

December 6, 2010

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Members of the City Council,

As you know, reducing crime and reforming the Criminal Justice system has been my top priority since taking office. We conducted a national search for a new Superintendent of Police and formed a productive partnership with the US Department of Justice. We've streamlined the NOPD leadership structure and begun a new, cooperative relationship with the Independent Police Monitor. But these steps are only the beginning.

The reconstruction of the Orleans Parish Prison is an important piece of this reform process. Sheriff Gusman has been a leader in advocating for and implementing reforms in how our jail system operates. He has been and will continue to be a key partner of our Criminal Justice Working Group. This advisory committee, established by Executive Order MJL 10-06, was tasked with making research-based recommendations that adhered to the values of public safety and justice on the future jail size of the Orleans Parish Prison complex.

Today, I submit to the City Council, the Working Group's resolution with my full support. This group was tasked with and met the following responsibilities:

- Making a determination for the appropriate jail size for New Orleans based on a variety of data and an understanding of how difference policies and practices, if implemented, could influence the number of inmates to be housed in Orleans Parish Prison and the length of their incarceration.
- Reviewing a report completed by Dr. James Austin of JFA Institute, under the guidance of the National Institute of Justice, that provided baseline projections and projections based on modeling of specific simulated policy changes.
- Reviewing Sheriff Gusman's current plans for the redevelopment of the Orleans Parish Prison complex.
- Reviewing information about national best practices for criminal justice and recommendations that other organizations have submitted to the Working Group.

The Criminal Justice Working Group has also met on five different occasions in addition to holding three public hearings to take testimony from the people of New Orleans. On November 22nd, the deadline established by the Executive Order, the resolution that is being submitted was passed.

This resolution calls for the immediate approval for the construction of a 1,438 bed facility at the Templeman I & II site conditional upon its potential to be the sole facility needed by the Parish and capable of accommodating any type of prisoner under any jurisdiction. Furthermore, upon opening the new facility, all other current Orleans Parish Prison facilities shall be decommissioned unless other action is taken by the Mayor and/or City Council. Public safety will be always at the forefront of decisions made on these matters now and in the future. We must have a jail that meets our needs-- one that keeps our city safe, protects civil liberties, and operates in the best interest of Orleans Parish taxpayers.

I have asked the Criminal Justice Working Group to continue meeting for the next three months in order to further discuss crucial issues that include the provision of acute mental health and substance abuse beds, understanding and making recommendations to address the racial disparities in length of stay of pretrial prisoners, housing of state prisoners for reentry or work release programs, and the future use of city-owned property which previously housed Templeman III and IV. These issues, among others, must be resolved if we are truly going to reform our criminal justice system and take the necessary steps to do what is in the best interest of our community.

This public policy discussion has been unprecedented in both substance and process. I look forward to continue working through this and other criminal justice matters.

Sincerely,

Mitchell J. Landrieu
Mayor