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Gov. Snyder: To be safer, Michigan must change outcomes of criminal justice system

Special message cites importance of addressing root causes of criminal behavior, preparing prisoners for reentry into society

DETROIT, Mich. – Preparing prisoners for reentry into society, addressing the root causes of criminal behavior and improving the juvenile justice system are all part of creating a safer Michigan, Gov. Rick Snyder said today when delivering his Special Message to the Legislature on Criminal Justice.

The governor presented his message during a visit to Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit, where prior offenders manufacture auto parts and often transition to permanent employment at vehicle parts suppliers throughout Wayne County.

"We know that most criminals who go to prison will eventually be released after they have completed their sentence. It would be better for all of society if these former inmates are able to earn a job instead of turning back to crime," Snyder said. "We have to do better at preparing these individuals for life outside of prison walls so they can return to their communities as productive members of society. To change the outcome of their time in prison, we have to change how we prepare them to reenter society."

The governor is calling for reforms to identify the skills that are needed for the jobs that are available and create the capacity to train prisoners for employment. That includes collaborative efforts between the newly-created Talent Investment Agency and the Department of Corrections to identify in-demand skills, improve quality of prisoner training with hands-on skilled trades training, and preparing inmates for life outside of prison by teaching what it means to earn a wage, keep a job, pay bills, find housing and follow the law.

"Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit has a long history of guiding, preparing and placing employment-challenged citizens into full-time job opportunities," said Lorna Utley, CEO of Goodwill Industries of Greater Detroit. "Through our strong relationship with employment partners and emphasis on breaking down all barriers to employment, we have an exceptional track record of long-term employment success with those who often need another chance to succeed. Gov. Snyder chose the perfect location for his message today, as he shares our understanding that obtaining not only a job, but a meaningful, permanent job, is often the difference between whether an individual ends up a former prisoner or a future prisoner."

The state's corrections system costs Michigan residents billions of dollars per year. To make the criminal justice system more effective, the governor affirmed his support of using probation options and diversionary court treatment programs, such as mental health and drug courts, for non-violent offenders.

"There is often only one chance to divert someone from a path that leads to a lifelong pattern of criminal behavior and imprisonment," Snyder said. "Law enforcement and experts in the judicial system have identified how to keep people out of prison or at least keep them from going back in. Now it is up to us to put those recommendations to use."

Snyder is calling on the Legislature to address the issue of unregulated and inconsistent probation violation sanctions, presumptive parole for inmates assessed to have a high probability of success and eliminating redundant and outdated laws that penalize citizens for minor infractions, leaving them with a lifelong criminal record.

"I also want to take this opportunity to thank all of those who strive every day to make Michigan a safer place to live. From our state troopers, to local law enforcement, to corrections officers, court officers and parole and probation agents, thank you for risking your safety to protect ours, and for all the expertise you have offered in how we can reform our criminal justice system and improve outcomes."

Other highlights of the message include:

- Protecting crime victims by funding free service of Personal Protection Orders by law enforcement and successfully collecting restitution from offenders.
- Cultivating the best possible police force by expanding diversity through recruitment, establishing a Michigan State Police Cadet Program and connecting law enforcement officers with community partnerships.
- Calling on the Legislature to review funding for training prosecutors and public defenders, as well as helping exonerees find their footing again.
- Providing wraparound services to help ex-offenders, including the possibility of placing a parole officer at a workplace if a sufficient number of ex-offenders are employed there.
- Having the Department of Health and Human Services require quality metrics to measure outcomes from juvenile justice providers.
- Asking the Legislature to make diversion programming the default placement for juveniles, based on needs and risk assessments.
- Pairing MSP with the Department of Technology, Management and Budget to create a joint forensic team that will detect and investigate cybercrimes.
- Reviewing with the intent to sign bills passed by the Legislature that expand the use of the Holmes Youthful Trainee Act, which allows younger offenders to successfully complete probation or incarceration in exchange for not having the offense appear on their permanent record.
- Encouraging counties to reconsider pretrial detention practices, saving taxpayers money on jail costs and protecting offenders from potentially losing a job.
- Examining the possibility of placing terminally ill and elderly prisoners in settings that could be more cost effective.
- Ensuring MDOC's compliance with the Prison Rape Elimination Act.

The entire Special Message on Criminal Justice is available at www.michigan.gov/SaferMichigan.