Legislation Summary:

An Act implementing the joint recommendations of the Massachusetts criminal justice review

Initial bill number: H74 (Bill numbers will change as legislation proceeds.)

Sponsors: Gov. Charles Baker

This bill allows some offenders sentenced to mandatory minimum sentences to be able to get work release and parole without reducing the maximum term of the sentence. This bill increases incentives to participate in rehabilitative programming, expands programs at Community Corrections Centers and their availability to some pre-trial individuals, allows for time off of parole or probation by earning compliance credits, enables non-discretionary parole, and calls for data collection to ensure program effectiveness. It also comes with funding of $3.5 million for the first year in the budget.

Why this is good: Currently, those serving mandatory minimum sentences cannot access off-site programming known to help re-entry into society so this is a meaningful improvement. Expanding program access to those held pre-trial should enable many pre-trial individuals to remain out of jail while awaiting trial. Earning time off is a good incentive for individuals to take more rehabilitative programs that should reduce our two-thirds recidivism rate. More individuals out on parole, and expanding programs, mean more people getting support to navigate their mental health, substance abuse, behavioral issues and youth transition period to become productive members of society. Our poorer and minority communities are bearing the brunt of mass incarceration and this bill should have the greatest impact on those communities.

Bottom line: This bill will reduce our high two-thirds recidivism rate, hold fewer people awaiting trial, increase access to programs so people are better able to re-enter society, and treat individuals as whole people and not just as perpetrators. In the long run this should save the Commonwealth money and help some individuals and families be more self-sufficient.