

**Questions for the Record**  
**“Oversight of the Bureau of Prisons & Cost-Effective Strategies for Reducing Recidivism”**  
**November 6, 2013**  
**Senator Sheldon Whitehouse**

**John E. Wetzel:**

- 1) The Committee heard testimony that permitting the early release of prisoners or reducing sentences always leads to more crime. Based on your experience reforming the criminal justice system in Pennsylvania, do you agree?

A: No. It's about who and when you release the person while using science to make the decisions instead of painting with a broad brush. It is critical to make good decisions with good outcomes while still reducing population costs.

What happened to crime rates in your state after you passed your package of reforms?

A: We don't anticipate a negative impact because reforms improved criminal justice policy and expect improved outcomes as a result. Our reforms are focused on improving identified problems in the system and a logical consequence was that we flattened out the population growth. The focus is improving criminal justice practices and policies.

- 2) Do you believe that it is important to target recidivism-reduction programming toward high-risk inmates?

A: Absolutely. The research is very clear that high risk offenders benefit from intensive programming. It has the opposite effect on low risk offenders and increases their potential criminality. Furthermore, from a resource standpoint, providing programming to low risk offenders has a negative effect on them. From a financial standpoint spending money on those who do not benefit from it is a waste of resources. Targeted evidenced based programming to the proper offender reduces crime.

How do you try to achieve this goal in Pennsylvania?

A: Good evidence based actuarial risk assessment at the front door and developing a continuum of treatment that meets the assessed needs of the offenders. Finally, connecting offenders who have continuing program needs with programs on the outside through our reentry efforts to meet the remaining needs.

## **“Oversight of the Bureau of Prisons & Cost-Effective Strategies for Reducing Recidivism”**

### **Senator Grassley’s Questions for Secretary Wetzel**

1. You testified that Pennsylvania decided to prohibit the early release of prisoners to residential programs. What occurred in Pennsylvania because of early prisoner release that led the state to abolish it?

A: The prelease was a program that targeted low risk offenders and put low risk offenders in a program designed for high risk offenders which increased their future criminality. It was a flawed concept. We created transition units in the prison to accomplish the same goal for the lower risk offenders but in a more research based manner and placed them in the residential program with technical parole violators. Our decision was based upon data, and again, focused on improving outcomes.