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For Immediate Release

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Senator Folmer Right on Civil Forfeiture Reform

PHILADELPHIA —The Pennsylvania Prison Society supports legislation being introduced by State Senator Mike Folmer (R-Lebanon) that will create more sensible and less devastating laws regarding civil asset forfeiture in Pennsylvania. Removing property from families – even when the owners have not been convicted of a crime – only hurts these families and their communities.

Under the current law, prosecutors may seize property (including cash, vehicles, and even homes) that might be connected to a crime, whether or not the owner has been convicted of a crime directly associated to the seized property.

Civil forfeiture in Philadelphia has made national headlines for its aggressiveness. In a sample of more than 100 cases from 2011 and 2012 reviewed by *City Paper*, the median amount seized was only \$178. In many cases, the amount was less than \$100. Several homes have been seized due to people other than the property owners committing a crime on the property. In one example, a couple's teenaged son sold \$40 worth of drugs on the property, but they lost their house.

According to the Pennsylvania Attorney General's office, about \$7 million of seized property went to local law enforcement in Philadelphia over three years but no money was spent on community-based drug and crime-fighting programs.

The law's intent was to target criminals by going after the proceeds of their crimes, and to use those funds for the benefit of the public. The implementation, however, has little oversight. We believe the law sets up a conflict of interest for law enforcement, while doing nothing to prevent crime through neighborhood programs that work. Instead, homeowners had their tight resources diverted unnecessarily—even when they were not the culprit. Making them homeless will not solve the dilemmas of public safety and in fact, will only exacerbate problems in our neighborhoods.

The Pennsylvania Prison Society, originally known as the Philadelphia Society for Alleviating the Miseries of Public Prisons, was founded in 1787 by well-respected Philadelphians such as Benjamin Franklin and Dr. Benjamin Rush. The mission of the Prison Society is to promote a humane, just, and constructive correctional system and a rational approach to criminal justice.