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The Journal Gazette

Last updated: June 29, 2010 9:54 a.m.

## State to visit sentencing guides

### Surging prison rolls, spending underscore need, Daniels says

Niki Kelly | The Journal Gazette

INDIANAPOLIS – With the prison population rising and spending on corrections threatening to balloon, Gov. Mitch Daniels on Monday announced the state's first comprehensive review of Indiana's criminal code and sentencing policies since 1976.

The goal is to improve public safety by reducing recidivism and managing the growth in the number of offenders in Indiana's prisons.

"In Indiana, we will not compromise public safety," Daniels said. "Having more dangerous and repeat offending criminals in prison is the best way to protect Hoosiers, but if our current laws and practices result in non-dangerous offenders taking up space at high cost to taxpayers, there may be better ways to manage that."

The population has risen from 7,500 offenders in 1976 to nearly 29,000 today.

A national study this year showed while the population of state prisons across the country declined for the first time in 38 years, Indiana led the nation in percentage growth in prison inmates, with a 5.3 percent increase.

Indiana added 1,496 prisoners from 2008 to 2009. In contrast, Ohio reduced its prison population by 80, and Michigan by 3,260.

The state hasn't built new prison space since 2002. And in the last 20 years, lawmakers have added 107 new crimes or longer sentences.

"If we sit on our hands and don't attack this issue here, the projection is Indiana will have another 6,000 inmates over the next 10 years at an accumulated cost of \$1 billion," said Adam Gelb, director of the Public Safety Performance Project of the Pew Center on the States.

All three branches of state government – legislative, judicial and executive – are partnering with Pew and the Council of State Governments Justice Center on the issue.

The Indiana Criminal Justice Institute, mostly through federal grants, is putting \$100,000 toward the effort, while the Pew Foundation is contributing between \$500,000 and \$1 million.

The study will collect and analyze criminal sentencing data and compare the state's current sentencing and corrections policies and practices with nationally recognized evidence-based and fiscally responsible practices.

"In place after place in our state, there are alternatives to prison that try to hold accountable people who we think may be trusted with a second chance," Indiana Supreme Court Chief Justice Randall T. Shepard said.

A few areas expected to be examined include:

- Adding post-incarceration supervision for certain offenders. Some of Indiana's most non-compliant and dangerous offenders don't receive supervision because they have served their full term and no follow-up is legally required.
- Expanding the use of community corrections, parole and community transition programs. Daniels said the state paid \$1.3 million last year for intake costs on offenders sent to the Department of Correction with less than 30 days to serve.
- Revamping the state's earned credit time rules. State prison sentences automatically are cut in half for good time, and offenders can reduce sentences further by completing educational requirements.

To guide the work of this project, Daniels has established a bipartisan steering committee that includes Allen Superior Court Judge John Surbeck.

The timeline for full completion of the project is projected to be November 2011, but Daniels and several legislators involved said they hope to have enough data and recommendations to draft legislation for the legislative session starting in January.

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