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Philadelphia D.A. Calls for "Justice Reinvestment" at Appropriations Hearing; Rep. Fattah Praises Williams' "Smart Proactive" Approach

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Congressman Frank Wolfe (R-VA) is Chair of the subcommittee. Congressman Chaka Fattah (D-PA) subcommittee Ranking Member invited Williams to testify about Philadelphia’s re-entry initiatives, how the city tackles recidivism and corrections spending.

“As District Attorney of Philadelphia, I want to invest in good programs that will reduce recidivism and reduce the size of our prison population,” Williams told Members of the subcommittee. “But here is the challenge. In many cases, programs that will lower the recidivism rates require us to spend some money well before we can realize greater savings.”

Williams urged continued funding for the federal Justice Assistance Grants, with expansion toward innovative justice reinvestment programs. Sworn into office as Philadelphia’s first African-American D.A. 13 months ago, Williams outlined for the appropriators eight reforms he has instituted that have saved \$15 million while increasing public safety and justice.

Fattah praised Williams for his approach, "District Attorney Williams has outlined a smart, proactive approach to some of the most pressing and intractable problems facing our criminal justice system. He has instituted a series of win-win reforms and he is showing us the way to increase justice reinvestment to scale for all our cities and states."

Citing the Philadelphia D.A.'s office as a case study, Williams pointed to justice reinvestment initiatives now in place. They include his first-day-in-office action to revamp the charging unit to "get it right from the start, not ask our judges to simply sort (charges) out later."

Williams' office has diverted low-risk, non-violent drug offenders to summary cases, accelerated diversion to community service for misdemeanor cases, speeded up negotiated pleas, set up geographically zoned courts centralized at the Criminal Justice Center and endorsed prison reform legislation among other steps.

Also testifying at the CJS subcommittee hearing this morning were Adam Gelb, Director, Public Safety Performance Project, of the Pew Center on the States; Mark L. Earley, Member of the Board, Prison Fellowship International, and Immediate Past President, Prison Fellowship USA; and Michael Thompson, Director, Justice Center, Council of State Governments.

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