

Letters: Incarceration of a parent starts the negative cycle anew

July 18, 2011

MENSAH DEAN addressed an important issue - the extraordinarily high recidivism rate in Pennsylvania - in his July 5 article, "*Half of Pa.'s inmates are rejailed within 5 years.*"

While the article focused on barriers that drive inmates back to incarceration, including a lack of job training, the rarely told story is the effect that recidivism has on children of the incarcerated.

Throughout my legal career, I've seen firsthand the trauma that accompanies the incarceration of a parent. Regardless of mistakes a mother or father has made in the eyes of the law, the impact can be devastating to a child. Children experience separation anxiety, depression, guilt and confusion. This can lead to behavioral issues and, in some cases, self-medication. If half of Pennsylvania's inmates return to prison within five years, the impact is compounded.

I'm working to improve coordination of social-work services for the children of incarcerated parents. In addition to examining policies and practices for cases involving these children, we will create a discharge guide for parents when they leave incarceration.

Our goal is to reunite families in a way that benefits both the parent and child. Hopefully this work will also decrease the number of children that become incarcerated like one, or both, parents.

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