



Commonwealth of Kentucky Justice & Public Safety Cabinet

Matthew G. Bevin, Governor

John C. Tilley, Secretary

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Contact: Mike Wynn
502.229.8417
Mike.Wynn@ky.gov

Justice Reinvestment Panel Kicks Off Work to Strengthen Public Safety

Expert panel will help focus resources on the most effective strategies to protect communities

FRANKFORT, Ky. (Sept. 7, 2017) – Gov. Matt Bevin has announced a new criminal justice panel that will bolster efforts to control taxpayer spending on prisons while simultaneously strengthening public safety through a smarter, more deliberate approach to crime.

The panel – called the Justice Reinvestment Work Group – will perform a comprehensive review of Kentucky’s criminal justice system and recommend reforms for the 2018 General Assembly. It will work in conjunction with the Criminal Justice Policy Assessment Council, which the governor appointed last year to address growing prison populations, high recidivism and escalating costs.

Kentucky Justice Secretary John Tilley, who heads the panel, said state taxpayers are on track to spend nearly \$600 million on corrections next year with diminishing returns for public safety. Meanwhile, 31 other states have reduced both their crime rate and incarceration rate since 2012, freeing up money that can benefit classrooms, workforce development or public pensions.

“We must demand the best possible return on our corrections investment,” Secretary Tilley said. “Our prisons are full, and taxpayers have no interest in spending millions more on new facilities for low-level, non-violent offenders. Instead, our state must come together to work within our means, and that requires a more disciplined approach to the penal code that holds both criminals and government accountable.”

Tilley said public safety would also benefit by redirecting funds from incarceration to treatment and alternative programs that have yielded better results.

The group, which held its first organizational meeting Wednesday, is bringing together law enforcement, prosecutors, policy experts, and legislators, among others. Many of the members also serve on the Criminal Justice Policy Assessment Council (CJPAC), providing a seamless nexus between the two boards.

The panel will receive technical assistance from the Crime and Justice Institute, a nationally-recognized consulting organization that will examine data from courts and corrections to identify areas of improvement. Kentucky obtained the assistance through the Justice Reinvestment Initiative – a partnership between the U.S. Bureau of Justice Assistance and Pew Charitable Trusts.

Last year, recommendations from the CJPAC resulted in Senate Bill 120, a measure that removed an automatic ban for felons seeking professional licenses. It also provided work release to certain types of felons and allowed inmates to gain private sector experience from behind prison walls. Senate Judiciary Chairman Whitney Westerfield, who serves on the CJPAC and the Justice Reinvestment Work Group, sponsored the bill.

“We should always strive to improve public safety and get the best impact from every precious tax dollar we spend, and this is particularly true with criminal justice policy,” Sen. Westerfield said. “I look forward to the work ahead as we continue investigating what improvements Kentucky can make to achieve both important goals.”

Gov. Bevin formed the CJPAC and applied to participate in the Justice Reinvestment Initiative as part of a continuum of reform in adult and juvenile justice.

In March, the governor unveiled the Justice to Journeyman apprenticeship project, which places inmates on track to earn a nationally recognized journeyman credential in a skilled trade, starting with training they receive inside Kentucky prisons. He has also implemented fair chance hiring practices for executive branch jobs and signed legislation to allow for expungement of certain low-level felonies after a person has completed the terms of their criminal sentence.

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