

Rep. Ronald Marsico
Opening remarks
Public Hearing on Proposed Merger of DOC/PBPP
May 25, 2017

Good morning, and welcome to this public hearing of the House Judiciary Committee.

We are here today to discuss the administration's proposal to merge the Department of Corrections and the Board of Probation and Parole into a new state agency to be called the "Department of Criminal Justice."

Last legislative session, this committee held a hearing regarding two Senate bills to enact this proposed merger. The Senate has again taken up consideration of two bills to enact the proposed merger, which are Senate Bills 522 and 523. Those bills are still under consideration by the Senate at this time.

As we learned at that hearing last session, the merger of two independent criminal justice agencies would be a major change to the correctional system in Pennsylvania.

This committee and the General Assembly have been actively reforming the state correctional system to enhance public safety in recent years.

For example, five years ago, we passed the Justice Reinvestment Initiative, which was another historic correctional system reform. The goal of JRI was to reduce recidivism, reduce crime, and therefore over time reduce correctional costs. Importantly, the JRI reforms were enacted only after years of study that assured the members that public safety would be enhanced by the reforms.

A renewed effort is currently underway to further reform the correctional system in a second-stage of the Justice Reinvestment Initiative.

Staff and members, the Department of Corrections, the Board of Probation and Parole, and others have all been working on legislation to further reduce recidivism among those who re-enter our society -- while deterring crime, and keeping in prison those who are the most dangerous offenders.

Today, we are joined by a number of testifiers, all with deep and varied experience with the Commonwealth's criminal justice system. Welcome to all of you who are here today. We are looking forward to hearing from all of you as you explain your viewpoints on the proposed merger and how it will affect public safety, and entertain questions from committee members.

Before we get started, I'd like to ask everyone here to please silence their cell phones. I would also like to ask the members of the committee to introduce themselves.

[Member introductions]

[Ask Chairman Petrarca if he has any opening remarks.]