



correctional **Newsfront**

Corbett Nominates Wetzel as Corrections Secretary

Gov. Tom Corbett nominated John E. Wetzel as secretary of the Department of Corrections on December 17, 2010. He faces approval from the state Senate.

Wetzel began his corrections career in 1989 as an officer at the Lebanon County Correctional Facility. In 1992, he transferred to the Berks County Prison, where he rose through the ranks, serving as treatment counselor, supervisor of treatment services and training academy director. In 2002, he was named warden of the Franklin County Jail.

He was appointed as the corrections expert to the Pennsylvania Board of Pardons in June 2007, a position he continues to hold. Since 2006, he has been a corrections consultant in the areas of operational and staffing analysis and vulnerability assessments.



John E. Wetzel

During his 20 years in the field of corrections, Wetzel has presented state wide and nationally on several topics, including inmate labor issues, the mentally ill in corrections, working with inmates' families, developing system-wide solutions to jail crowding, jail staffing and conducting vulnerability assessments.

He also has had several national articles published on inmate labor, jail management and jail staffing. Wetzel is currently the immediate past president of the PA County Corrections Association (formerly PA County Prison Wardens Association).

Additionally, he has been part of several efforts which have reduced jail population. These include developing a jail industries program through a community-wide advisory board to increase the job readiness of offenders; initiating the first, jail-based CareerLink access point in the state of

Secretary-designee John Wetzel Talks About...

Becoming Secretary of Corrections



It is an honor to have been nominated by Governor Tom Corbett for secretary of corrections. Recently I had the opportunity to meet the state prison superintendents and DOC executive staff. I told them what my core beliefs are:

- being professional and committed to our work
- being a good person who has values and understands the importance of family
- holding ourselves to a higher standard
- being a hands-on manager
- establishing trust
- being honest and telling the truth at all times
- doing things because it's the right thing to do
- being responsive to staff, inmates and the public
- sharing accurate information and getting news out quickly.

I have 20 years of experience in a county prison setting, and I understand that the county prison system is different from the state prison system. I do not pretend to know what state prison administrators do. But I plan to visit every facility within the next six to eight weeks and that I will learn what everyone does quickly.

We are going to experience change, but I expect us to work together as a team to manage our population and our budget and to continue to be a national leader in the field of corrections.

I have an open door policy and hope that as I tour the state prisons, you will take the opportunity to say hello. It is my hope that I will be able to serve you well in this capacity and that you can accept me as one of your own -- a corrections professional.

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ADMINISTRATION

Tom Corbett
Governor

John Wetzel
Secretary Designee

Susan McNaughton
Press Secretary/Editor

Susan Bensinger
Deputy Press Secretary/Writer

www.cor.state.pa.us

DOC Cancels Plans for State Prison in Fayette County

The Department of Corrections announced recently that a proposed state prison facility in Fayette County will not be built.

"There are several reasons for this decision, but the most important one is need," Acting Secretary John Wetzel said. "We will not spend \$200 million to build a new prison unless it is absolutely needed."

The state prison population stayed about the same through all of 2010, Wetzel said, remaining at about 51,000 inmates.

Also, Wetzel said, several prisons across the state are under-utilized, including the boot camp facility at Quehanna, Clearfield County, as well as several community correction centers and treatment centers.

Those factors, combined with an increased effort for alternative treatment plans aimed at reducing the prison population, reduce the need to build another facility.

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Pennsylvania; developing a day reporting center which reduced the jail population by more than 205; and overseeing the construction of an award-winning new jail facility. The sum of these efforts, and others such as court case processing, utilizing weekend incarceration, jail diversion for mentally ill offenders and others, led to the impressive fact that the average daily population in Franklin County Prison is lower today than it was 10 years ago.

A previous offensive line coach for Shippensburg University, Wetzel earned a bachelor of arts in psychology from Bloomsburg University and is studying for a master's degree in applied psychology at Penn State University. He is a member of the American Correctional Association, the American Jail Association, the American College Football Coaches Association and is past president of the Pennsylvania County Corrections Association.

Wetzel served as treasurer of the Letterkenny Industrial Development Authority; is a founding member of St. Seraphim Homeless Shelter; a member of the Pennsylvania Forensics Inter-Agency Task-Force; a core team member of Brother 2 Brother mentoring initiative; part-time instructor of an evening truancy school; and is an ethics panel speaker for Leadership Franklin County.

DOC Releases Performance Reports

Reports Highlight State Intermediate Punishment and Recidivism Risk Reduction Incentive

Department of Corrections Acting Secretary John E. Wetzel recently announced the release of two major reports – one highlighting State Intermediate Punishment and another on the Recidivism Risk Reduction Incentive.

