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May 24, 2017

Re: SB 522

Dear Chairman Marsico,

Pennsylvania's law enforcement community is united in opposition to Senate Bill 522, which would consolidate the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) and the Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole (PBPP) into a single state agency.

Senate Bill 522 will weaken Pennsylvania's criminal justice system by putting more criminals on the streets and fewer parole violators behind bars. The results of this proposal is likely to be increased crime in our local communities, higher risk for citizens, and a greater likelihood of injury or death for law enforcement officers sworn to protect our communities.

- * **SB 522 is driven by saving money, not by public safety.** Ninety percent (90%) of Pennsylvania's prison population will someday be released back into our communities. The Board of Probation and Parole's mission is to ensure that those offenders return to society only when they are ready, and then only under conditions intended to maintain community safety. Parole decisions are not and must not be motivated by dollars; they must be motivated solely by public safety. SB 522 will inject cost considerations directly into the parole and probation system.

The fact is that SB 522 was drafted to save dollars, not to keep Pennsylvanians safe. The unabashed goal of the proposed consolidation is to save approximately \$10 million per year, mostly by releasing inmates into our local communities. DOC projects that consolidating departments will increase the parolee population from 41,500 to 44,200 - that's 2,700 more offenders on our streets.

- * **Consolidation is a poor option because DOC and PBPP have different missions.** DOC and PBPP have important but conflicting roles within Pennsylvania's criminal justice system. DOC's mission is the care, custody and control of inmates. DOC decisions are motivated by prison population and its related costs. Cost must be a factor. PBPP's mission, however, is deciding whether, when and how inmates may be returned to society without undue risk to the public. Safety is the primary consideration. Cost is not a factor. Clearly, the missions do not mix.
- * **PBPP works well right now - why fix it?** PBPP exercises authority over its own field agents and conducts its own investigations into parole and

probation matters, absent any undue influence from the executive branch. SB 522 eliminates PBPP control over field investigations and transfers control to DOC, thus removing a critical "check" against abuse. Another problem with this is that PBPP's investigations are more vigorous than DOC reviews and result in better outcomes. The DOC and PBPP contend that recidivism rates are at a historic low. DOC Secretary Wetzel and PBPP Chairman Dunn have proclaimed this fact in many interviews and statements. Why risk breaking a system that already works?

- * **SB 522 concentrates too much power in one department.** Perhaps the greatest risk posed by Senate Bill 522's proposed consolidation is its elimination of "checks and balances" within the corrections and parole processes. For decades, PBPP has operated as an independent "check" against budget-driven pressure to save money by releasing offenders into our communities. This pressure will always exist, regardless of the administration. SB 522 eliminates this vital check against unwise release of inmates by giving DOC total control over its inmate population, from incarceration to parole and parole supervision. That's far too much power concentrated in one entity, and it opens Pennsylvania up to the risk of political considerations influencing parole decision. Checks and balances work.

Based on the above, it is clear that Pennsylvania cannot afford the short-term and long-term risks and related costs posed by SB 522. While the cost savings proposed are laudable, this proposal is a penny wise, pound-foolish. The passage of SB 522 will not result in a safer Pennsylvania but rather a more dangerous place to live and work.

For these reasons, Pennsylvania's law enforcement community opposes SB 522. Thank you for your continued support.

Respectfully,



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Joe Kovel, President
PA State Troopers
Association



Jason Bloom, President
PA State Corrections Officer
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