

STATE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TESTIMONY

September 8, 1992
Harrisburg, PA

TOPIC: Alternative Sentencing

My name is John A. Fidler, Jr. and I'm the Executive Director of the Berks County Prison Society, Inc. located in Reading, Berks County Pennsylvania. I also administrate all of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency grants for the County of Berks . . . since, all of the projects are integrated programs that are operated by more than one agency. I was happy to be asked to speak with you today on subject matters that I feel extremely positive about. Coordinated programming, planned through a Long Range Planning process, to deal with three major issues in Berks County. The Prison overcrowding issue that all counties are experiencing and two other major problems, drugs and alcohol. Each of our programs deals with at least two of the three. Issue one, prison overcrowding is a part of each of our project efforts.

In an attempt to mitigate current overcrowding at Berks County Prison, as well as to impact population growth in years to come, the County of Berks through its Criminal Justice System has implemented several types of Intermediate Punishment Programs - IPP. These programs are designed to provide alternatives to incarceration for selected offenders who can be

successfully impacted by programs other than traditional and costly incarceration, while limiting negative effects upon the community. It should be stressed that the goal of Intermediate Punishment is not to empty jails, but rather to: a) slow the acceleration of incarceration by the use of alternative options to incarceration that are safe and beneficial to both the offenders and the community and b) to assist the client in a rehabilitative nature for his or her drug and/or alcohol problem, as a preventive measure from future addiction, with the individual and family problems that assuredly will occur.

The benefits of Berks Counties IPP programming have been two fold:

- 1) Monetary Saving to the taxpayers - all program elements are extremely less expensive than incarceration.
- 2) Client lifestyle changes which result in a more successful lifestyle after each completes the program.

Berks County has been richly blessed by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency, under the leadership of Mr. James Thomas and his most professional and credible staff.

Since 1985 through County Criminal Justice long range planning and the needed PCCD funding and programmatic support, a Coordinated long range approach to IPP programming has been able to be implemented in Berks County.

In 1985 the Berks County Community Release Program a pre-trial program that brought to Berks County "a fair and equitable" bail system, was implemented. A 20% reduction in Berks County Prison residents at the pre-trial level has been gained over the 7 year program period. This program not only continues to assist in stabilizing the Berks County Prison pre-trial population, but also pays 70% of the annual expense of its program efforts and its staffing needs. Staffing that is 24 hours a day - 365 days a year. PCCD dollars gave Berks County the chance to bring this most effective program into reality. Counties around our state continually call to request pre-trial program implementation assistance. Through initial PCCD dollars which were given to Berks County, those counties have gained our "free" services and program implementation support.

As the pre-trial program continued its success, Berks County looked to expand its prison overcrowding assistance and as 1987 came around and Long Range Planning became the name of the game, Criminal Justice issues changed and the accelerated drug problem came on the scene. Now it was not only one issue, prison overcrowding, but a second issue, drug abuse and community drug problems.

A project was needed to deal with the client from arrest to pre-trial supervision to prosecution to probation and parole - and along the way

outpatient treatment had to be a part of each clients plan. The Intensified Approach to Drug Intervention and Treatment of Drug Offenders/Abusers in the Criminal Justice System - Pre-trial was born through PCCD's solid commitment to coordinated programming, with prison overcrowding and the County drug problem as the key issues. Today the District Attorney's Office, Berks County Narcotic Information Center, Treatment Access Services Center, Council on Chemical Abuse, Berks County Prison Society, Inc. and Adult Probation and Parole are still actively working together with over 800 clients a year entering several or all elements of the project. From arrest to probation with drug and alcohol counseling along the way, this PCCD initiated program has made a difference in a drug free life for hundreds of clients and families over the past five years. This program with eleven staff in five offices is funded totally with Berks County dollars, picked up after three years of the most needed PCCD dollars.

