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HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 206

House Amendments in [] — February 10, 1994

Requesting the Department of Corrections to study the issue of maternal and infant bonding in the Goochland Correctional Facility.

Patrons—Cunningham, Christian, Crittenden and Van Landingham

Referred to Committee on Health, Welfare and Institutions

WHEREAS, in 1981, women made up approximately 3 percent of the national prison population; and in 1993 they made up about 6 percent; and

WHEREAS, today women are coming into prisons at a faster rate than men, but generally go unnoticed in the crime statistics reported to the public; and

WHEREAS, on any given day, 75 to 80 percent of those incarcerated women are mothers and the percentage of those who give birth in prison is estimated to be 9 percent; and

WHEREAS, the term "estimate" is used freely because, of the thousands of statistics published by the United States Department of Justice, none include the term "prison births"; and

WHEREAS, while most social policies address readiness for school, there is less attention on the preparedness of the children for everyday activities and life skills; and

WHEREAS, many feel that "education and attitudes start in the crib, and so does crime"; and

WHEREAS, New York is the only state which allows infants to remain with their incarcerated mothers in a prison nursery until their first birthday or up to 18 months if the mother will be paroled in that time; and

WHEREAS, the infants [~~in prison have no awareness of prison and can~~] benefit from the feeling of being comfortable, safe and wanted which can translate into the beginning of a healthy social adjustment; and

WHEREAS, the program deals not only with the basic needs of the child, but also with teaching the mother parenting skills in addition to educational achievement and work or job training; and

WHEREAS, in most cases, these mothers are the only caregivers for their children and will assume responsibility for them after leaving prison; and

WHEREAS, if we are to reduce crime and uphold the responsibility taken on by the state to keep families intact, we need to give caregivers the skills and opportunity to achieve those goals; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the Department of Corrections study the feasibility of allowing incarcerated mothers who have young children or who give birth in prison to keep their children with them in order to promote bonding and family stability. The department shall examine, but not be limited to, (i) a comparison of costs between what it costs to maintain a woman in prison and pay for foster care for her children and that of allowing her to keep her young children with her; (ii) the design of a program which would promote family stability and teach parenting skills; (iii) the potential effects on recidivism after participation in such a program; [~~and~~] (iv) the outcomes experienced by the state of New York whose program has been operating since 1931 [; and (v) the potential effects of the prison environment on the child] .

The Department of Corrections shall provide staff support for the study. All agencies of the Commonwealth shall provide assistance to the department, upon request.

The Department of Corrections shall complete its work in time to submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and the 1995 Session of the General Assembly as provided in the procedures of the Division of Legislative Automated Systems for the processing of legislative documents.

ENGROSSED

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