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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 184

Offered March 3, 2014

Commending the Virginia Department of Corrections.

Patrons—Ebbin; Delegate: Hope

WHEREAS, the Virginia Department of Corrections assessed that the growing number of administrative segregation assignments in the Commonwealth was leading to challenges in the corrections system, including a cycle of regression among offenders, low staff morale, and higher operating expenses; and

WHEREAS, the Department recognized that over 90 percent of incarcerated offenders complete their sentences and return to the community and that long-term public safety is not served when offenders discharge directly from administrative segregation to the community; and

WHEREAS, the Department developed an innovative and creative process based on research in the correctional field to reduce the prison system's reliance on long-term administrative segregation assignments, successfully changing the culture at the Commonwealth's highest security prisons; and

WHEREAS, the Step Down program implements evidence-based practices, extensive personnel training, and advanced security measures beyond required procedures to enhance staff and offender safety; and

WHEREAS, the program creates pathways for offenders to learn and practice law-abiding behavior through specially designed modules, with the opportunity to progress through a conservative step down process toward lower security classifications and gradually prepare for community reentry; and

WHEREAS, the program has utilized a multidisciplinary team to determine underlying reasons for offender behaviors so they may be targeted with specially designed programs; and

WHEREAS, in July 2013, the Southern Legislative Conference recognized the Department's national leadership with the STAR (State Transformation in Action Recognition) award for its diligent work in reducing administrative segregation and for developing a program model replicable in other states; and

WHEREAS, Department leadership and an effective team effort involving all staff from Southwest Virginia's Red Onion and Wallens Ridge State Prisons have reduced administrative segregation and increased safety through cognitive programming and the building of pro-social behavior; and

WHEREAS, 511 offenders have become involved in the program, leading to a 64 percent reduction in administrative segregation assignments, and 337 offenders have successfully stepped down to general population assignments since 2011; and

WHEREAS, serious incidents with administrative segregation offenders have declined by 76 percent, offender grievances and complaints have declined by 79 percent, and 26 percent of the offenders working in the prisons' food services have successfully graduated from the Step Down program; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED, by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly hereby commend the Virginia Department of Corrections for its outstanding leadership and dedication to public safety in administering the Step Down program; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the Senate prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the Virginia Department of Corrections as an expression of the General Assembly's gratitude and admiration for the Department's efforts to develop a superior program to help guide offenders toward rehabilitation.

INTRODUCED

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