

PROPOSED TESTIMONY

Charles E. Bowers, Chief of Police, Erie Police Department (Retired)

House Labor Committee Hearing

House Bill #2585

Wednesday, September 9, 2010

Good Morning. My name is Chuck Bowers. Most of my testimony will be concerning my personal knowledge about the working relationship between the Erie County Sheriff's Office and other law enforcement agencies within Erie County.

I was an Officer with the Erie Police Department for over 36 years. During my time with the Department I served as a Patrolman, Motorcycle Officer, Detective SGT, Patrol LT, Narcotics Unit Commander, Training Unit Commander, SWAT Team Commander and Chief of Police. After I retired I took a position as the Training Coordinator for the Erie County Sheriff's Office.

In 1998 I was the Swat Team Commander. At that time we had 24 officers on the Team. Over the previous few years it became evident that certain situations would require an even larger number of specially trained officers. Some of these situations could be:

- School or workplace active shooter
- Extended barricade situations
- Simultaneous service of search and arrest warrants
- Searching for armed fugitives in large outdoor areas
- Dignitary protection details

With the approval of Chief DeDionisio, I contacted Sheriff Merski and he agreed to help with the recruitment of officers throughout Erie County to attend the Emergency Response Team training course. 11 officers were selected and put through the 48 hour training course. There are currently 10 County officers attached to the City Team, 8 of them are Erie County Sheriff's Deputies. Over the past 12 years they have been activated numerous times to assist other agencies, such as:

- Erie PD
- Millcreek PD
- North East PD
- Edinboro PD
- Wesleyville PD
- Corry PD
- Erie County Prison
- Erie County Probation
- PA State Police Fugitive Unit
- PA State Parole
- U.S. Marshal Service
- PA Attorney General's Office
- FBI
- U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency
- United States Secret Service

The Sheriff has also had a Deputy assigned as a member the Erie Metro Bomb Squad for the last 10 years. This unit is trained and funded by the Federal Government and is responsible for all explosive related incidents in a 14 County area. Deputy Copley is still assigned to the squad and was the Law Enforcement Chairman for the Group II NW PA Terrorism Task Force for 9 years. He also was a member of Governor Schweiker's Homeland Security Committee. Over the years, other deputies have had full- time assignments to the State Police/FBI Fugitive Squad and many have had part- time assignments to the PA Attorney General and Erie County District Attorney Drug Task Forces.

In addition to these special units, all the Deputy Sheriffs have worked numerous times with Erie Police Officers. In my 40 years of working with Law Enforcement I have never heard one complaint from an Erie Police Officer about the conduct or professionalism of an Erie County Deputy Sheriff.

When I was Chief of Police in 2002 the city received funding for the State Weed and Seed program. An important part of this program were the foot patrols in designated high crime areas. 2-3 nights a week Deputy Sheriffs and Erie PD officer worked side by side on these foot patrols. As we had to lay off 40 officers in 2005, the volunteers from the Sheriff's Office became even more important to the program because the EPD officers were getting "burned out" because of the amount of time they had to put in to fill their regular shifts. On several occasions the foot patrols were comprised entirely of Deputy Sheriffs.

I know one of the issues being discussed with House Bill 2585 is the training of Deputy Sheriffs. In my experience as the Commander of the Training Unit of the Erie Police Department and now the Training Coordinator for the Sheriffs Department, I have seen new officers come on to both agencies after completing their basic training.

I see no differences in the capabilities of the graduates of the respective training academies. Speaking for the Erie County Sheriff's Office, our ongoing training programs are extensive and comparable to any law enforcement agency in the entire state.

I have listened to the testimony in Harrisburg and have seen the written objections made by certain organizations that oppose this bill. It appears to me that all of the initial concerns have been addressed and I can see no logical reason to withhold the additional protection that could be afforded to the citizens by passing House Bill #2585.

Thank you for your time and attention.