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Friday, August 18, 2006

Mr. David Farney, Assistant Counsel
Pennsylvania Department of Corrections
55 Urley Drive
Camp Hill, PA 17011

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INDEPENDENT REGULATORY
REVIEW COMMISSION

Dear Mr. Farney:

Justice & Mercy, Inc. regularly meets and works with the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections on issues of mutual concern. We understand that you are asking for input into the new amendments to Title 37, Chapter 95, addressing county prison inspections. We support the new amendments to make minimal standards enforceable; however, we would like to see the process happen quicker.

Since citations for noncompliance are only issued after three years of noncompliance in county prisons, inhumane and unhealthy conditions not only for offenders but for prison staff are allowed to remain for inexcusable period of time that can lead to dangerous situations. In addition, the amendments only state that county prisons "may" be decertified at the discretion of the Secretary. As these are only minimal standards of prison operation, we believe that prisons should automatically be decertified.

We cite facilities like Pike County Correctional Facility which is reputed to be one of the best run county prisons in the nation. The prison actually strives to correct inmates with a recidivism rate of less than 25%. The staff from the warden and his deputies along with the correctional officers are professional, respectful and dedicated to their jobs. They have worked with the community to develop a re-entry program that will lead to successful reintegration of ex-inmates.

Prisons should work to raise standards of excellence, not just try to meet the minimal criteria. The Pa. DOC needs to encourage this mindset.

Thank you.

Sincerely,

Jean M. Bickmire, Administrative Director
Justice & Mercy, Inc.

CC: Secretary Jeffrey Beard, Pa. DOC

JMB

"What does the LORD require of us, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with God?" Micah 6:8