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Governor Jon S. Corzine
Office of the Governor
P.O. Box 001
Trenton, NJ 08625

Dear Governor Corzine,

As you are aware, I am the president of the New Jersey Law Enforcement Supervisors Association (NJLESA). The NJLESA serves as the exclusive certified collective bargaining unit representing supervisory law enforcement personnel at the rank of sergeant throughout the State of New Jersey. Please allow this letter to serve as notice of our strong opposition to the expansion of private prisons in New Jersey. These privately-operated facilities promise huge cost savings to the state, but only deliver failed results with many hidden costs. Regardless if it is the State Parole Board's (NJSPB) proposed Residential Assessment Centers (RACs), an expansion of the existing halfway back program through more halfway houses, or the plans by the Department of Corrections to contract the relocation of the State's Sexually Violent Predators Unit, it is clearly the privatization of these programs and services that will needlessly jeopardize public safety at a questionable savings to taxpayers.

Listening to the testimony of NJSPB Executive Director Joseph Shields, I was shocked to hear that the much lower recidivism rates advertised for parolees who participated in their various privately-operated halfway-back programs did not include the number of "technical" parole violators who enjoyed an uncounted number chances instead of being sent directly back to prison. This data is key to determining the actual cost of housing and treatment in these programs in relation to the per diem rate of incarceration in a secure state facility with trained state law enforcement officers. Each and every trip through a program's "revolving door" not only costs the state additional money, but needlessly exposes the public to dangerous criminals who should be behind bars. I am also extremely concerned with reports that Parole Officers are being pressured to let dangerous parole violators avoid being sent back to jail in a scheme to manipulate these recidivism rates and hide failed results.

In addition, when a convicted criminal makes a commitment to the State Parole Board to abide by certain terms and conditions parole in exchange for early release from prison, he must be held fully responsible for any decision to break this

commitment. Whether the parolee commits another “new” crime or not, we must not forget that the parolee’s original sentence was reduced on a promise to follow simple rules and become a productive member of society. If they do not meet with their parole officer, do not continue to participate in various support programs, or test positive for the use of illegal drugs, we must recognize that they are a danger to every law-abiding citizen of New Jersey who expect to be protected by their government. As was the case with Rasheena McCray of Newark, who was killed on March 1, 2008 after being intentionally hit by a car driven by halfway-house escapee Wilquan Williams. Williams was transferred to the halfway house to complete his state sentence for aggravated assault and various other weapons charges. If he had remained in prison to finish his original sentence, or at least been prevented from escaping from a failed halfway house program, Rasheena McCray would still be alive.

As far as the failures of these privately-operated facilities, there can be no dispute that the ***thousands of escapes*** that are conveniently masked by the term “walkaways,” is a poor track record that will only increase the danger to society if we allow them to run new, “secure” facilities that house dangerous sexually violent predators. Meanwhile, escapes of inmates from state prisons are extremely rare given the fact that they are staffed by trained correction officers with secure perimeters patrolled by armed law enforcement professionals. Another point to consider before expanding the number of beds in the current Halfway Back Program through new Residential Assessment Centers is that the current bed-space is not being used for its original intent. According to the State Parole website, ***“They [Halfway Back Programs (HWB)] are designed as a more structured alternative sanction in lieu of incarceration for parolees.”*** However, these beds are being used to accommodate transfers ***from*** state prison, such as Rasheena McCray’s murderer from above, who are being released early through the relaxed criteria of the State Parole Board. They are using these programs as a halfway-back-to-society program instead of their original intent as a halfway-back-to-prison program, or “an alternative sanction in lieu of incarceration.”

Understanding the price for the incarceration of dangerous, convicted criminals continues to increase along with every other good or service over time, rest assured there will be a much higher political price paid by elected policy-makers and their political parties when New Jersey residents not only continue to bear the burden of high taxes due to ramped over-spending, but are then surrounded by dangerous and violent escapees from failed privately-operated facilities. If real and substantial cost saving without an increased threat to public safety is the true goal, than the economy of scale must be achieved through increased capital investments in larger, well-maintained and efficient prisons. Another clear path to substantial savings for New Jersey taxpayers would be the consolidation of government services through the merger of the Division of Parole ***back*** into the Department of Corrections. We must end the duplication of services that needlessly inflates our annual budget with a bulging and ever-increasing bureaucracy.

One shocking fact that will soon be exposed to every tax-paying resident of New Jersey is that the proprietors of these failed, privately-operated halfway houses are major contributors to both political parties each election year. Their corporate officers have reportedly donated hundreds of thousands of dollars to numerous state legislators in both political parties. Pay-to-play in New Jersey is now costing law-abiding, tax-paying citizens their lives, and it will only get worse if we allow these privateers to prosper. Another situation that should be thoroughly investigated is the number of high-ranking state employees within the Department of Corrections that are later hired post-retirement by these very same prison privateers.

In closing, the safety of every law-abiding resident of New Jersey and the protection of our children hang in the balance of your decisions on these matters. We must not attempt to balance a bloated state budget, amassed through years of out-of-control spending, at the cost of public safety. We must stop the expansion of privately-run halfway houses in New Jersey, and stop the thousands of escapes from these failed facilities that have become all too common. I implore you to tell these prison privateers that New Jersey's public safety is not for sale and that although we believe in rehabilitation and redemption, there are penalties for violating our laws that will not be ignored.

Sincerely,



Steve Brzdek
President, NJLESA

c: Senate Budget and Appropriations Committee
Assembly Budget Committee Members
George W. Hayman, DOC Commissioner
Joseph Maligrino, PBA #105 President
Jeff Smith, NJSOA President
Scott Derby, NJSOA-CU President
State Law Enforcement Coalition for Safe Neighborhoods