

COMMONWEALTH OF PENNSYLVANIA
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

STATE GOVERNMENT COMMITTEE HEARING

STATE CAPITOL
HARRISBURG, PA

RYAN OFFICE BUILDING
ROOM 205

MONDAY, JUNE 18, 2018
10:01 A.M.

PRESENTATION ON SENATE BILL 748
PUBLIC SAFETY FACILITIES ACT

BEFORE :

HONORABLE DARYL METCALFE, MAJORITY CHAIRMAN
HONORABLE MATT DOWLING
HONORABLE CRIS DUSH
HONORABLE BRETT MILLER
HONORABLE THOMAS SANKEY
HONORABLE JUSTIN WALSH
HONORABLE JUDY WARD
HONORABLE JEFF WHEELAND

HONORABLE DONNA BULLOCK
HONORABLE MARY JO DALEY
HONORABLE PAMELA DeLISSIO
HONORABLE ISABELLA FITZGERALD
HONORABLE STEPHEN McCARTER

1 COMMITTEE STAFF PRESENT:

2 SUSAN BOYLE, MAJORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
3 PAM NEUGARD, MAJORITY ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT
4 MIKE HECKMANN, MAJORITY RESEARCH ANALYST

5 BRIDGET LAFFERTY, MINORITY EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
6 MATT HURLBURT, MINORITY RESEARCH ANALYST
7 SHARON HOUSSOU, MINORITY LEGISLATIVE ASSISTANT

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Pennsylvania House of Representatives
Commonwealth of Pennsylvania

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SUBMITTED WRITTEN TESTIMONY

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P R O C E E D I N G S

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MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: This meeting of the House State Government Committee, actually, hearing of the House State Government Committee, is called to order. And before we get started with the roll call, I'd ask everyone to please rise and, Representative DeLissio, would you lead us in the Pledge?

(Pledge of Allegiance recited.)

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you, Representative DeLissio.

And if I could ask my assistant to call the roll, Pam?

(Roll call taken.)

MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: And we were just joined by Representative Dush. And there's other competing activities here going on this morning, so I'm sure we'll have members coming and going throughout the hearing.

Today's hearing is on the Public Safety Facilities Act, Senate Bill 748. And Representative Wheeland also has a bill in the House, House Bill 1606. And we've invited the senator here today and we also have Representative Wheeland with us as one of our members. So we'll start off with Senator Argall addressing the committee on behalf of his reasoning for the legislation.

1 If you'd like to take the microphone,
2 Senator.

3 SENATOR ARGALL: It's good to be back.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Good to have you
5 back.

6 SENATOR ARGALL: Chairman Metcalfe, members
7 of the committee, I thank you for the opportunity to join
8 you for a few minutes this morning to talk about prison
9 closure reform.

10 When the Department of Corrections announced
11 the possible closings of state correctional institutions in
12 January 2017, Representative Knowles, Representative
13 Goodman, Representative Tobash, and I were quite surprised.
14 Many local residents were shocked to find SCI Frackville on
15 that list. There had been no discussion beforehand, and I
16 suspect the same was true for Retreat, Mercer, Waymart, and
17 possibly Pittsburgh, all linked at that time for possible
18 closings.

19 The department's plan then was to decide on
20 closing a prison within 20 days. We believe that was
21 completely mistaken. We believe that's an inadequate amount
22 of time to solicit input and information from directly
23 affected parties and experts, including the facility's
24 workforce, local governments people in the local community.

25 So upon hearing of that possible closing,

1 many people wanted to voice their concerns. The
2 representatives and I received a petition signed by over
3 5,000 local residents asking to keep the facility opened.
4 We agreed with our constituents that the 384 employees
5 working at SCI Frackville, they deserved better than a
6 20-day notice. And so when we received that troubling news,
7 as chairman of the Senate Majority Policy Committee, I
8 reached out to the Senate Democratic Policy Committee and
9 the Judiciary Committee and we conducted a joint hearing to
10 carefully review various aspects of the proposed closings,
11 including the cost to the taxpayer, public safety,
12 transparency, prison overpopulation, and the impact on the
13 local communities. We believe those are the kind of details
14 that need to be carefully evaluated and deserve more than a
15 20-day review.