“As required by law, the DOC is required to provide Pennsylvania’s Judiciary Committees with performance reports in these two areas,” Wetzel said. “While these sentencing measures have been in effect for a few years, we have noticed that there still is potential for greater use of both SIP and RRRI. To that end, we intend to launch an effort to provide support and assistance to jurisdictions enabling them to expand their use of these cost-effective sentencing options.”

State Intermediate Punishment, which was enacted in 2004 and amended in 2008 to increase offender eligibility, is designed for less-violent offenders convicted of drug-related offenses that motivated their criminal behavior. After DOC evaluation to ensure the offender is appropriate for SIP, the judge sentences the offender to SIP. Under SIP, the offender serves a flat sentence of 24 months, with specific progressive periods of time being served attending treatment programs in a state prison and in the community corrections system. Progress through the program is based on the assessed need and attainment of goals established for each offender. A person who fails in the program, due to misconduct or poor progress in treatment, is subject to resentencing by the court under traditional sentencing guidelines.

Highlights of the 2011 report include:

—From program inception in May 2005 through September 2010, 2,239 offenders were sentenced to SIP.

—As of September 30, 2010, there were 933 graduates.

—The state saves approximately \$34,190 per SIP inmate, with the current 933 SIP graduates having saved the Commonwealth approximately \$32 million.

—Of the estimated 9,676 offenders admitted to the DOC who appeared SIP eligible, approximately 2,843 (or 29 percent) were court referred for an SIP evaluation.

—Altogether, 65 counties have referred offenders for an SIP evaluation.

—Six-month and one-year reincarceration rates are lower for SIP graduates than for a comparable group of non-SIP offenders.

Recidivism Risk Reduction Incentive was implemented in 2008. Referred to by DOC officials as RRRI, it requires judges to sentence eligible, non-violent offenders to two minimum sentences rather than a traditional sentence. If offenders complete recommended programs and maintain positive prison adjustments, or in other words, they practice good conduct and remain misconduct free during their incarceration, they can be released at their RRRI minimum.

“We see significant potential in expanding the usage of this sentencing option at the county level,” Wetzel said. “It is our goal, over the next several months, to be a resource to both counties and the public about this sentencing option in an effort to see more offenders enter the system with RRRI minimum sentences.”

Highlights of the 2010 report include:

—Since November 2008, an estimated 5,060 offenders were admitted to DOC custody with a RRRI minimum sentence date, representing 25.3 percent of all new DOC admissions.

—Through RRRI, the state has saved approximately \$11.4 million, or an estimated \$9,769 per RRRI inmate) due to reduced prison stays.

—RRRI has resulted in an estimated prison population reduction of 647 inmates as of December 31, 2010.

“The department is here to serve as a resource to judges, prosecutors and defense attorneys in maximizing the use of this existing legislation with the goal of right sizing our prison population in a responsible and fiscally efficient method.”

To learn more about SIP and RRRI, and to view the reports in their entirety, visit the DOC’s web site: www.cor.state.pa.us and click on Research & Statistics and then Annual Reports.

Did You Know???

...That the DOC is working closely with Big Brothers/Big Sisters to establish mentors for children of incarcerated individuals? SCI Pittsburgh will be kicking off their new mentoring program in March.

...The DOC is working with the York County Prison on a re-entry initiative. So far 10 state prison inmates have been placed at the county prison as pre-release inmates and are part of the prison's work-release program. This joint effort involves inmates who are committed from and returning to the York County area after incarceration. The DOC realizes that the county prison has better re-entry efforts than the DOC. So far the program is showing great promise, and the DOC is looking to expand the program to as many county prisons as possible.

...The DOC is piloting at a number of state prisons the availability and use by inmates of MP3 players. During the program, the DOC provides certain inmates with pre-programmed players.

Check future issues of "Correctional Newsfront" for additional details.

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"The majority of our inmate population is from eastern Pennsylvania," Wetzel said. "Locating another prison facility in western Pennsylvania is not conducive to our current re-entry plans, where family connections play a large role in helping inmates return to a productive life in society."

In regard to system capacity, an expansion to SCI Graterford in Montgomery County and a new prison in Centre County are among several projects in the works.

Wetzel said the site of the proposed \$200 million Fayette County facility was not large enough to accommodate housing for the superintendent and deputies. Department policies require at least two officials are within 30 minutes of the facility at all times in case of an emergency response.

In a continuing effort to better manage the inmate population, Wetzel said, the department is working with the General Assembly and criminal justice system to develop alternative and treatment programs while maximizing the use of existing programs.

Dogs In Pennsylvania's State Prisons

There are several ways in which dogs are inside PA DOC prisons – as part of a service-dog training program; part of a behavior rehabilitation program; and part of the drug interdiction unit.

