

**Testimony of  
GOVERNOR GEORGE M. LEADER  
Before the  
Pennsylvania House of Representatives  
Judiciary Committee  
Subcommittee on Crimes and Corrections  
May 23, 2000  
State Correctional Institution at Camp Hill**

Good afternoon, Mr. Chairman and members of the House Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections. My name is George M. Leader, and between 1955 and 1959 I had the honor and distinct privilege to serve as Governor of this great Commonwealth. I currently serve as Chairman of Providence Place Retirement Community, although today I am pleased to be here in my volunteer capacity as an Advisory Board member to Second Chance Ministries of Pennsylvania, Inc., which is headquartered here in Camp Hill. Thank you for this opportunity to participate in these proceedings.

Truth be told, I have had precious little involvement with the criminal justice system in my post-elective years. That is, until sometime in 1995 when I was approached to participate as a member of the Pennsylvania Justice Fellowship Task Force in an extensive citizen review of the Commonwealth's criminal justice system. Our citizen-led Task Force conducted nine public fact-finding hearings that featured approximately 150 presentations from criminal justice experts, plus two in-prison roundtable discussions. It was during that process that I first had the opportunity to come into contact with Pastor Jim Law and Second Chance Ministries. However, it wasn't until I had the opportunity to deliver the keynote address at Second Chance Ministries' Annual Fundraising Dinner in 1998 that I fully came to appreciate the tremendous positive impact that ministries such as this have on the prison population and our society as a whole. But, more about that later.

Allow me to shed a little light on this matter of crimes and corrections by drawing on my own historical perspective. When I entered the Governor's Office in 1955, Pennsylvania operated *seven* state prisons. At the end of my first year in office, there were *7,342 inmates* in our state institutions (it should be noted that this number included youthful offenders from three state juvenile facilities). As of April 30, 2000, Pennsylvania now operates *25* correctional facilities that house nearly *36,000 inmates* (35,825). I won't even attempt to make budgetary comparisons because any such comparison (1) would be virtually irrelevant, and (2) would distract from my primary concern today: the human element – the lives of the individuals within our correctional facilities, as well as the safety of our citizenry.

Fortunately for us all, I am well past the point of any political vanity that might lead me to lay claim to superior leadership qualities as an explanation for this astounding increase in the number of incarcerated men and women. The loss of human potential here is far too tragic to either trivialize or politicize. Think of it – at this very moment the equivalent of a third-class city is behind bars in this Commonwealth. A population only slightly smaller than the City of York now populates our state prison system.

Now, I point this out not to suggest that crime should not have its consequences. We all know that it should. Allow me to clearly focus on what does concern me the most.

Ninety-five percent of the people in our state corrections system one-day will be released from the term that they are now serving. Based on current statistics, 75 percent of those parolees will be back behind bars within two years. When three out of four ex-inmates fail to be reintegrated back into society; when only one out of four learns the lesson of what we used to call “the error of his ways,” we have to stop and ask, “What’s wrong?” Or, maybe the more appropriate question is “Is there a better way?”

I firmly believe that the answer to that question is an emphatic “YES,” and I am delighted to be here today to tell you about something with a remarkable track record that will result in zero added expense to the cost of running the state prison system.

Christian prison ministries, such as Second Chance Ministries whom I represent here today, have posted a remarkable track record in changing the hearts and minds and lives of incarcerated men and women. In fact, the success rate for ex-inmates who have participated in Second Chance Ministries’ Bible study and counseling programs is the exact opposite of the failure rate of the system as a whole. A full seventy-five percent of inmates involved with Second Chance Ministries programming make a successful transition back into society. And the numbers are even higher for ministries that have fulltime aftercare housing programs. Teen Challenge, located in Berks County, has a success rate of 87 percent for the young men who participate in their aftercare program.

As I came face-to-face with this reality, I couldn’t help but be excited by the potential that expanded ministry opportunities might present for both reclaiming lost lives and making our society safer at the same time. Knowing that a state-sponsored ministry outreach would be out of the question, I asked myself if it were possible to otherwise insert such life-changing ministry opportunities into our state correctional facilities.

A little over a year ago, I began actively working with Second Chance Ministries on the creation of a faith-based life-skills program for state prison inmates. I am pleased to introduce to you today the result of our efforts, something that we call *The Chapel Mentor Program*.

The Chapel Mentor Program is designed to educate and train select inmates in state prisons who will, in turn, lead and mentor other inmates in how to make good, life-changing decisions. It is a program dedicated to the instruction of the three major

religious groups within the prison population – Christian, Jewish and Islamic. The Program will be privately developed, privately funded, and a network of volunteers representing each separate religion will teach the courses. Although essentially private, the Chapel Mentor Program will coordinate closely with the chaplain of each state correctional facility.

People of faith believe that God can use any circumstance for good – even prison. And it is upon that belief that this program was developed. Based on our intimate knowledge of Pennsylvania prisons and prisoners, Second Chance Ministries is aware that every inmate receives an “education” while incarcerated. The “faculty” for this so-called education comes from within the inmate population. The lesson taught is typically a destructive one that we believe has played a big role in the high rate of recidivism in today’s crime statistics.

The Chapel Mentor Program is designed to train up a new generation of men and women from the inmate population who will serve as mentors of the character traits that will change lives and change our society for the better. Inmates selected for the Chapel Mentor Program will undertake a one-year training curriculum that will instruct them on important life principles, including:

- Knowing God’s purpose for their life
- Goal setting
- Life skills
- Obedience to authority
- Developing a work ethic
- Establishing relationships

Each of these skills will be taught in the context of the religious teachings of Christianity, Judaism or Islam. Upon completion of the curriculum, each inmate will receive certification as a Chapel Mentor, and will be equipped to mentor others in the prison population on the same positive, life-changing principles. As the hearts, minds and attitudes of the inmate population changes for the positive, we believe that this program will result in safer prisons, improved life opportunities for inmates upon release, and a safer society for all Pennsylvanians.

The curriculum for this program was developed beginning with the ample assistance of the Criminal Justice Department of Taylor University in Fort Wayne, Indiana. The final format of the program was refined by Pastor Law after numerous meetings with Secretary Horn, Father Francis Menei, and Chaplain Jim Smith from SCI Camp Hill.

In closing, may I say what a great pleasure it was to work with Secretary Martin Horn on the development and ultimate approval of this exciting new program. Words cannot adequately express how refreshing the experience was in working with a prison administration that is so open to new ideas, new initiatives and willing to recognize the impact that faith-based programming can have on changing hearts, changing attitudes, changing lives, and creating a safer society for us all.