

2018-2019 BUDGET REQUEST

PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

STATEMENT TO HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS

COMMITTEE

MARCH 7, 2018



Good morning Chairmen Saylor and Markosek, and members of the House Appropriations Committee. I am Colonel Tyree Blocker, Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP). With me today are the Deputy Commissioner of Staff, Lt. Col Stephen Bucar; the Deputy Commissioner of Operations, Lt. Col. Robert Evanchick; the Acting Deputy of Administration and Professional Responsibility, Major Scott Price; and the Director of our Bureau of Communications and Information Services, Major Diane Stackhouse.

I would like to dedicate this testimony to Trooper Michael Stewart, who, on July 14, 2017, became the 98th member of the Pennsylvania State Police to lay down his

life in the line of duty in service for the citizens of the Commonwealth.

We are grateful to Governor Wolf and members of the General Assembly for their steadfast commitment to public safety and fervent support of PSP operations. Furthermore, I would also like to thank the citizens of Pennsylvania for their unwavering support of PSP.

Our PSP is one of the most comprehensive providers of professional police services in the country. We are the tenth largest police department in the nation and the third largest internationally accredited law enforcement agency in the world. Currently, we patrol 82 percent of the land area and 61 percent of the Commonwealth's highways, including all of our interstates. Last year, Troopers made

73,559 criminal arrests and issued 607,845 traffic citations. Additionally, Troopers also made 19,913 arrests for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The PSP provides full-time or part-time police protection to almost 67% of the Commonwealth's 2,560 municipalities. In addition, we also deliver specialized services to municipal police agencies at no cost; these services included drug identification, DNA analysis, and latent fingerprint examination at our seven crime laboratories. The demand for PSP services continues to grow. For example, we recently sent a number of enlisted members and various other resources to assist Philadelphia in its post-Super Bowl victory celebrations.

We would like to thank Governor Wolf for his commitment to ensuring that public safety is upheld throughout the Commonwealth, as demonstrated in his proposal to fund 4 cadet classes which will send

approximately 380 Cadets through our training academy. The funding of regularly occurring Cadet classes is of paramount importance to the PSP and we would like to extend our gratitude to the Governor, members of this Committee, and the General Assembly for appreciating the critical nature of this need and supporting our fiscal requirements in the past. As of February 13, 2018, there were almost 500 enlisted position vacancies within the PSP. There is also the possibility the Department may see a significant number of retirements in the future, creating a condition where the influx of recent Academy graduates does not keep up with attrition levels. While it is difficult to predict the number of retirements, it should be noted this scenario produces a level of uncertainty over our ability to maintain adequate staffing levels. We are continuing our efforts to recruit qualified individuals who are reflective of

Pennsylvania's diverse communities. To fund these necessary cadet classes a \$25 per person fee for municipalities which currently rely on PSP for full-time police coverage is proposed. Fiscal analyses of field expenditures show the cost to provide full-time police service to over 1,200 municipalities to be approximately \$600 million annually, or around \$240 per capita. It should, however, be noted this amount does not include indirect costs such as administrative overhead or special police functions, This fee that only covers around 10% of the overall per capita cost will ensure that PSP can provide service to the entire commonwealth.

The PSP provides a range of other services in addition to patrolling and solving crimes. The safety and efficiency of Troopers and municipal police officers is greatly enhanced by unique elements within the Pennsylvania State Police. These specialty units are staffed by highly trained members of the Department, many of whom provide this service in addition to their primary function as Patrol or Criminal Investigation Unit members. Some of the most visible of these are the Special Emergency Response Team (SERT), the sexual offender registry (Megan's Law), the state crime lab, the Pennsylvania Access to Criminal History (PATCH), and the Pennsylvania Instant Checks System (PICS).

Our elite SERT is increasingly being called upon to assist Troop operations and municipal police departments

across the entire state. In 2017, SERT responded to 310 requests for activation. 60 of these requests were from other law enforcement agencies. Many of those activations were for highly volatile situations involving a barricaded gunman or a high-risk warrant service. The Computer Crime Unit (CCU) conducts and supports the investigation of technological crimes, such as internet fraud, identity theft, child pornography, cyber terrorism, among others. During 2017, the CCU conducted 201 investigations and 3,667 forensic digital evidence examinations. The unit also obtained and executed 127 search warrants/court orders across the Commonwealth. Another highly trained specialty unit increasingly being called into action is our Hazardous Device and Explosives Section (HDES), commonly known as the “bomb squad.” This unit responds to statewide requests for suspicious packages, improvised

explosive devices, and discovered military ordnance. In 2017, HDES provided its services at 259 incidents. Our Clandestine Lab Response Team (CLRT) is the only one of its kind in the Commonwealth and has the unenviable task of collecting evidence and conducting “clean-up” functions for all suspected illicit drug labs. Of the 384 CLRT callouts last year, 202 were at the request of municipal police departments.

Last year, PATCH received and responded to 1,766,087 requests. Of those, 401,456 were for volunteer criminal history checks provided at no cost. Despite the enormous number of PATCH requests, our personnel assigned to the PATCH Unit were up to the challenge and

worked diligently to ensure backlogs and turnaround times remained reasonable.

