GOODMAN INTRODUCES BILL TO ESTABLISH SAFETY STANDARDS FOR THE INMATE WORK PROGRAM AT THE GOVERNOR’S RESIDENCE

COLUMBUS— State Senator David Goodman (R- New Albany) today introduced Senate Bill 260, legislation that would establish safety standards to better govern the inmate work program at the Governor’s residence in Bexley. An April 29, 2010 report by the Inspector General revealed significant gaps in the oversight of the program.

Senator Goodman, who represents the families of Bexley in the Senate and who serves as Acting Chairman of the Correctional Institution Inspection Committee, wants to ensure that if the program continues, security will be paramount.

“I had been encouraging the Governor to suspend the program and work with us to develop adequate safety standards. He dismissed my concerns and rebuffed my earnest offer to work with him.” Goodman said. “This bill will ensure security protocols are clear in the law to protect the first family and their neighbors, and to keep the inmates from bringing contraband and other dangerous implements back into our prison system.”

According to the Inspector General’s report, under Governor Strickland’s watch, the program has “significantly veered off course.” It found that there has been a failure to integrate prison security requirements while inmates are at the residence, which has allowed inmates to receive curbside deliveries of contraband in broad daylight. Inmates have been found to have had access to knives, axes and chainsaws without supervision, and items such as razor blades and utility knives have been intercepted after resident “honor” inmates attempted to smuggle them into prison. The report notes that supervision has been “so cavalier” that oversight has “devolved to two housekeepers at the residence.” In all, 24 security and contraband incidents were reported at the Governor’s residence from March 2007 to March 2010.

Goodman’s bill would, without exception, prohibit inmates who have been convicted of violent offenses, sexual offenses or multiple felonies from participating in the program and requires that the criminal histories of all eligible inmates be thoroughly reviewed prior to their assignment.

SB 260 would also establish clear boundaries at and around the Governor’s residence beyond which no inmate may go. It would ensure that all prisoners who work at the Governor’s residence are directly supervised by corrections professionals or law enforcement at all times and that those law enforcement officials have access to all parts of the residence in which the inmates are permitted to go.
Regarding the use of potentially dangerous tools, the bill would require maintenance of a log where inmates would sign out tools needed for specific jobs and where it would be noted when those tools are returned.

Passage of SB 260 would require that all of these provisions be part of rules that must be adopted by the Director of Rehabilitation and Correction in consultation with the Department of Public Safety and the Department of Administrative Services.

“I have a vital interest in the safety of my constituents and am duty bound to act in their interest when their security is compromised by acts and omissions that have been brought to my attention,” Goodman said. “These are not radical or politically-motivated suggestions. It is just good common sense. I am concerned that everyone seems to recognize the need for these reasonable safety measures, except for the Governor.”

Senate President Bill Harris (R-Ashland) has deemed Senator Goodman’s bill a priority bill for the Senate.

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*Senator Goodman represents the 3rd Ohio Senate District, which encompasses portions of Franklin County. For more information about Senator Goodman, please visit www.ohiosenate.gov/david-goodman.*

What Others Are Saying About Oversight of the Inmate Work Program

*Columbus Dispatch*

“One thing that seems beyond dispute is that the inmate-work program at the residence needs an overhaul... (Inspector General) Charles’ report paints a picture of a program that was incomprehensibly lax.” (Editorial, May 13, 2010)

*Cleveland Plain Dealer*

“...the investigation’s indisputably stark finding is that Pickaway prisoners assigned to the mansion have been virtually unsupervised – and that none of the three Cabinet departments that share responsibility for the mansion really is in charge of them. That’s grossly irresponsible and, as to the governor’s neighborhood, callously indifferent.” (Editorial, May 10, 2010)

*Dayton Daily News*

“If only for the sake of his neighbors – who are entitled to know that the inmates are under somebody’s watchful eye – Governor Strickland can’t be so dismissive of the investigation or the criticism of his appointees... He also needs to take responsibility for his own role in creating a climate that allowed prisoners to stash tobacco in his home and to think they could get by with picking up contraband on the street in broad daylight.” (Editorial, May 4, 2010)