

Allegheny County Council

*County of Allegheny
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Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 21, 2007

4:00 PM

Conference Room 1

Committee on Public Safety

*Jim Burn, Chair; John DeFazio, Matt Drozd, Vince Gastgeb, William E. Lestitian,
Chuck Martoni, and William Robinson - Members*

I. Call to Order

Summary: *The meeting was called to order at 4:00 PM*

Invited Guests:

Jim Flynn, County Manager or Designee

William Mullen, Acting County Sheriff

Ramon Rustin, Warden, Allegheny County Jail

Summary: *Invited guests in attendance: Mr. Flynn, Mr. Rustin, and Joe Rizzo for Mr. Mullen*

Council staff in attendance: John Mascio and Jared Barker

II. Roll Call

Roll Call: Present: Matt Drozd, Vince Gastgeb, Jim Burn, Council Member Rich Fitzgerald, Council Member Michael Finnerty, and Council Member Bob Macey

Absent: John DeFazio, William Lestitian, Chuck Martoni, and William Robinson

III. Approval of Minutes

3110-07 Motion to approve the Minutes of the November 29, 2006 Public Safety Committee Meeting.

Action: **A motion was made by Gastgeb, seconded by Drozd, that this matter be Passed. The motion carried unanimously.**

IV. Agenda Items**Ordinance**

3034-07 An Ordinance of the County of Allegheny, Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, amending and supplementing the Allegheny County Code of Ordinances, Division 2, entitled "County Government Operations," Chapter 205, entitled "Allegheny County Jail," by the creation of a new Article II, entitled "Employment of Prisoners", and providing guidelines for the employment of inmates at the Allegheny County Jail for the improvement of highways within the County.

Sponsors: Vince Gastgeb and Matt Drozd

Summary: *Mr. Gastgeb provided the committee with a summary of the bill. He said that the proposed ordinance would formally adopting an existing state law authorizing the use of prisoners detained in County jails for the maintenance of highways, roads and bridges in the Commonwealth. He said that this statute in essence allows the County to use individuals who have been convicted of criminal offenses and who are serving their sentences at the County Jail as labor for maintenance functions.*

He went on to explain that because only individuals sentenced to prison terms of under two years generally serve their time in the County Jail, it is anticipated that the most serious offenders would never even be contemplated for this type of duty. Individuals

who are at the County Jail awaiting trial or who have been transported to the County Jail for a hearing in Allegheny County would not be eligible, because the authorization is only for inmates serving their sentences at the County Jail.

Bill No. 3034-07 also includes a similar provision pertaining to the use of County prisoners for the maintenance of the County's parks, buildings, and other facilities. Although not specifically authorized by state law, this provision also does not appear to be contrary to the existing state statute.

The ordinance would also require that the Warden develop specific written policies governing the use of prisoners for labor outside the County Jail, and that these policies be approved by Council.

He said that Council would not develop the rules or policies. He said that he views his bill as a starting point. He asked Mr. Flynn and Warden Rustin for their opinion on the feasibility of implementing this.

Mr. Flynn provided the committee with a history of the county's workhouse programs. He said that he has a concern that there is a perception that the County would be creating chain gangs. He said the goal should be to promote integration of these prisoners in a more global manner other than cleaning roads and parks. He said he was also concerned about contraband, officer safety, inmate safety, and union issues that may arise. He also expressed concern over the cost of transporting the inmates. He said that he would support programs for training and providing life skills for the prisoners.

Mr. Rustin provide the committee with an update on some of the reintegration programs that they are currently working on. He said that have substance abuse programs and life skill training programs. He said the focus should be to provide them with job skills that they could use after they are released. He said that he too has concerns about security issues, contraband, and the possibility of escape. He said they provide jobs that teach life skills such as paving and other contracting type work.

Mr. Fitzgerald said that maybe some of the aspects of the bill could be implemented.

Mr. Gastgeb asked Mr. Flynn and Mr. Rustin if they could maybe look into writing some type of policy which would incorporate some of the provisions contained in the bill.

Mr. Flynn reminded the committee that the Jail Oversight Board is responsible for establishing policies regarding the jails, so it would need to come from them.

Mr. Gastgeb said that he would want the experts to write the bill and Council could sign off on it by Ordinance.

Mr. Burn said that maybe they should ask Human Services Director Marc Cherna for his input.

Mr. Flynn said that he will have Mr. Rustin give the bill to the Jail Oversight Board for their views and comments.

Burn said that at the next committee meeting they should invite a representative from

the Jail Oversight Board to discuss this.

Action: **Held in Committee**

V. Adjournment

Summary: *The meeting adjourned at 4:45 PM*