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GOVERNOR PATRICK HIGHLIGHTS NEW LAW THAT EXPANDS JOB OPPORTUNITIES, PROTECTS PUBLIC SAFETY**Law reforms CORI system, combats illegal gun possession**

WORCESTER - Monday, August 30, 2010 - Joined by local officials, community leaders and advocates, Governor Deval Patrick today highlighted a new anti-crime law that reforms the state's criminal offender records information system (CORI) to improve employment opportunities for residents across the Commonwealth. The Governor gathered with residents who will benefit from this new law at Worcester City Hall to celebrate the progress made on this important issue.

Signed by Governor Patrick on August 6, the law also reduces recidivism by allowing non-violent offenders serving mandatory minimum sentences to receive supervision and training before being released back into the community and combats gun violence by adding illegal gun possession to the list of crimes prosecutors can use for pre-trial detention of suspects.

"The best way to break the cycle of recidivism is to make it possible for people to get a job," said Governor Patrick. "This legislation brings our outdated criminal history database into the 21st century, ensures law enforcement agencies, employers and housing providers have access to accurate and complete records in appropriate circumstances, and helps people get back to work so they can support their families. I commend the Legislature for sending me this tough and smart anti-crime package."

Recognizing the importance of implementing tough and smart anti-crime measures, Governor Patrick first filed CORI Reform on January 11, 2008. The comprehensive reform enhances employment and economic opportunities for citizens with criminal records and expands access to criminal record information for prospective employers and housing providers on an internet-based system holding the most accurate and relevant information. Felony convictions will be available for 10 years and misdemeanor convictions for five years, as long as there are no subsequent offenses. Murder and sex offense convictions remain in the system permanently. Pending cases that are continued without a finding (CWOFF) will be available until disposed.

"Governor Patrick originally filed this comprehensive reform legislation to improve public safety and increase access to economic opportunities," said Lieutenant Governor Timothy Murray. "By partnering with the Legislature, this administration passed a bill that will strengthen our neighborhoods by providing stronger safety measure on gun control while also increasing employment opportunities for those rehabilitated individuals transitioning back to the community."

"This takes a responsible approach to targeted reforms that improve public safety and address the costly problems of recidivism and overcrowding," Senate President Therese Murray said. "It also provides important new tools for employers to access the state's criminal records system."

"This legislation strikes a balance to reduce recidivism while remaining tough on violent offenders," said House Speaker Robert A. DeLeo. "This bill will provide new opportunities to those who have paid their debt to society while maintaining a strong focus on public safety."

Currently, too many prisoners leave custody without supervision or programs to ease their re-entry into the community, contributing to high rates of recidivism. The law Governor Patrick signed today addresses sentencing reform by allowing some inmates imprisoned in Houses of Corrections for non-violent drug offenses parole eligibility after serving one half of their mandatory minimum sentence if no aggravating factors are found. As a condition of parole, the Parole Board may require enhanced supervision, including the use of a satellite tracking device. For the first time, the measure will give inmates serving sentences for non-violent drug offenses an opportunity to participate in the education and training, programs that reduce the likelihood they will re-offend following their release.

The new law also adds illegal firearms possession to the list of crimes a prosecutor may use to move for pre-trial detention of a suspect based on dangerousness and expands compensation funds to provide greater relief to crime victims.

"I am pleased we are able to celebrate the passing of CORI reform today in Worcester, where so many advocates have worked tirelessly to see this legislation become a reality," said Senator Harriette L. Chandler.

"This reform is a common sense approach which balances public safety with an opportunity for a second chance for an ex-offender who is willing to contribute through gainful employment. These reforms will ensure the accuracy of records, leveling the playing field and opening doors to opportunity that had been closed," said Public Safety Secretary Mary Beth Heffernan.

Barbara J. Dougan, Massachusetts project director of Families Against Mandatory Minimums (FAMM) said, "FAMM and its members are gratified to see Massachusetts take this first step toward meaningful sentencing reform. Over the years the studies have amassed, showing that mandatory minimum sentences do not reduce either drug offenses or drug dependency and addiction. Instead, too often they result in nonviolent or low level offenders being punished with the same lengthy sentences intended for drug kingpins. The Legislature showed courage in its willingness to acknowledge that when laws do not work as intended, change is needed. And today, by signing the bill into law, Governor Patrick continues his strong leadership on this issue. This is part of a nationwide trend, as at least 15 other states have reformed their drug sentencing laws in recent years."

"Community organizations and unions worked tirelessly for this legislation because it will lessen crime in our communities and also give ex-offenders a fair chance to get jobs when they've shown they have rehabilitated themselves," said Lewis Finfer, Director of Massachusetts Communities Action Network. "We need less crime victims and as people of faith, we believe in redemption."

"This victory is the culmination of years of tireless work to bring the issue to the forefront and build support for change," said Wilnelia Rivera, Chair of the Commonwealth CORI Coalition and Neighbor to Neighbor Campaigns Director. "Today, our state has made good policy for public safety and our communities. CORI reform will stop the revolving door of recidivism, strengthen families, and cut costs to taxpayers in the process."

Angela Estrada, a member of Neighbor to Neighbor who has a CORI record, said, "This is a huge victory for all of the people that have worked hard for years to make this reform happen. We have made history by changing this law. We know that when we all unite, we can win."

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