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To: jwilensky@comcast.net

Subject: Response to proposed changes to Community Corrections Programming

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the proposed legislative changes to Community Corrections statewide. I am the manager of the 13th Circuit Court Community Corrections which covers Antrim, Leelanau and Grand Traverse counties.

I have serious concerns with several of the proposed changes. First which is the proposal for force a merge between Community Corrections and Reentry. There have been varying reports statewide as to the actual success of Reentry. However, there are constant reports of great success of Community Corrections programs. I am concerned that combining the two will force Community Corrections to bear the burden of a non-successful venture, perhaps lowering the successes we consistently see in our area with our programs. While on paper it may seem we do much of the same job, however in reality our clients are very different and the directions we take with them vary vastly. We are trying to help them before they get out of control and get to the prison state of their criminal career.

I fear that a forced merger PRIOR to any test pilots is extremely irresponsible. Changing legislation is not a small feat and once these changes are made it will be a nightmare to fix something that could have been foreseen, if the time had been taken prior to actually changing a law to test the proposals. Any responsible individual knows that you "practice" before you actually put something into effect. I point out the statement by Nancy Pelosi concerning Obamacare, "We have to pass the health care bill to find out what's in it." Nearly everyone agrees now with the debacle Obamacare created nationwide. Are legislators going to pass a flawed law in Michigan just to find out if it will work? I support having test pilot areas to see if any of these changes will work, if they are found successful, then it would be much easier to implement, knowing what worked and what didn't beforehand.

Living in Northern Michigan is a vastly different lifestyle and experience than those who reside "down state." Our offenders and communities should not and cannot be put into a "One Size Fits All" mentality. Forcing all CCAB's to be governed solely by the state and losing local control will be disastrous. What works in Wayne County could possibly be impossible to implement in our area, and vice versa. We often know every single aspect of the crime and history of individuals we work with. They are not numbers to us, they live in our neighborhoods, their children go to school with ours, they are not just mere "offenders" to us. We have a distinct buy-in with the success of our clients, they very much effect our lifestyles here. I cannot imagine that many officers in Urban Detroit or Grand Rapids, literally see their clients in the local grocery store on a daily or weekly basis. We do here, therefore we have a large interest in having them succeed and changing their lives.

Another problematic area is focusing so much on Prison Commitment Rates. Again, Northern Michigan cannot be held to the same standard as more populated areas. For example, one month in Antrim County we had a 50% PCR. The reason for this? Only 2 people were sentenced for the entire month. One of those individuals was sentenced to prison, as they should have been, because of a CSC crime. The other, was eligible for and participated in Community Corrections. Another month, Leelanau County had a 100% PCR--only 1 person was sentenced and he went to prison, as he was a level 1 offender, yet again should have gone to prison. It is impossible to have an accurate comparison between our areas than those of largely populated counties. However we will be and are compared to them with unfavorable impressions. Another factor we face that contributes to high PCR in our Circuit is the fact that our prosecutors allow several different types of "Specialty Courts" to work with offenders. Nearly all OWI 3rd offenders are allowed to participate in the District Court level Drug Court Program. These are offenders who in all other areas are counted in state statistics as felons, however in our area they are not unless they fail Drug Court. Therefore again, we have a different population to be compared to elsewhere in the state. We work with the Drug court with these individuals. We place them in local counseling, we send them to treatment, yet we are not given the benefit of having them counted in our PCR.

It is unfair to apply a set of standards where some of us can literally never meet them, while we still have extremely effective and rigorous programs, with high successes. We are a very forward thinking and ever changing court system here. We have Drug court, mental health court and veterans court. We have been recognized both state and nation wide for our innovative programs. The folks who participate in our programs spend very little time in jail, we prevent them from going to prison. Yet on paper, with our PCR, we look very unsuccessful, because we are already set in a standard statewide cookie cutter system that is unable to accurately track what we do. Yet one more reason to leave the local decisions of what our offenders need in our Judges and staff control.

These are just a few of my concerns, I would highly encourage you to step back and take the needed time to do this correctly. I do not disagree that the PA511 Act is outdated and needs to be re-addressed. However, do it responsibly and effectively. Do not just rush to pass a law before any attempt has been made to see if those change will even work.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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