16 It was clear to us that the lack of adequate
17 notice and the absence of clear procedures for evaluating
18 proposed facility closures caused considerable panic
19 throughout our local communities. The stress and worry
20 affected workers and their families who wondered whether or
21 not they would be able to continue to earn a paycheck. And
22 so those events at that time encouraged many of us to
23 consider how possibly we could do better in the future.

24 During the budget hearings in March, I asked
25 Secretary Wetzel about the next round of prison closures and

1 he informed us at that time that this could happen again in
2 as little as two years. And so the question remains, what
3 will we do next time? Will we once allow a unilateral
4 short-term notice or can we find a way to do this in a more
5 orderly fashion?

6 Senate Bill 748, the representative's
7 companion bill, is designed to protect our law enforcement
8 networks and the communities they serve by ensuring
9 responsible notice and consideration of any proposed closure
10 of structures that employ individuals who provide law
11 enforcement, security, care, custody, and control of
12 inmates. It was modeled on similar legislation that's now
13 law in New York.

14 The legislation has four main tasks. First
15 and foremost, to establish a clear list of stakeholders as
16 listed in the bill who must be notified at least one year
17 before proposed closure is intended to incur. Secondly,
18 requiring the overseeing state agency to gather information
19 from stakeholders, hold at least one public hearing at least
20 six months prior to any closure, and provide a written
21 report detailing their findings to be shared with the
22 Governor, the majority and minority leaders in the House and
23 Senate. And finally, the last two points, to permit the
24 overseeing state agency to decide whether a facility may be
25 closed -- but I think this is incredibly important -- but

1 only after strategies are developed to minimize the impact
2 on the workforce, the local and regional economies, the
3 delivery of law enforcement and public services.

4 Finally, it notes that if there is an
5 immediate threat to life, health, and safety of the
6 individual, then the facility could be closed much more
7 quickly. This bill was not the work of one senator or one
8 representative; it was the product of many concerned voices
9 at the state and local levels. It was crafted and supported
10 by a bipartisan group of folks in the Senate. There are six
11 Republicans and four Democrats with their names on the bill.
12 It passed our State Government Committee unanimously on
13 January 29th, it passed the Senate Appropriations Committee
14 unanimously on March 19th, and it passed the Senate on
15 March 27th with one "no" vote.

16 Again, Chairman Metcalfe, I want to thank you
17 and the entire committee for allowing me to return today.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
19 Senator Argall. It's good to have you back. I appreciate
20 your presentation.

21 And we'll next hear from Representative
22 Wheeland on his bill also. It's the companion bill to
23 Senator Argall's bill.

24 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: Good morning,
25 everyone. And thank you, Chairman Metcalfe and the

1 committee, for conducting this hearing on Senate Bill 748.

2 At the onset of this meeting, I want to make
3 it perfectly clear that I am in no way opposed to closing a
4 Pennsylvania facility provided there are proper guidelines
5 in place. As the good senator just explained, 20 days is
6 perhaps a little short.

7 You know, we in the legislature appropriate
8 significant dollars for technology and things like our
9 transportation system. We continue, and I'm sure we're
10 going to continue, to legislate in an effort to modernize
11 sentencing guidelines. With these and other factors in
12 play, it only stands to reason the necessity for
13 consolidation and ultimately the closure of many
14 brick-and-mortar, Pennsylvania-owned and leased facilities.
15 Certainly I would hope so. Otherwise, spending all that
16 money on technology and transportation and legislating
17 reform would really be derelict in our duty of spending
18 taxpayer dollars wisely. During this hearing, it's my
19 sincerest hope that we focus on the process of closing a
20 facility and not tangle ourselves up in the minutia of why
21 we would close a particular facility.

22 My current concern with the closure policy is
23 the extremely short time line between the official public
24 notice and the actual closing of the facility. The focus on
25 the process solely, I believe there are four areas of

1 concern. Like the senator said, the effect on the local
2 economy, both short-term and long-term. Businesses that
3 decide to expand or maybe remodel or perhaps even buy a
4 business dependent upon the traffic that that state facility
5 provides. What do they do with such a short notice?

6 Concern for employees, transferring their families and
7 enrolling their kids in school only to find out in mere
8 months that they bought the house for naught, they've
9 disturbed their children as far as schooling. We must do
10 better for our state employees.

