



State of California

LITTLE HOOVER COMMISSION

March 9, 2005

The Honorable Carol Liu
Member, California State Assembly
State Capitol, Room 4112
Sacramento, CA 95814

Michael E. Alpert
Chairman

Stanley R. Zax
Vice Chairman

David J. Epstein

Liz Figueroa
Senator

Mike Gordon
Assemblymember

Daniel W. Hancock

Welton C. Mansfield

Eugene "Mitch" Mitchell

Stuart G. Moldaw

Charles S. Poochigian
Senator

Leslie "Teddie" Ray

Joseph Rodota

James P. Mayer
Executive Director

RE: SUPPORT FOR ASSEMBLY BILL 658

Dear Assemblymember Liu:

The Little Hoover Commission supports AB 658, the measure you have authored relating to incarcerated options for nonviolent women offenders. In its December 2004 report, *Breaking the Barriers for Women on Parole*, the Commission asserted the State could save money, improve public safety and break the cycle of crime if it reformed the way it incarcerates women offenders and supervises them on parole.

During the course of its study, the Commission found that more women have entered prison in the past two decades than ever before. The majority of them are incarcerated in large, remote prisons designed primarily to incapacitate and punish violent offenders. But women offenders are not like their male counterparts -- they are mostly non-violent. The majority of them have been victims themselves, they have more mental health issues and more severe drug addictions, and they are more likely to be the primary caretaker of a young child. The Commission concluded that mega-prisons are not effective for the non-violent female offenders who serve short sentences and need specific services to successfully return home.

It recommended the Department of Corrections appoint a director for women's programs to guide the development and implementation of reforms in institutions and parole to effectively address the risks and needs of women offenders and their children. It further recommended the State develop a continuum of incarceration options to include: community correctional facilities to house female inmates closer to their communities; halfway back facilities to support the transition from prison to the community; and, facilities specifically designed to address the needs of parole violators who are inappropriate for less restrictive sanctions.

AB 658 reflects the Commission's recommendation by requiring CDC to appoint a deputy director of women's programs to oversee the development of reforms that effectively address women inmates and their children. For these reasons, the Commission is taking an active support position on the measure.

As the bill moves through the committee process, I will be writing letters on behalf of the Commission to legislators urging aye votes. If you feel my presence and testimony at a hearing would be helpful, please let me know, and I will make every attempt to be available.

Sincerely,

James P. Mayer
Executive Director

c: Commissioners