify on HB 2375, the Joint Ventures Act. My name is Ann Schwartzman and I am the Associate Executive Director of the Pennsylvania Prison Society. The Prison Society monitors conditions in county jails and state prisons and advocates for a more humane, just, and constructive correctional system.

Many offenders, their families, and supportive correctional personnel contact our agency for information on job opportunities and skills training. Unfortunately, these opportunities are limited, and often an individual remains on a waiting list in prison only to be released without meaningful job assignments or basic skills training. Studies suggest, however, that meaningful employment is critical to preventing the cycle of incarceration. With over 23,000 state prisoners (and 18,000 in the county jails) and a system that is 148 percent of capacity, determined efforts that reduce recidivism are necessary.

The Joint Ventures Act is not a panacea for this dilemma, but it is encouraging in that it affords real work opportunities. HB 2375, PN 3039, provides for jobs offered at comparable wages or minimum wage; built in responsibilities--deductions (although high) such as taxes, room and board, and family support; and protections--including workmen's compensation coverage and protections under the Fair Labor Standards Act. Restitution and face-to-face encounters, as with victim offender reconciliation programs, could be incorporated as well to further establish the link between the offender and the victim.

Eligibility requirements, the selection process, job performance, and turnover are some of the issues the Joint Venture Enterprise Board and the Department of Corrections or county authority would need to develop. Most important, the selection process should not be coercive nor based on favoritism.

Ventures that provide meaningful jobs to assist the offender on the outside clearly should be given top priority, good examples of which are airline and hotel reservations programs, telephone answering systems and manufacturing. Prisoner participation in these ventures should be voluntary. It is also critical to stress that these jobs will not be jobs that displace employees on the outside and that they will not provide direct competition to the growing numbers of unemployed. The prohibitions to such ventures in HB 2375 are important especially during a recession when job security is at a premium.

To include concerns of the community as well as the offenders, we suggest additional slots on the Joint Venture Enterprise Board for a community member of the county in which the facility is located and a representative for the prisoners such as the Pennsylvania Prison Society. Involving union representatives on the Board and in the entire project is an important element to establishing successful joint ventures.

Joint Ventures have worked successfully in other states and could have a positive impact in Pennsylvania. The Prison Society supports such work opportunities and looks forward to working on this important endeavor.