Service Dogs

Since 2002, the DOC has been working with Canine Partners for Life (<http://www.k94life.org/>), a non-profit organization based in Chester County, to train and use inmates to train puppies during their first year of life. The training prepares the puppies for further, advanced training by Canine Partners for Life (CPL) where they are turned into service dogs for disabled individuals.

CPL trains and places assistance dogs with individuals with mobility impairments to help increase their independence and quality of life. CPL has several types of assistance dogs in its program including service dogs, seizure alert dogs, home companions and residential (community) companions.

Recipients come from all walks of life and have a wide variety of physical disabilities including muscular dystrophy, multiple sclerosis, cerebral palsy, spinal cord injuries, seizure disorders and more.

The first state prison to begin this program was SCI Cambridge Springs. Presently four prisons participate in this program – SCIs Albion, Cambridge Springs, Muncy and Smithfield.

Since implementing the program in 2002, more than 100 dogs have been trained by DOC inmates and graduated to the more-advanced training. Presently there are 20 dogs enrolled in the training program throughout the state prison system, and 44 inmates are serving as primary, secondary and alternate trainers.

State prisons do not assume any direct costs associated with the program. The Inmate General Welfare Fund pays for collars and leashes, while CPL provides a grant to cover food expenses. Veterinary care is donated by animal hospitals located near the various prisons. Any excess medical bills are covered by CPL. Prison staff donates the majority of treats and toys.

In this program, mostly life sentenced inmates are used as trainers. For those inmates it provides them with a sense of accomplishment within the prison system, where they will spend their entire lives. It also teaches the inmates

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responsibility. Many inmates who participate in the program take great pride in their graduates and believe that the program allows them to give back to society.

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HOPE Dog Program – SCI Camp Hill

The Hounds of Prison Education (HOPE) program was started at SCI Camp Hill in 2005 through a cooperative relationship between the prison and HOPE organizer Kelly McGinley. It is sponsored by the Central Pennsylvania Animal Alliance.

The dogs, which come from shelters and are usually victims of abuse, are enrolled in the program where inmates work with the dogs to help the dogs learn to trust humans again.

In the program, the dogs live with the inmates in their cells. The inmates are responsible for feeding and caring for the dogs for a period of six to 12 weeks. On a weekly basis a professional trainer visits the prison and teaches inmates various skills to retrain the dogs in an effort to change any negative behavior issues, with the ultimate goal of making the dog adoptable.

During these sessions they review material learned during the previous sessions, questions and concerns that have come up throughout the week and new material to be worked on for the next week. The training includes basic commands, socialization with other dogs and people, grooming, health concerns and behavior modifications. The trainer and the HOPE volunteers also assist each pair of inmates as they work through the issues that are unique to their dog.

Nearly 100 dogs have been adopted out since the program began five years ago, when the program started with five inmates. Today, 12 inmates participate in the program.

There are no costs to the prison for the program. Everything, including food and vet care, is provided by the HOPE program.

Prison officials believe the program also helps the inmates by teaching them accountability and responsibility.

www.hopedogs.org

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Drug Interdiction Unit:

The DOC's K-9 Drug Interdiction Unit began in 1996 thanks to a \$330,700 grant from the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. The grant paid for four officers and their benefits, four all-wheel drive vehicles, four two-way radios; and two electronic drug detection units.

The unit was established in support of the department's goal to operate and provide drug-free facilities. Through policy implementation, intensified searches, increased training, technological advancements and facility support, the unit has enhanced the department's ability to decrease the flow of illegal drugs and contraband inside our facilities.

The K-9 units have been designed to be self-sufficient so they can be deployed to any state prison and preserve the element of surprise in their drug searches.

The initial group of four dogs was acquired by donations from Pennsylvania residents. Training for the dogs and the handlers was provided free-of-charge by the State of Maryland, which had been using drug detecting K-9s in a prison setting since the early 1980s.

Since its inception, the Drug Interdiction Unit has grown from eight drug detection K-9 handlers to a total of 22 drug detection K-9 handlers and three cell phone detection dog handlers. In 2008, the department began training and using a dog to detect cell phone batteries and components. A second cell phone dog was added in 2009 and the third team was put into action in 2010.

The handlers and their K-9 partners are responsible for providing drug and cell phone detection searches for all state correctional facilities and the Bureau of Community Corrections. The unit is often solicited to provide their services to county correctional facilities, schools and external law enforcement agencies. Members of the unit also provide training and informational presentations to local community organizations and educational entities.

The K-9s also are used to search visitor vehicles for illegal drugs. The dogs also have been trained to conduct passive air scans around visitors, where they sniff the air around a visitor to detect illegal drugs. This was implemented in 2006.

In September 2000, the DOC opened a K-9 academy at the Quehanna Boot Camp, with a purpose of producing well-trained, professional K-9 handlers. At the academy, K-9 handlers and their dogs complete an 11-week narcotics detection course that is conducted by highly-trained in-house trainers.

