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Moratorium on Private Prisons
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Good morning. Thank you for allowing me to express my concerns about the construction of private prisons in Pennsylvania and for holding a hearing today on this issue.

There are 27 state correctional institutions in Pennsylvania, each of which fills a very important niche in the community, and the state at large. The institutions house approximately 40,000 men and women and protect the residents of Pennsylvania from criminals who threaten the safety of our communities. They also serve an important role in the rehabilitation process of the prisoners they house, so that its occupants may not pass through the revolving door of crime.

And they also serve as a productive and valuable employer for residents in the surrounding areas of the prisons.

I myself have two correctional institutions in my district – SCI's Mahanoy and Frackville – that employ 556 and 438 prison staff respectively. Statewide, more than 15,000 Pennsylvanians are employed by the DOC, and bring well-trained, seasoned experience to their jobs.

I have concerns about future reliance on private prisons, which may not have the same ties to the community, nor inmate population, as a prison overseen by the state.

That is why I have introduced legislation, H.B. 1469, that would impose a moratorium on the operation of private prisons and create a legislative task force to conduct an investigation of the feasibility of private prisons. Until that force has completed its investigation, the legislation would impose a moratorium on the construction of private prisons.

Many jurisdictions now rely on private prisons to add to their complement of adult prison beds. One of the primary reasons for this dependence has been the unprecedented growth in the sentenced, adult population in the United States.

In order to add more capacity, quickly and without having to ask legislators to authorize bonds, state and local jurisdictions have contracted with private companies to build and/or operate private prisons. While some jurisdictions view privatization as a management tool that allows them additional flexibility in their operational demands, other jurisdictions view privatization as a

way to reduce the costs of operating prisons and to improve quality.

Opponents of private prisons argue that they tend to be poorly managed and largely unregulated, while private prison guards are underpaid, unorganized, and minimally trained. As a consequence, mistreatment of prisoners is all too common.

Further, studies show private prisons cost taxpayers nearly as much as public ones, and critics argue that punishing criminals shouldn't be left to organizations whose primary motive is profit.

Many of the concerns about private corporations and their staff capabilities came to a head in the aftermath of the highly publicized escape of six maximum-security inmates, five of them convicted murderers, from the Northeast Ohio Correctional Center in July of 1998. An investigation partially attributed the escape to the lack of basic security practices and the inexperience and inability of staff to handle difficult inmates.

An incident of this level would be a betrayal to the confidence in Pennsylvanians in our ability to protect and manage crime.

There are currently no state private prisons in Pennsylvania, however there are at the federal and county levels. The Pennsylvania Department of Corrections has proven it is capable of safely and effectively managing the state prison population.

While I do not criticize the capability or motives of privatization, I do not feel there is a need for it to come to Pennsylvania. These concerns are worthy of a thorough investigation so that we can protect the integrity of our prisons, the safety of our streets and recognize the value of our dedicated correctional employees across the state.

Thank you.