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Green Party Urges: Build Schools -- Not Prisons
Criticizes Massive Spending on Prison Construction While Capital
Spending on Schools Lags
Applauds Governor for Proposing Prison Alternatives

Montgomery County: The Montgomery County Greens called on the state to cut massive expenditures for prison building and transfer spending to capital improvements in schools and affordable, low-income housing.

"Cutting Correctly in Maryland," a report released by the Justice Policy Institute on February 21, 2003 found that capital spending on Maryland prisons would be increasing by \$92 million while 30 of 54 state agencies are facing budget cuts. The report noted that in the last two decades the states prison population has tripled - from 7,731 in 1980 to 23,752 at the end of 2001. The report found that 24% of the inmates in Maryland's prisons are drug offenders and that nonviolent offenders are languishing behind bars as the number of prisoners paroled each year has fallen by 29%. Racial unfairness in the Maryland justice system was highlighted as 81% of all drug offenders are African American even though they are only 28% of Maryland's population.

The Green Party applauded comments made by Governor Ehrlich in his State of the State Address, where he noted: "we must work together to get nonviolent drug offenders out of jail and into treatment programs, where they belong."

"The budget should reflect the views of the governor - we have too many non-violent, drug offenders behind bars. At a time of state budget crisis the capital expenditure slated for prisons should be directed toward capital expenditures for schools and affordable housing - both areas are in desperate need of expansion," charged Linda Schade, Co-Chair of the Montgomery Greens.

Schade noted that the prison spending was for expanding a women's facility and a medium security facility and noted, "These will house the type of non-violent offenders that are ideal for diversion from the criminal justice system." Further she noted: "investing in prison construction forces us to fund prison operations in the future. We need to stop escalation of prison expenditures by stopping prison construction now. Across the country from Louisiana to Michigan, Washington to North Carolina, states are developing more sensible, less expensive drug policies. It is time for Maryland to do the same."

The Justice Policy Institute report is available at: www.justicepolicy.org