



DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS

ADMINISTRATION

3200 East Highway 34
c/o 500 East Capitol Avenue
Pierre, SD 57501-5070
Phone: (605) 773-3478
Fax: (605) 773-3194

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Contact: Michael Winder
(605) 773-3478

Governor's Corrections Workgroup Discusses Possible Legislation, Commutations and Pilot Day Reporting Project

(Pierre) – Governor Rounds' Corrections Workgroup has endorsed draft legislation to allow more judicial authority on certain sentences for inmates, commutations for inmates who help fight forest fires and other state work projects and a pilot project for day reporting centers in certain areas of South Dakota.

The 46-member workgroup was appointed by the Governor to study the increasing prison population in South Dakota and to recommend changes to reverse that trend. The workgroup's third meeting was held in Pierre on December 10th.

Legislation to allow more judicial authority on certain mandatory consecutive sentences will be introduced on behalf of the workgroup. The bill would remove a requirement in state law that the court order consecutive and stand alone consecutive sentences for crimes committed by prisoners which allows the court the discretion to run these sentences concurrently as well.

Members of the workgroup also approved continuing a practice of having the Governor commute the sentences of certain minimum custody inmates who help fight forest fires and work on disaster cleanup efforts and other projects that save taxpayer dollars. Inmates worked more than 13-thousand hours on fires in the Black Hills and more than 2-thousand hours on disaster cleanup efforts in 2003.

Attorney General Larry Long also briefed the workgroup on a proposal for a pilot project involving day reporting centers. The "24/7 Project" would impose special bond conditions on those people in the project area who are arrested for drunk driving and have at least one prior drunk driving conviction within the last ten years. Defendants would be required to abstain from consumption of any alcohol by reporting to a law enforcement agency for a breath test twice a day. Failure of any breath test would result in the revocation of bond and the defendant would be returned to the custody of the sheriff until further action of the court. The goal is to help chronic drunk drivers reach and maintain sobriety, thus preventing them from committing more drunk driving offenses and becoming inmates of the Department of Corrections. Long is meeting with judges and law enforcement officials in the state to find sites for the pilot project.

More information on the workgroup is available on the Department of Corrections website.