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Testimony on House Bill 1400
Pennsylvania House Environmental Resources
And Energy Committee
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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Committee:

Today, I am pleased to add my support to a growing group of distinguished individuals and organizations for Governor Ridge's proposal to improve the operations of the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Resources by creating two departments, a Department of Environmental Protection and a Department of Conservation and Natural Resources.

The Governor and Secretary Seif have advanced ambitious and laudable plans to change the way DER conducts its business. Every administrative reform that has been suggested by the Ridge Administration should not be viewed as a dismantling of the Department, as some may have you believe. Instead, their plans focus on making the Department perform better by being more responsive, and I believe provides the opportunity for DER to become more user friendly. From adopting new procedures for streamlining rulemaking and expediting permit reviews to the creation of an Office of Pollution Prevention and Compliance Assistance and a 21st Century Environment Commission, these proposals are intended to improve our ability to achieve one common goal - a clean environment.

A cornerstone of these reforms is the proposal to split the current Department of Environmental Resources into two Departments. Although this is not a new idea, (it's been Maurice Goddard's dream for as long as I can remember), it is one for which the time has come to make it a reality.

As a former Secretary of the Department of Environmental Resources, I can state, without equivocation, that this proposal, as embodied in House Bill 1400, is not only a sound idea, but represents the type of change in government bureauceracy that is needed if we are to properly prepare to meet the challenges of the next 4 years and into the next millennium.

Having been one of only six Cabinet Secretaries who have had the honor to serve this Commonwealth as Secretary of DER, I can also speak from first hand experience about the complexities and requisite demands that come with the job. Although I have never shied away from work, while Secretary of DER for 4 years, it seemed that I was on a round-the-clock schedule, including weekends. There was a simple reason for that. Because the

department's mission is so broad in purpose and large in scope, it literally consumes a full day, nearly everyday, to properly manage and oversee the numerous programs under its jurisdiction. It can be, and was many times, an exhausting task. I didn't mind the sometimes 14 hour days - what bothered me was what I wasn't getting accomplished when forced to leave the office.

When I retired from the Department at the end of 1986, the Thornburgh Administration had put in place and prepared to pass off to the Casey Administration, numerous new initiatives and programs to address pressing environmental issues. These included a toxic waste cleanup program, new solid and hazardous waste programs, a much expanded Safe Drinking Water program, a Chesapeake Bay initiative, the enactment of the Low Level Radioactive Waste Act, the Water Facilities Loan Board, municipal enforcement initiatives aimed at cleaning our rivers and waterways, a Black Fly Preventative Spraying Program and new rules for seasonal migrant farm labor camps. Further, we had to deal with an increasing number of federal mandates that needed to be absorbed into and carried out at the state level. These were programs that simply weren't on my plan of action when I became Secretary in the early 80's - and in addition to these, I am sure Art Davis has left more new time-consuming programs for Secretary Seif.

I would be remiss if I didn't also remind this committee that a DER Secretary's greatest fear was having an unexpected crisis land in his lap, which would then literally consume him and key personnel for days, if not weeks and months. In my case, the burning underground coal mines of Centralia and the discovery of radon along the Reading prong have left me with vivid memories of how any one day at the head of DER could be your worst.

While these programs and crisis issues mounted, more and more of my time was necessarily spent on these matters and their complexities. And, despite our best efforts, less time was devoted to matters dealing with the Commonwealth's unique needs for our state parks and forests and our vast natural resources. Let me make this, however, perfectly clear - any reduction in our attentiveness was not from a lack of trying or commitment, it was simply an impossibility. Fortunately, during my tenure, and as I am sure the case is today, the programs that govern our park and forest systems were in the capable hands of experienced and dedicated professionals such as Deputy Secretary Pat Solano, whom I relied on day to day.

Now, after two decades of asking the parks/forests to "run themselves", it is time to give our state parks and forests what they deserve - a singular focus to ensure the proper stewardship and management of Pennsylvania's precious natural resources.

You have heard these facts and figures before, but they are worth restating. Pennsylvania's State Park system is the third largest in the country and a major part of our tourism and recreation industry. Our Forest products industry is Pennsylvania's fourth largest, employing over 100,000 people and contributing more than \$4.5 billion to our economy.

Thirty-five states have already separated the environmental protection functions from resource management activities, and for those who have not, it is admitted that only 10-20 percent of the top management staff's time was spent on parks and forestry issues. The management and protection of our natural resource system can no longer afford a "stepchild" status. The creation of a new Department of Conservation and Natural Resources will ensure not only a proper and deserving status, but will allow Jim Seif, as the first Secretary of the Department of Environmental Protection, to concentrate and devote one hundred percent of his time addressing an ever growing number of environmental issues and making the Department work better. In this case, the sum of the parts will be greater than the whole.

We should not miss this opportunity to prepare ourselves and State Government for the future. The creation of two cabinet level Departments from the current DER is needed now, more than, ever and I applaud both Governor Ridge and Secretary Seif for taking this issue head-on and leading us into the 21st century.