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BOARD OF FREEHOLDERS

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**CAMDEN COUNTY ADVANCES TAXPAYER-SAVING
PLAN TO REVAMP CORRECTIONAL OPERATION**

**Initiative Would Save Taxpayers Millions, Relieve Inmate
Overcrowding, and Install Private Management**

Local Government Would Have Final Say on Location

Camden County today announced plans to contract with a private firm to build and operate a new correctional center, an initiative that would save taxpayers millions of dollars and dramatically upgrade the county's detention facilities.

The plan, sponsored by the Board of Freeholders, will involve the construction of a new facility elsewhere or the creation of a new complex at the existing site. Either option will satisfy three critical needs: Bring the county in line with United States Federal Court mandates to relieve prison overcrowding; provide first-rate alcohol, drug and other treatment and training programs to reduce criminal recidivism rates; and benefit taxpayers through millions of dollars in reduced costs of a correctional operation that now consumes 20 percent of the county budget.

The freeholders' plan expressly prohibits the construction of a detention center in any community that does not support and approve it. No plan will be advanced for any location without seeking input and support of the neighboring communities. At the request of Mayor Redd and residents living near a potential site on Mt. Ephraim Avenue in Camden, as well as residents in the neighboring towns of Collingswood, Haddon Township and Woodlynne, freeholders have eliminated the site for a correctional facility.

“Local government will have the final say on where a facility will be located,” said Freeholder Director Louis Cappelli, Jr. “There will be extensive discussions involving the community and the private operator chosen by the county. Local planning and zoning boards, as well as the elected officials in the community, will also be involved in the decision.”

“In the absence of a viable, taxpayer-driven proposal for a site that has community support, we will create a new facility, under outside management, on the existing site in downtown Camden,” Cappelli said. “Under no circumstances could the current facility be renovated or expanded. It is unsustainable because of its structural and design flaws that can’t be fixed.”

Under the plan, wherever the new facility is located, a private company would be contracted to build two new separate facilities: a smaller, maximum-security detention center and a larger treatment and training facility alongside it. The treatment-training facility is critical to the county’s goal – and the federal court’s order – to substantially reduce the inmate population by attacking the high prisoner recidivism rate, which makes the detention center a virtual revolving door for many inmates with alcohol and substance-abuse problems.

The Board of Freeholders, through a competitive bidding process, will select a firm to write the specifications for such a complex. Once those are written, reviewed and approved, they will be used as the basis for soliciting comprehensive proposals from companies to build and manage a new complex. The public and elected officials in any community chosen as a potential site for a new facility would determine whether they wanted it.

In the event that no other sites are acceptable, the County would use the existing site for a new complex, built and operated by a private firm. Candidates for the new treatment facility, which would be part of the complex, would be selected from those non-violent, minimum- and mid-level security inmates with alcohol and substance-abuse problems. Maximum security inmates – about a quarter of the current jail population of 1,600 – would be housed in a maximum security, smaller, more traditional jail adjacent to the treatment center.

As the process of revamping the county’s correctional operation moves forward, the county will continue working with a committee with representatives from law enforcement, the judiciary, the county administration and the public defenders’ office. Playing a central role in these deliberations is Dr. Marie Van Nostrand, a nationally known expert on pre-trial process and procedures. This initiative has the potential to reduce the detention center population by as many as 500 to 600 inmates. We’re hoping to get our average daily jail population down to 1267 by this July and down to 1050-1100 by the following year (2011).

“Our taxpayers expect these kinds of solutions from their government, especially in these tough economic times” Cappelli said. “We needed to find an approach that protects the public safety while saving taxpayers significant amounts of money, and we believe we are on the right track to accomplish just that. We are counting on the county warden, Eric Taylor, to oversee the process, with approval by the New Jersey Department of Corrections, and input from top municipal and law enforcement officials across Camden County.”