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July 30, 2015

Julienne James
Senior Policy Advisor
Bureau of Justice Assistance
810 Seventh Street NW
Washington, D.C., 20531

Adam Gelb
Project Director
Pew Center on the States
901 E Street, NW, 10th Floor
Washington, D.C., 20004

Dear Ms. James and Mr. Gelb:

Massachusetts has a long history of its state leaders working across party lines and branches of government to study systemic challenges and improve real-world outcomes. Past efforts have led to the adoption of evidence-based practices in many parts of our criminal justice system. A logical next step is for Massachusetts to request technical assistance from the Justice Reinvestment Project to use a data-driven approach to continue to improve criminal justice outcomes.

As you know, Massachusetts has experienced an overall decline in correctional population (including state prison and house of correction inmates) in the past decade, and has one of the lowest per capita rates of incarceration in the country. The decline in our state prison population has allowed us to begin mothballing facilities and redistributing prisoners to allow for more focus on step-down activities. However, despite this success in reducing the overall rate of incarceration, our three-year recidivism rate has remained at approximately 40% for a number of years. Recent data shows this rate dropping to 35% for those individuals released in 2011, but it is too soon to say whether this is the beginning of a trend or if it is an anomaly. It is also important to note that Massachusetts law does not mandate post-release supervision. As a result, 39% of those released from state prison returned to the community without any supervision in 2013.

We believe that this technical assistance will complement other data analyses that are currently underway, adding additional insight into our study of Massachusetts' criminal justice system. Without limiting the scope of your data analysis, we hope, looking at the data as a whole, to better understand how we can further reduce recidivism and enable successful re-entry, and whether we can further reduce our prison and jail populations through early release programs while ensuring appropriate punishment and preserving public safety.

We would like to use the Justice Reinvestment process as part of our analysis of these and related issues such as:

- How are terms and length of post-release supervision being set by judges and the parole board?
- Are there steps that can be taken to better tailor supervision to the needs of the offender population?
- Would additional mental health services, programming and/or post-release support help to reduce recidivism rates?
- Would additional substance abuse services, programming and/or post-release support help to reduce recidivism rates?
- Does our existing pre-release programming adequately address the needs of re-entry adjustment for inmates?
- Which specific programs are most effective at enabling offenders to successfully reintegrate into the civilian workforce?
- Can we, consistent with ensuring appropriate punishment and preserving public safety, make further progress in reducing our rate of incarceration through early release programs? Do early release programs reduce the rate of recidivism?

We intend to use these analyses to develop data-driven, cost-effective practices and policy options for further consideration that will reduce our recidivism rate and make our Commonwealth safer.

As this letter indicates, all three branches of government are supportive of employing the Justice Reinvestment process in a manner that is tailored to the needs of the Commonwealth. Our state leaders recognize that collecting and analyzing criminal justice data is the most rational way to make administrative and policy decisions. We believe the assistance of the Council of State Governments' Justice Center can help us develop consensus-based solutions. As part of our commitment to that process, we pledge to participate in a bipartisan Task Force made up of members of each of the Commonwealth's constituent branches of government.

We also agree to provide the Council of State Governments' Justice Center with full and timely access to the data required for this analysis. In exchange, we expect that the Council of State Governments will:

- Support the Task Force with facilitation and administrative needs;
- Conduct research and analysis of Massachusetts' corrections and post-release supervision systems and programs;
- Help develop policy options that will protect public safety while wisely targeting the limited resources of the state, including:
 - educating members of the Task Force about evidence-based practices;
 - facilitating the development of recommendations based on data and research;
 - projecting the impact of policy options and recommendations based on correctional populations and costs; and
 - assisting in drafting findings and recommendations to be issued by the Task Force in its report.

Massachusetts is committed to enhancing public safety and improving our approach to criminal justice by engaging in this data-driven process. We believe that Justice Reinvestment technical assistance will help us achieve our goals, and we would welcome and appreciate your support.

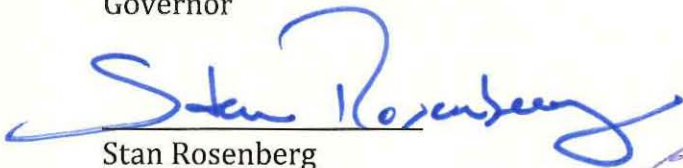
Sincerely,



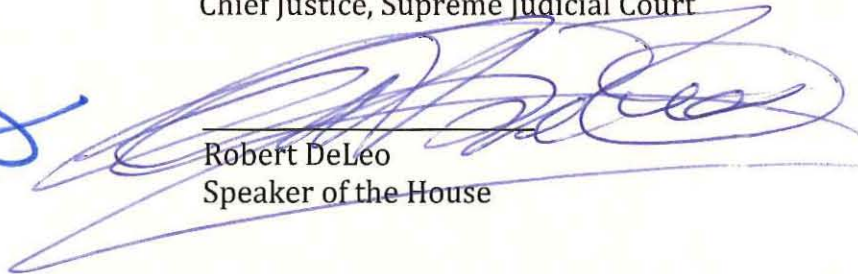
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