

Testimony of Leo Dunn, Esquire – Chairman, Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole
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House of Representatives Judiciary Committee

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Chairmen Marsico and Petrarca, and members of the committee, I would like to thank you for providing me with the opportunity to appear before this committee today and speak on behalf of the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP).

I would like to first praise the excellent work that is done every day by our parole agents, supervisors, and all of our staff. They dedicate their lives to keeping Pennsylvanians safe, and the work that they do is vital to our commonwealth.

Unification with Department of Corrections

We are here today to reiterate our strong support for the merger of the Board of Probation and Parole and the Department of Corrections and its legislative vehicles SB 522 and SB 523. A majority of the board and staff leadership are committed to the creation of one department to improve public safety and streamline government, reducing recidivism by five percent and saving an estimated \$124 million over five years.

Operating independently within the new department, The Pennsylvania Parole Board will continue to ensure public safety through the careful selection of individuals to be paroled and revoked. The new department will maintain the state system for the custody, rehabilitation of criminally convicted individuals, and the eventual supervision of reentrants on parole, helping individuals to continue to reintegrate within society, providing continuity of care and improving outcomes and public safety.

The unification will allow the board to function more efficiently by focusing the board's attention on decision making, improving decision processing, expanding the number of inmates interviewed, and increasing the time decision makers have to spend on individual cases. It is of course key to maintain the board's independent decision-making status, and SB 522 does that. With regard to parole decision making, the proposed plan retains the board's role as an independent discretionary parole board. The board has a recognized track record on continuous improvement utilizing best practices with regard to its parole guidelines, actuarial measures and professional development. This has maintained quality public safety in parole reentry decisions. Maintaining the board as being responsible only to the governor and funding support separates them from influence by the department regarding prison population. The board will maintain its independence in its decision making under the proposed consolidation.

To improve outcomes, the functions of parole supervision and the DOC's Bureau of Community Corrections (BCC) need to be combined under this new agency in order for Pennsylvania to be able to make significant strides in reducing recidivism. BCC is responsible for state level parolees who are not inmates at a state correctional facility. Currently, parole agents must get approval from BCC regarding the housing and treatment needs of parolees. In addition, the proposed integration of field supervision with the community corrections will allow agents access to expanded treatment resources while eliminating interagency delays.

Additionally, some functions of PBPP and DOC have already been consolidated, and the cost savings and efficiencies can be easily demonstrated. Example: consolidation of statistical offices with DOC. This allowed for six positions to be eliminated total of four (4) from the board, resulting in a savings to the board of \$412,330.

The unification will ensure that parolees don't fail due to differences of opinion between the two systems. These two functions when combined in other states are what allowed for increased reductions in recidivism.

Through the elimination of administrative and program redundancies, the proposed unification will be able to realize substantial cost savings. The intent is to plough the program savings into

expanding the number of parole agents. This will also enable us to increase the number of specialized agent caseloads; caseloads which focus on sexual offenders, mental health, high risk drug users, high risk drug dealers and violent offenders. Our internal research shows sex offender and mental health caseloads reduce the recidivism rate among these cases by 10-12% compared to sex offenders and mental health cases supervised by a general caseload agent. By increasing these specialty caseloads, we will also be able to reduce the general agent caseloads.

Progress at the Board of Probation and Parole

We have worked to create additional efficiencies within our agency, and have largely succeeded in speeding up the timeline for release of inmates who have met certain guidelines, completed programming, or have received a positive DOC recommendation. PBPP has also increased the percentage of scheduled interviews held from 63% to 70%. Working in concert with DOC we have streamlined the parole release process in order to reduce the time between the approval of parole and the release of the parolee.

Despite the approximate 6,000 increase in the number of parolees, the number of technical parole violators (TPV) has decreased both as a raw number, and as a percentage of the overall state parole population. In 2012 there were 3,155 TPV (1.01% of the state sentenced population). In 2015 there were only 3,113 TPV (0.83% of the state sentenced population). Almost 5,000 TPVs have been diverted from prison and placed into parole violator centers during this period for average stays of less than 100 days.

Since taking over as chairman in March 2016, we have hired 163 new parole agents and the board's overall vacancy rate dropped from 7.19% in March 2016 to 2.36% in April 2017, and the parole agent vacancy rate dropped from 7.14% in March 2016 to 1.31% in April 2017. We have also increased net parole agent complement by 52 positions through reclassifications and improved management of existing authorized complement. Half of this agent complement increase has come as a result of reclassifying 26 positions from the FY2016-17 budget from non-field supervisory positions to field parole agent positions. This has yielded a board cost avoidance to complement increase, estimated \$2.9M.

Additionally, PBPP has worked to save costs on routine items such as travel and paper. We have increased our video conferencing capability for board members to conduct interviews resulted in a 49% reduction in travel costs associated with in person interviews from 2014 to 2016, and we have made tremendous progress in our conversion from paper to electronic files. Shipping and supply costs were reduced through eliminating the creation of paper case files. The savings in shipping paper back and forth across the state alone has been over \$95,000. We have also worked to increase the mobility of our field agents, and one small part of this initiative has been the replacement of older laptops that were ending their lifespan with a lighter more mobile device (iPads). This generated a cost savings of \$56,700.

Looking to the future, we are anticipating that we will be able to reclassify an additional 50 non-field supervisory positions as agents during fiscal year 2017-18. This will result in an expected cost avoidance to complement increase of \$5.5M. We are also in the process of drafting a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the board and Dauphin County prison to house technical parole violators (TPVs) overnight (or no more than 72 hours). This agreement will save field parole agent overtime costs associated with after hour transports for TPVs, a savings for the Harrisburg district alone of approximately \$50,000.

Our investments in mobility will produce increased savings as well; currently the board expects to reduce its real estate footprint through the consolidation of single unit offices. Such a reduction of existing office square footage would yield a board estimated cost savings of \$184,000 in the first year, with additional savings in future years. Lastly, we are currently conducting a cost analysis to determine the cost savings associated with hearing examiners conducting nonviolent interviews through video conference vs. in person interviews. While we cannot yet determine an accurate cost savings estimate, we believe at least 50% of travel time and travel cost can be saved through the implementation of videoconferencing.

Chairmen Marsico and Petrarca and members of the committee, I would like to again thank you for your time today, and for the opportunity to speak before you today. I am available to answer any questions you may have.