

Proposed Testimony
Ray C. Geringer, Sheriff of Montour County
House Labor Committee Informational Hearing
House Bill # 2585, Monday August 23, 2010

Good Afternoon, I am Ray C. Geringer, Sheriff of Montour County. On behalf of all Sheriffs, Deputy Sheriffs and the citizens of Montour County, Thank You Mr. Chairman and members of this Labor Committee for conducting this informational hearing on this vital issue of the power and duties of the Office of Sheriff in Pennsylvania.

Let me begin by telling this committee that I have been with the Montour County Sheriffs Office since February 5, 1978. In January 2004, I was sworn in as the elected Sheriff of Montour County and on January 4th 2008, I was sworn into my 2nd term of Office as Sheriff.

Prior to being elected Sheriff, while serving as a Deputy Sheriff, Chief Deputy Sheriff and Chief County Detective, I attended and successfully completed the prescribed courses of study with the Pennsylvania Deputy Sheriffs Education & Training Commission, the Pennsylvania Municipal Police Officers Education & Training Commission and also attended and successfully completed the Pennsylvania Electronic Surveillance and Wiretapping Control Act. In addition to these statutory courses of study, I have also attended and completed well over 100 courses of study related to criminal law, criminal investigations and specialized narcotics enforcement and I continue to receive yearly recertification as required under Pennsylvania law.

The Montour County Sheriffs Office, like all other Pennsylvania Sheriffs Offices continue to provide its Deputy Sheriffs with training and recertification every two years for Act 2 training, those Deputies that have attended the Act 120 training receive recertification yearly by purchasing tickets from Municipal Police Officers Education and Training Commission, this training is the same type training as municipal police are receiving. This training must be completed in accordance to Pennsylvania Law.

In Montour County the Sheriffs Office and all municipal police work together diligently each day working together as a team to ensure that the citizens of Montour County receive the best law enforcement that they deserve and presently pay for.

Montour County is an 8th class county, with 11 government bodies within the county, which has approximately 18,236 citizens and covers approximately 131 square miles. The county only has two municipal police departments with a total of 13 full-time officers, all other municipal bodies depend on the Pennsylvania State Police for law enforcement protection.

The Pennsylvania State Police that are assigned to cover Montour County are out of the Milton Station, which is located in Northumberland County. The State Police from Milton also cover part of Northumberland County and all of Union County. This station has a large coverage area.

For many years in Montour County, the Office of Sheriff and all law enforcement agencies have worked together, side-by-side on law enforcement matters, and for years, it has proven positive for Montour County. For the record, there is no TURF WAR among law enforcement in Montour County. These team efforts have worked well, and have made Montour County a safer place to live, work and raise a family.

Since the Pennsylvania Supreme Court Decisions on KOPKO v MILLER and COMMONWEALTH v DOBBINS, clearly the time is now for the general assembly to pass legislation that clearly authorizes Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs to enforce the laws of this great Commonwealth.

The people of Pennsylvania expect law enforcement to work aggressively to rid our communities of crime, illegal drugs and the people who sell them. Pennsylvania Sheriffs have been an integral part of this mission for many years.

As Sheriff of Montour County, I believe and share the same common mission as all other Sheriffs of Pennsylvania, that we must protect and serve the citizens of our counties, and this should be the most important service that government agencies can provide.

The need for this legislation (H.B. #2585) is critical. Crime, drugs and gangs are escalating in small rural counties.

House Bill #2585 is not a republican or a democratic issue, HB #2585 is a PUBLIC SAFETY ISSUE, the general assembly needs to pass the bill and the Governor needs to sign the same into law.

As Sheriff of Montour County and a father of two wonderful children, I respectfully request the general assembly to work in a bi partisan effort for the passage of HB #2585.

It is imperative for all Pennsylvanians, but for those smaller rural counties with limited law enforcement this bill is critical.

Should House Bill #2585 not pass into law, the only losers will be the good citizens of this great Commonwealth, and the true winners will be the drug dealers and the criminals that violate our laws each day.

As Sheriff of Montour County, I am troubled by the state associations and groups that are working to kill this legislation that would restore the Sheriff's authority. These associations have been providing misinformation to the general public, making claims that H.B. #2585 is about EXPANSION of power and authority, inferring that a steep rise in county budgets will be looming if this bill becomes law. Nothing could be further from the truth.

What this legislation does do however, is give the Office of Sheriff the power and authority to protect their courthouses and county property, and the legislation clearly states that Sheriffs shall not abolish or supplant an existing police department or reduce or displace the employment of any police officer, so I don't see the expansion, as claimed by the state associations attempting to kill this bill.

The arguments against this legislation are ludicrous, I challenge anyone of these associations to prove me wrong, in Montour County and in all other counties of this great Commonwealth, Sheriffs budget's and staffing are in total control by the Board of County Commissioners, and in addition, each Sheriff must answer to the TAX PAYERS of his or her County every four years, simply put, if the Sheriff is not doing his job, then he or she is not going to be reelected, unlike appointed officials.

The citizens of Pennsylvania deserve the best in law enforcement; it would be absolutely unacceptable to the citizens of rural counties to not enable Sheriffs to participate in the fight against crime. Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs, over 2,000, already trained, already paid, stand ready to assist their law enforcement brothers and sisters when called upon. House Bill #2585 is not about taking jobs away from municipal police, its not about more money for Sheriffs budgets, Simply put, its about **PUBLIC SAFETY.**

I thank you in advance for your positive consideration on H.B. #2585, and urge you to vote this bill out of committee. I would entertain any questions that you may have.