The second phase of the Long Range Plan for IPP expansion came to Berks County in 1991 as sentencing guidelines changed for drug offenses. Through PCCD funding assistance, Berks County Prison gained its presently effective drug program. The program entitled - Intensified Approach to Drug Intervention and Treatment of Drug Offenders/Abusers in the Criminal Justice System - Phase II - Prison Population Movement was funded with PCCD

dollars. Our judges needed a new program to sentence clients who had mandatory time to serve for their drug offense. Current funds from PCCD continue to assist the growth of this program in Year #3. The County of Berks is committed to pick-up total funding of this important PCCD assisted program in March of 1993. Along with the drug program established at Berks County Prison through the PCCD support, a population management position was also implemented, and through this position court cases, beginning at the pre-trial stage, are moving 30 days faster than prior to the inception of the PCCD funded staff position. Prison resident cases have been accelerated ahead of pre-trial release cases to assist even more in the overcrowding situation. The Prison Society, Council on Chemical Abuse, Treatment Assessment and Services Center, Neuman Center and Adult Probation and Parole all have a part in this coordinated program effort.

Then once again, with the needed assistance of PCCD, who were right there to make our long range Criminal Justice programming plans a reality for our community, Intensified Approach to Drug Intervention and Treatment of Drug Offenders/Abusers in the Criminal Justice System - Phase III - Community Service was able to be implemented and give to our Courts another alternative sentencing plan. A two prong plan. A) A Community Service program for Criminal Justice clients and B) the opening of three SAFE

Houses, (SAFE) meaning Staying Addiction Free and Employed. Three halfway houses with out-patient counseling for 24 clients that are either sentenced, released early from prison or parole violated clients. Client Outpatient drug treatment needs and the prison overcrowding problem were once again assisted in Berks County by program funding from PCCD. This program as just described is in Year #2 of operation and we're hoping for Year #3 assistance, prior to full County funding, which already has been approved. The success of this program can be best shown by the 85% success rate. This is an addiction free success rate. The Council on Chemical Abuse, Treatment Access Services Center, Berks Youth Counseling Center, Berks County Prison Society, Inc. and the County Community Service Department are all working together to assist the 24 clients per day, which is the number of beds available, 18 men and six women can be supported daily with their addiction problem in the SAFE House residences. Over 100 clients annually are assisted. The average length of SAFE House stay is from 2 to 5 months. Along with outpatient drug counseling, employment and educational assistance is given to each client. And, over 600 clients presently are doing Community Service work as part of their sentence, due to this Phase III program effort. PCCD can only be thanked by these clients and families for allowing Berks County to give them a chance to be credible citizens.

Finally, as the three phase Long Range Plan in Berks County dealing with drug offenders and the prison overcrowding continues to grow in success, another growing problem has sprouted and continues to bring more family oriented problems. The alcoholic and 2nd time DUI offender figures are rising daily in Berks County. And 30 days in jail doesn't seem to be halting the problem. So, once again PCCD has come to the forefront with their support efforts. And hopefully on January 1, 1993 the program "A Coordinated System Approach To Intervention and Treatment of the DUI Offender", a program for 2nd time DUI offenders will move into its implementation stages, bringing another IPP prevention program to Berks County. A 14 bed DUI Halfway House will be opened for 2nd time DUI offenders. With this program and its goals, we hope to bring back family values to many and drop the figure of alcohol related problems, including death on our highways. The program will also assist again with the prison overcrowding problem.

The dollars received from the state through PCCD have been used cost effective in providing a full gamut of IPP programming in Berks County. These programs would not have ever had the chance to be started without the assistance of PCCD-State fund resources. Without these state dollars Berks County Prison would be more than overcrowded and drug and alcohol related problems would equal a much expanded and costly problem.

Many dollars allocated by PCCD for programs like those in Berks County are needed presently to operate Criminal Justice programming in the other 66 counties in our state. I come before you today to applaud and commend you for your past support of PCCD-State budgets that have assisted our county efforts and other counties throughout the State; and to respectfully request that you make a positive decision to the future of PCCD-State budget requests, so that PCCD can continue to do their extremely and highly effective job in making the difference in the family lives of so many in our state.

I want to thank you for the job your doing and the time you have given me to discuss programs I'm proud of. To thank PCCD, Mr. James Thomas and his staff for allowing me to grow professionally. To thank my three County Commissioners, Anthony Carabello, Glenn Reber, and Ernie Miller, my President Judge, Judge Forrest Schaeffer and his colleagues and Court Administrator, James Bonini and all the Criminal Justice professionals in Berks County that have given me a chance to talk to you today. And finally to thank two people for the job they are doing in so efficiently a manner in the state, Representative Caltigirone and Senator Michael O'Pake, who serves as a member of the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency.

Thank you again and please understand that family values are essential to all of us and PCCD-State funds will allow more people in our state to understand that major issue.