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SCI Waymart Donates Doghouses to Griffin Pond Animal Shelter

Joe Nish, Superintendent at the State Correctional Institution at Waymart, announced that the carpentry class from the institution's education department donated seven doghouses to the Griffin Pond Animal Shelter earlier this year.

The students in the carpentry class have spent the past year constructing a miniature home to demonstrate their skills thus fulfilling the required certifications of the National Center for Construction Education and Research.

The inmates enrolled in the carpentry class receive approximately 700 hours of training. They are qualified for a nationally recognized certificate. NCCER certification makes the inmate a more viable candidate for employment upon reentry into society. After the inmates had received their certificates and the miniature home had been dismantled, the scrap materials were then utilized to build the doghouses.

"The building of the doghouses was used as a final test of the inmates' skills and abilities," prison Carpentry Instructor Robert Pavlovich said. "The inmates also feel good knowing that their skills have been utilized to help bring together a project that is going to be used toward a very worthy end."

"It has been a very trying year for the shelter, and recent news stories about the possibility of the shelter closing due to lack of support and room is what prompted SCI Waymart to choose Griffin Pond as the shelter they would donate to this year," stated Warren Reed, director of Griffin Pond Animal Shelter.

"It is very inspiring when an agency such as the Department of Corrections aides smaller organizations such as the shelter," Superintendent Nish said. "Everyone realizes that without the services that the shelter offers, many animals would live horrible lives."

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In 2009, the K-9 unit searched 12,693 cells, 11,209 common areas, 18,771 vehicles and 184,750 visitors. Inmates and employees also are scanned. The total number of drug finds increased by .07 percent, from a total of 872 in 2008 to 878 in 2009. Of the drugs found, 23.7 percent were illegal substances such as marijuana or alcohol; 25.4 percent were prescription medication; and 49.7 percent were found on visitors at institutions prior to them entering the prison.

Reburial Services Held for Remains Found During Construction Project

Officials from the State Correctional Institution at Laurel Highlands, in December, held a private reburial service on Nov. 24 for human remains found earlier this year during construction on prison grounds.

“We believed that it was important to return these individuals to a resting place on prison grounds,” Superintendent Daniel Burns said. “We identified an area inside the prison perimeter where no future construction is planned, and we hope that this will serve as their final resting place.”

The remains, likely those of patients at facilities that predated the prison, were discovered during excavation for a new modular housing unit in April 2010. A total of 23 sets of remains in wooden coffins – most likely from the 1800s — were unearthed.

The prison site was originally established as The Poor House and House of Employment in 1846. The site later became a county hospital in 1897 and a state hospital in 1941. It became a prison in 1996.

Rev. Dave Klink officiated at the reburial, which was attended by prison staff.





Keeping You Notified of State Prison Emergencies

Several years ago the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections began using an automated telephone dialing system to notify citizens of an emergency at any of its state prisons.

The currently used system – called RapidNotify – is instructed by DOC officials to call listed phone numbers within a one to two mile radius of a state prison and play a message regarding a variety of prison emergencies. This system can literally dial and deliver messages to thousands of phone numbers in a matter of minutes.

NOTE: Individuals who have unlisted phone numbers and who want to receive the emergency notification can have their phone number added to the system by contacting their closest state prison.

AlertPA - The New System ... Your Action is Required

In late 2009, the DOC began using a second, additional system to notify citizens. This second system is called AlertPA. AlertPA quickly sends emergency messages via text messages to cell phones, pagers and e-mail addresses. Voice notification also is an option.

Individuals can register for AlertPA by going to www.pa.gov and clicking on Alerts & Advisories or by clicking on the link at the top of this page. Users can choose the method of notification and select what type of information they would like to receive. The Web site also contains a Frequently Asked Questions page, and citizens should understand that standard texting rates may apply. To receive text alerts from this system, you MUST allow e-mail messaging to your phone.

Individuals are encouraged to sign up for the AlertPA system, because the DOC plans to end its contract with RapidNotify in the future. However, before ending the contract, DOC officials want to ensure that everyone who wants to be notified will be notified.

Therefore, since you have to opt into this system, we need you to register, which a majority of people can do via the Internet.

The only concern DOC officials have is for those citizens who do not have access to the Internet. Internet access is required to sign up with AlertPA.

Therefore, citizens who do not have Internet access should contact the Critical Incident Manager at the nearest state prison. The Critical Incident Manager will take their information and then enter it into the AlertPA system for them.

Officials want to ensure that citizens are utilizing the AlertPA system before ending its contract with RapidNotify. So, we need you to sign up.

Please sign up with AlertPA to ensure you receive notifications about state prison emergencies.