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Protest at Capitol Opposes Prison Expansion, Budget Priorities

Advocates: DOC Lied to Justify New Prisons, Legislators Refuse to Take Action

Harrisburg, PA – At 1PM today, members of Decarcerate PA and their allies are gathering at the State Capitol for a “People’s Hearing on Prison Expansion.” The protest coincides with the House Appropriations Hearing for the Department of Corrections, who, according to Corbett’s budget proposal, will receive an additional \$78 million in the 2014-2015 budget.

Announced last week, the proposed budget **would raise state funding for the Department of Corrections to over \$2 billion a year for the first time while falling far short of restoring the millions that have been cut from education during his term.** The DOC’s \$2 billion budget is in addition to the \$400 million currently being spent to build new prisons. The protesters claim that the DOC lied about potential savings to justify the construction of these projects, and that the state is suffering as a result.

“We’re sick of Governor Corbett giving money to prisons and not to schools,” said Marquise Warfield of Youth United for Change. “We have come to make a change and we won’t stop until it’s over. It’s time for the DOC to stop the lies. It’s time for the truth.”

In particular, the event’s organizers are demanding that legislators hold hearings to investigate the construction of two new prisons on the grounds of SCI Graterford in Montgomery County. Numerous times, Secretary of Corrections John Wetzel has stated that the DOC had conducted a “cost-benefit study” that determined that building the new prisons would be less costly than renovating the existing facility at Graterford. Based on DOC documents acquired under the state’s Right-to-Know law, Decarcerate PA is asserting that Secretary Wetzel and the DOC have been misleading legislators and all Pennsylvanians.

“The DOC refused to provide us with the documents until they were faced with the threat of a lawsuit, and now we know why,” says Ashley Henderson, an attorney with Decarcerate PA. “The handful of spreadsheets they turned over to us show that no independent, data-driven study was ever conducted.” Decarcerate PA says they have uncovered a multitude of inaccuracies and contradictions in the documents, which fail to show any of the alleged savings the DOC has used to justify the second most expensive construction project in state history. These documents are posted at <http://decarceratepa.info/study>.

“We’ve been calling for the legislature to hold public hearings and halt construction while the DOC’s false claims are investigated,” explained Owen Lyman-Schmidt of Decarcerate PA. “Since they have refused to do so, we’re bringing the hearing to them. Lawmakers need to know how prison expansion harms people both inside and outside of prison.”

The Pennsylvania NAACP, speakers from student groups, prisoners’ rights activists, advocates for people with HIV/AIDS, and immigration justice organizers will be among the array of people giving testimony at the People’s Hearing. “We don’t need new prisons in Pennsylvania,” said Rev. Kent Matthies, Minister at the Unitarian Society of Germantown. “To make our communities safer, we need to invest more wisely and in ways that keep people out of prison in the first place. This includes funding for housing, education, food security, and reentry employment services.”

The People’s Hearing begins at 1PM in the Rotunda at the Capitol. Decarcerate PA last visited the State Capitol en masse in June, after completing a 113-mile “March for a People’s Budget, Not a Prison Budget.” Today, however, they are chartering several buses for the journey and are joined by more than twenty-five allied organizations.

The People’s Hearing is co-sponsored by:

Philly Student Union	National Lawyers Guild-	Teacher Action Group
Youth United for Change	Philadelphia Chapter	Artists for Recovery
The Center for Returning	National Lawyers Guild-Temple	NAACP of PA
Citizens	Chapter	Fight for Philly
Juntos	Philly Survivor Support	Aids Policy Project
Boat People SOS	Collective	Art for Justice
Youth Art & Self-Empowerment	Exit-US Reentry	Point Breeze Organizing
Project	Global Women's Strike	Committee
ACT-UP	Payday Men's Network	MoveOn
Haverford College: Rethink	Every Mother is a Working	Neighborhood Networks
Incarceration Group	Mother Network	Philadelphia Federation of
University Community	AIDS Policy Project	Teachers
Collaborative of Philadelphia	Human Rights Coalition	Philadelphia Coalition
Up Against the Law Legal	The CHARLES Foundation	Advocating for Public Schools
Collective	DreamActivist PA	ACLU of PA
Prison Health News	1LoveMovement	
Philly Independent Media	Reconstruction Inc.	
Center	Books through Bars	

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Decarcerate PA is a grassroots campaign working to end mass incarceration in Pennsylvania. We demand that PA stop building prisons, reduce the prison population, and reinvest money in our communities. For a more in depth analysis of the documents from the Department of Corrections and to view the documents themselves, visit <http://decarceratepa.info/study>.