

**May 22, 2017**

**Joint Public Hearing of the Senate Judiciary Committee and Appropriations  
Subcommittee on Public Safety and Criminal Justice**

**Opening Statement of Committee Chairman, State Senator Stewart J.  
Greenleaf**

I would like to welcome everyone to today's public hearing on mandatory minimum sentences.

In the 1980s and 1990s, good intentioned lawmakers, myself included, passed a number of mandatory minimum sentences targeting drug offenders. In the 1980s, I believed that mandatory sentences were needed as a deterrent. I wanted to put offenders in prison for a long time without the chance of probation.

However, since that time, dozens of mandatory minimum sentences have been passed for drug dealing and other offenses. Mandatory sentences have been extended from applying to "big-time dealers" to many smaller fish who deal drugs to support their own addiction.

Unfortunately, we have not slowed the flow of drugs into our communities, and the mandatory sentences were no deterrent at all. For every dealer we have sent to prison, there has been someone else to take his place. We have, however, put a lot of people behind bars. At least two-thirds of our inmates have drug addiction issues. Pennsylvania's state inmate population increased from 8,000 in 1980 to 51,000 today and mandatory minimum sentences are a big reason why.

My SB 63 provides a sentencing judge with the discretion to impose a lesser sentence when the judge has a compelling reason to believe that a substantial injustice would occur by applying the mandatory sentence.

The legislation would not allow for this discretion if the offender has a prior criminal record, had used a firearm or other weapon, or if the offense involved death or serious injury.

I would now like to turn over this hearing to our witnesses who have so generously agreed to lend us their invaluable expertise. Witnesses play a critical role in forming public policy, and I thank each of them for their time.

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