



106 North Bronough Street, Tallahassee, FL 32301 floridatxwatch.org o: 850.222.5052 f: 850.222.7476

Senator George S. LeMieux
Chairman of the Board of Trustees

Dominic M. Calabro
President & Chief Executive Officer

January 5, 2022

The Honorable Wilton Simpson, President
The Florida Senate
404 South Monroe Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-1100

Dear President Simpson:

Thank you for your efforts to improve the operation and efficiency of Florida's prison system. The recent decisions to close three North Florida prisons underscores the need for corrections system reform. With more than 80,000 inmates incarcerated, Florida's corrections system is the third-largest in the nation. Continuing to operate these prisons, given the critical shortage of security staff, will pose greater safety risks to both the security staff and to the inmates, and to the public.

These vacant prison facilities have served as economic drivers in their communities and have helped to stimulate economic growth, reduce unemployment, and reduce crime. Keeping these prisons vacant will result in reduced earnings and consumer spending. Sales tax and other revenues that fund local government services will be reduced and these local economies will contract further.

Florida TaxWatch supports efforts to systematically reduce Florida's prison population and to "repurpose" those underutilized correctional facilities that are no longer necessary. In a September 2014 report entitled "*Florida's Aging Prisoner Problem*," TaxWatch reported on the increasing medical and housing costs of a growing elderly prison inmate population, many of which were originally incarcerated for a non-violent primary offense and would pose little if any risk to the public if they were released from prison. TaxWatch recommended the Florida Commission on Offender Review amend its release eligibility standards to authorize the supervised release of certain non-violent elderly inmates.

In a November 2013 report entitled *Modern Management & Sensible Savings*, TaxWatch identified the closing of 17 prison facilities as an opportunity to repurpose or sell those underutilized assets. One closed correctional facility in Gainesville, for example, was being repurposed to provide shelter and services to the homeless and area youth. Those vacant facilities that cannot be repurposed can be sold to private companies to be used as hospitals, hotels, or other beneficial uses. TaxWatch recommended the Legislature maximize the efficient management of state assets and move toward a shared facility management model of state-owned real estate.

TaxWatch supports the good work of the constitutionally-mandated Government Efficiency Task Force (GETF) which, in its June 2016 *Final Report*, cited many of the same problems and recommended the establishment of an inter-branch, bipartisan task force of stakeholders from both inside and outside of state government to conduct an operational review of the Department of Corrections and submit its findings and recommendations to the Governor and Legislature.

The Honorable Wilton Simpson
January 5, 2022
Page 2 of 2

Florida TaxWatch will continue its efforts to promote sound and effective policies to improve the efficient operation of Florida's corrections system and commends the Legislature and Secretary Dixon for their efforts in this regard. I am available to discuss this at your convenience.

Sincerely,



Dominic M. Calabro
President and Chief Executive Officer

cc: Executive Committee