



NEWS

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CONTACT: Jennifer Fennell for Associated Industries of Florida
(850) 222-3767, jennifer@coremessage.com

Dan Krassner for Florida TaxWatch
(850) 222-5052, dkrassner@floridataxwatch.org

AIF, Florida TaxWatch: Reform Prisons Texas-Style *Florida Groups Welcome Texas Legislator's Testimony on Decreasing Crime, Saving Taxpayer Dollars*

TALLAHASSEE — Texas State Representative Jerry Madden (R-Plano) testified today before a committee of the Florida Legislature on the impact of corrections reform legislation he sponsored in his home state.

Business lobbying group Associated Industries of Florida (AIF) and the independent research institute Florida TaxWatch were quick to praise Rep. Madden's remarks.

"Florida's business community is grateful for Rep. Madden's willingness to travel to our state to share his expertise on how to decrease crime, while saving taxpayer dollars," said Barney Bishop III, President and CEO of Associated Industries of Florida. "We don't have an income tax in Florida, so if our state is to continue down the path of building more prisons, it will be on the business community to foot the bill. To the extent that we can change the way that we're doing business, spend less money with a better outcome, that's in the interest of businesses statewide."

"Gov. Scott and our state's legislative leaders are wise to consider corrections reform based on the Texas model," said Dominic M. Calabro, President and CEO. "Rep. Madden comes from a tough on crime state that *reduced* its prison rolls in 2009. We are encouraged that our legislators' sought out Rep. Madden's perspective on how to save taxpayers' money while reducing crime and we look forward to continuing to be a resource for our policymakers to help implement needed corrections reforms as outlined in our recent Task Force report."

Rep. Madden presented before a joint meeting of the Senate Criminal Justice Committee and the Senate Subcommittee on Criminal and Civil Justice Appropriations. Madden is co-chair of the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) workgroup on sentencing and corrections policy issues and vice-chair of the Texas House of Representatives Committee on Corrections.

Rep. Madden has previously stated in a publication released by the Pew Charitable Trusts, “. . . there were a lot of things that could be done that made good sense. And many of those had to do with treatment: treatment of drug addicts, of alcoholics and treatment of people on parole or probation who were having problems.”

Madden continued “. . . we also had in our pocket the work we’ve done over the last several years in Texas on statistics and data gathering. So we had the numbers that could show what the probable success rates were going to be. The statistics are such that we could clearly show that we could operate these new programs for less money and we wouldn’t have to build new prisons. We showed, in fact, that the prison population probably will drop.”

In December 2010, Florida TaxWatch issued its Report and Recommendations of the Government Cost Savings Task Force for FY2011-12, which contains several references to Texas-style corrections reform as part of the documents more than 125 solutions to help the state save more than \$4 billion by adopting cost savings measures.

The Florida TaxWatch report states, “with a prison population of over a hundred thousand costing taxpayers \$2.4 billion a year, we can no longer afford the broken policy choices that have led to this out of control growth without making our communities any safer or offenders more accountable.”

The Task Force report, released in December 2010, builds upon the success of the previous Task Force report released in March 2010 that included 88 recommendations worth more than \$3 billion in innovative cost-savings for state government – many of which were enacted by the FY2010-11 Legislature.

The following are a few of the recommendations from the Cost Savings Task Force Report that relate specifically to corrections reform:

- Align Florida’s marijuana and cocaine possession laws with Texas and other similar states. The Florida Legislature should amend 893.13(6)(b), Florida Statutes, to reclassify low-level marijuana and/or cocaine possession as a misdemeanor.
- Expand evidence-based mental health treatment Recommendation: The Legislature should review and amend statutes to facilitate more effective collaboration among stakeholders involved in the delivery of mental health services, particularly as they relate to continuity of care for individuals involved in or at risk of becoming involved in the justice system.
- The Legislature may wish to review chapter 614.017 of the Texas Health and Safety Code as an example of such cross systems collaboration.
- The Legislature should pass the Community Mental Health and Substance Abuse Treatment and Crime Reduction Act.

- The Legislature should authorize county court judges to order involuntary outpatient treatment as a condition of release for defendants with mental illnesses when appropriate.
- Study the effects of barring commitment of misdemeanants to state custody. Texas, North Carolina, and Virginia have adopted legislation to keep misdemeanants out of state custody and have reduced commitment rates substantially. In all three states, the state not only realized significant cost-savings as a result of the legislation, but also saw improvements in public safety. In Texas, youth cannot be committed to residential facilities for misdemeanor offenses unless adjudicated for four or more prior offenses. This resulted in a 36% reduction in commitments in the past three years. At the same time, juvenile arrests for violent offenses dropped. Recommendation: The Legislature should examine the potential savings produced by limiting the commitment of juvenile misdemeanants.

[Click here to view the full Report and Recommendations of the Government Cost Savings Task Force for FY2011-12](#), or visit www.FloridaTaxWatch.org.

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Florida TaxWatch is a statewide non-partisan, non-profit research institute that over its 31 year history has become widely recognized as the watchdog of citizens' hard-earned tax dollars. Its mission is to provide the citizens of Florida and public officials with high quality, independent research and education on government revenues, expenditures, taxation, public policies and programs and to increase the productivity and accountability of Florida state and local government. Its support comes from homeowners and retirees, small and large businesses, philanthropic foundations, and professional associations. On the web at www.FloridaTaxWatch.org.