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Indiana's Criminal Justice System Could See Changes Soon

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By Max Resnik
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FORT WAYNE, Ind. (Indiana's NewsCenter) In an exclusive interview with Chief Justice Randall Shepard, Indiana's NewsCenter was given insight as to how the first comprehensive review of criminal code and sentencing could be reshaped in the coming years.

The review, endorsed today by Governor Mitch Daniels, is receiving support in the General Assembly from both sides of the aisle. The review, asked for by all three branches of state government about a year ago, something Chief Justice Shepard referred to as a first, examined Indiana's public safety, criminal code and sentencing guidelines.

The policy changes, recommended by the Council of State Governments Justice Center and the Pew Center, could save taxpayers more than \$1 billion by 2017. There are three categories for these changes:

1. Improve proportionality in sentencing and ensure prison space for the worst offenders by creating a more precise set of drug and theft sentencing laws and providing judges with more sentencing options for individuals who commit the least serious felony charges.
2. Strengthen community supervision by focusing resources on high-risk offenders and creating incentives for supervision agencies to coordinate better with one another.
3. Reduce recidivism and bolster public safety by increasing access to community-based substance abuse and mental health treatment and enabling probation officers to respond with more effective, swift and certain sanctions.

Allen County's Re-Entry Court, according to Chief Justice Randall, is one example of how these changes can be achieved. He says Allen County's community correction programs are models, not only for the state, but also for courts around the country.

Other recommendations in the review include strengthening probation services and opportunities for non-violent and first-time offenders when re-entering society.

Also as part of the Governor's endorsement today, was the announcement that a new 512-bed high security annex will be built as an addition to New Castle Correctional Facility. The GEO Group, Inc. will build, finance and operate the new structure.

In 1987 there were more than 12,000 inmates in Indiana's correctional system. Today there are more than 29,000 inmates in Indiana's correctional system. By 2017 there are expected to be more than 35,000 inmates.

