



Representative W. David Guice
North Carolina House of Representatives
District 113



An update from the North Carolina House

November 07, 2011

Raleigh, North Carolina – Even though the General Assembly was not in session, October was yet another busy month for me. I spent a lot of time traveling across North Carolina and I even went to Washington, DC to highlight some great things that are going on in North Carolina.

I'm eager to update you about Justice Reinvestment. As you may recall, I spent much of this year working on H.B. 642, the Justice Reinvestment Act, which passed the General Assembly with near-unanimous support and was signed into law by the governor in late June. Designed to reduce spending on corrections and increase public safety, this legislation was based on research conducted over a year by the Council of State Governments (CSG) Justice Center, in partnership with the Pew Center on the States and the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance.

Recently, I went to Washington, DC to brief members of Congress and their staff about Justice Reinvestment. While there, I participated in a briefing to more than 25 congressional staff. Furthermore, I had numerous meetings with members of Congress and their staff, including Senator Hagan and Congressman Coble. While Sen. Burr and Rep. Shuler were not available, I was able to meet with their staff members as well.

Everyone was excited to learn that as a result of the Justice Reinvestment Act, North Carolina's prisons are no longer projected to grow, which would have cost the state hundreds of millions of dollars. Instead, the prison population is now expected to be nearly 5,000 beds lower than projected by 2017. Not only will we avoid having to spend almost \$270 million to build and operate new prisons, but the state is expected to save more than \$290 million. While saving taxpayers' money is important, maintaining public safety is critical. The Justice Reinvestment Act will increase public safety by getting tougher on many offenders and focusing supervision and treatment resources where they will have the biggest impact.

The Justice Reinvestment Act represents the most comprehensive set of changes to North Carolina's criminal justice system since the Structured Sentencing Act became effective in 1994. Currently, about 15,000 people convicted of felonies leave prison each year without supervision. The Justice Reinvestment Act requires everyone leaving prison with a felony conviction to receive at least nine months of post-release supervision. This is a great boost to public safety. Additionally, the new law will empower probation officers to respond to violations using swift and certain sanctions. It also provides incentives for offenders who participate in treatment programs, and imposes tougher penalties for habitual breaking and entering offenders. In addition, counties that have capacity may volunteer to house certain misdemeanants. The jails will be compensated through the newly created Statewide Misdemeanant Confinement Fund.

To have the greatest impact on reducing recidivism, the legislation requires supervision and treatment resources be focused on higher-risk offenders. I believe that if we do not provide treatment to those who need it most, then they will continue to cycle through the criminal justice system. That is why I'm pleased to tell you that as a result of H.B. 642, the state has reinvested more than \$4 million annually on community-based treatment programs to improve outcomes for people on supervision.

Many parts of the legislation will become effective on December 1. To prepare for this date, the Department of Correction and the Administrative Office of the Courts are working together with agencies and organizations that will be responsible for implementing the legislation. Much work needs to be done, including developing new probation policies and procedures, identifying county jail capacity, and training stakeholders, such as probation officers, judges and district attorneys about the new legislation. To assist with implementing the legislation, North Carolina is receiving technical assistance from the CSG Justice Center and we expect to receive funding from the Bureau of Justice Assistance. Funding will be used to provide training, education, and upgrades to data systems.

To help ensure that people understand what is in the law and why policies were made, I have been speaking to many groups across the state. I was honored to be invited to speak with district attorneys at their conference in Concord about the changes being made as a result of the passage of the Justice Reinvestment Act. They asked many great questions and I appreciated the opportunity to discuss the new law. I also had the pleasure of meeting with staff in the Department of Correction Division of Community Corrections when they were learning more about the Justice Reinvestment Act while attending a managers meeting in Raleigh.

This week I am in Raleigh as we go back into session on Monday, November 7th and have various committee meetings throughout the week. I will be traveling back to Brevard on Friday and would like to recognize and thank all of the Veterans throughout District 113 for their service to our country so that we are able to celebrate our freedoms on Veteran's Day and throughout the year.

Representative W. David Guice
Legislative Office Building, Room 528
300 North Salisbury Street
Raleigh, North Carolina 27603
(919) 715-4466
David.Guice@ncleg.net

###