In 2017, PICS conducted almost 1.1 million firearm background checks which resulted in 15,031 denials. Denials may occur for a number of reasons, including convictions of certain crimes as enumerated in Section 6105 of the Pennsylvania Crimes Code, the existence of a Protection from Abuse Order (PFA), disqualifying Federal criteria (including certain indictments), and prior disqualifying mental health commitments. In 2017, PICS was highlighted by the national news media as a “model gun background check system”. Pennsylvania is the highest contributor of mental health records into the NICS Index, which has over 800,000 submissions. Usage of the PICS website to initiate background checks continues to

grow. Currently, 528 firearms dealers and Sheriffs are utilizing the E-pics website to initiate PICS background checks. Last year, PICS referred over 5,465 cases to PSP Troops and municipal police departments for investigation of potential violations of the Pennsylvania Uniform Firearms Act that came to light during the background check process. In 2017, PICS checks resulted in the apprehension of 143 fugitives from justice.

Opioid abuse continues to be a problem in Pennsylvania. Treatment, Education, and Enforcement are necessary elements in combating this epidemic. PSP has worked diligently and in concert with a variety of other state agencies as well as community groups to attack this issue. The PSP provides drug education to schools and community groups through a variety of presentations. In

addition, we have developed a three-prong strategy against the heroin epidemic consisting of Interdiction, Investigation, and our Naloxone program. Enforcement initiatives are conducted in order to attempt to interdict the flow of heroin into the Commonwealth. In 2017, Troopers confiscated approximately 154 pounds of heroin and 145 pounds of fentanyl with an estimated combined street value of over \$357 million. Investigations into the identification and eventual criminal prosecution of responsible dealers in heroin overdose deaths are aggressively pursued. PSP is also using innovative technology to tackle this epidemic by developing the PA Overdose Information Network (ODIN) database. ODIN is a database developed to collect data on fatal and non-fatal overdoses, Naloxone administrations, and identifiable markings on drug packaging. The goal of the database will be to provide law enforcement with real-

time information to aid in drug and overdose investigations and to give leadership in law enforcement, government officials, community leaders, and policymakers reliable information in order to make informed decisions when combating drug issues that could compromise public safety and health. Finally, all patrol units are outfitted with Naloxone, a drug used to reverse the effects of opioids in overdose incidents. Since implementing our Naloxone program in April of 2015, PSP has saved 137 lives through our members' deployment of the drug.

Our Bureau of Criminal Investigation operates the Commonwealth's federally designated all-hazards fusion center, also known as the Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center (PaCIC). PaCIC disseminates vital information to keep police officers and citizens safe, as well

as aiding in protecting critical infrastructure and key resources. PaCIC has been nationally recognized with awards for excellence in services provided. In 2017, it received nearly 1,680 tips associated with a wide variety of topics including those associated with suspected terrorism, drug dealers, and the location of fugitives. All of these tips were investigated by either members of the PSP or allied agencies. The Center is staffed by 44 analysts and supervisors along with representatives from a host of state and federal law enforcement agencies and all-hazards partners, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security. Last year, PaCIC received 38,624 requests for information from federal, state, and local agencies, and as a result of those requests, our analysts completed over 60,892 products for these agencies, enhancing and furthering their investigations.

The Center remains a national model for information sharing by providing law enforcement agencies archived public information, situational awareness reports, investigative material, and criminal information.

One of the pillars of 21st Century Policing involves the use of technology. Though PSP is frequently a leader in the adoption of cutting edge law enforcement technologies, we continue to seek ways to improve in this area in order to best serve members of the community more effectively and efficiently. Last year, the General Assembly passed and Governor Wolf signed Act 22, which overhauled existing Wiretap statutes and will pave the way for PSP and law enforcement agencies across the Commonwealth to utilize body-worn cameras. PSP is currently pursuing a pilot program which will outfit our members with body-worn

cameras. This technology will assist our agency with criminal investigations and provide for increased transparency. The Governor's budget includes a proposal for monies to assist PSP in this endeavor.

Members of the Appropriations Committee, I am certain you will remain conscious of the demanding process on which you are about to embark. However, I would be remiss if I failed to note how crucial it is that the PSP be adequately funded. Officer safety could be negatively impacted by cuts to programs such as the statewide radio system. Moreover, our budget is driven primarily by personnel costs, and decreases to PSP's budget could result in future Cadet classes being eliminated. Should that occur, the PSP's ability to provide the citizens of this great Commonwealth with the quality of service they deserve and have come to expect would be negatively impacted.

I am honored to serve as Commissioner of one of the finest law enforcement agencies in the nation. The men and women of the Pennsylvania State Police are faithful servants to the citizens of this Commonwealth and perform their duties with utmost integrity, professionalism, and courage. They represent a rare breed of brave individuals who have taken an oath and are willing to lay down their life rather than swerve from the path of duty.

Thank you for allowing me to address your Committee. I will be pleased to answer any questions you may have.