11 Another issue, a concern, is the short- and
12 long-term scheduled capital improvements at these
13 facilities, particularly, but not limited to, the state
14 prison. Those things, those buildings, are very costly to
15 maintain and to spend taxpayers' money for very expensive
16 capital improvements that could very easily be deferred had
17 management at those facilities realized that the facility
18 was going to be closed.

19 Contained within both of these bills is
20 spreading the process over one year. The question I have:
21 Is that appropriate or should it be longer?

22 And finally, I question the administration,
23 or the previous administration. Have they considered the
24 federal template laid out by the Defense Base Realignment
25 and Closure Commission, commonly known as BRAC, that took

1 place in the late 80s, 90s, and into the early 2000s?

2 So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for this hearing
3 and I look forward to the testimony, and I think I have
4 plenty of questions.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
6 Representative Wheeland.

7 Our first testifier on the issue this
8 morning, besides the legislators who have introduced the
9 legislation, is Mr. John Wetzel. He is Secretary of
10 Corrections, Pennsylvania Department of Corrections.

11 Secretary Wetzel.

12 SECRETARY WETZEL: Good morning.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Morning. Thanks
14 for joining us.

15 SECRETARY WETZEL: Thanks for having me.
16 Thanks for rescheduling this, too. I appreciate it.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: You're welcome.
18 Glad we were able to have you come over and speak with us
19 this morning. I appreciate it.

20 SECRETARY WETZEL: So I submitted written
21 testimony, which I'm not going to repeat. I think there's
22 really only two areas.

23 So philosophically I agree that, first of
24 all, these are difficult decisions to make and any way we
25 can do it that mitigates the impact on the community and the

1 staff, we're all in.

2 So I think there's only really two things in
3 the bill that I'd ask you to consider. The first one, and I
4 don't think Senator Argall disagrees with this one, is to
5 make a tighter definition for what the facility is, that you
6 could read into the current definition "housing units" and
7 "community correction centers." The vast majority of our
8 community correction centers are leased. So that's not
9 analogous to what you're looking at here. You're looking at
10 closing -- I assume you're looking at closing a major
11 facility that's going to have a huge impact. I don't think
12 community correction centers should be part of that.

13 The second thing is the time frame. And I
14 will tell you that, you know, 20 days, 30 days, too short.
15 I agree with that. I'm concerned that a year is too long.
16 And I'll tell you why.

17 One of the things that -- there's things
18 that -- the first time we closed prisons in the Corbett
19 administration, I believe it was 2013, there was no notice.
20 Actually, it couldn't have been done worse.

21 This time, as this senator says, we
22 announced, I believe it was five facilities at the time that
23 we were considering, gave a 20-day window. I think that was
24 extended because of the hearing that the senator chaired.
25 And ultimately, I believe we made the decision between 30

1 and 45 days. I could be off a little bit. And then
2 ultimately, we closed -- so that was the beginning of
3 January -- ultimately, we closed SCI Pittsburgh by the end
4 of June.

5 And I think one of the things you really want
6 to focus on is we've not laid anyone off in these closures.
7 And the reason we're able to attain this is because we can
8 do a hiring freeze at surrounding facilities. That would be
9 difficult to do for a year. That would -- we turn over
10 about a hundred people a month. So you're talking about
11 1200 people turned over in a year. When it's a relatively
12 short time frame, so three months, six months, we can afford
13 to have overtime go up a little bit because it offsets by
14 being able to not lay anybody off and have staff and not
15 overhire staff either, so just try to strike a good balance
16 on that. For a year, that would be difficult.

17 I think the other thing we really struggle
18 with is keeping staff there who have the ability to transfer
19 out, which again, would impact the environment at the
20 facility and also potentially impact cost. So we'd have
21 really two things. We have some places -- like nursing
22 positions are very difficult to fill. They're in-demand
23 positions, psychologists, doctors, as well as some of our
24 management positions.

25 So if it would be dragging out for a year,

1 like the sword of Damocles hanging over the facility's head,
2 it would be very difficult for us to hire and those kinds of
3 things. So again, I'd ask you to consider that.

4 Our options would be to reduce the
5 population, which would obviously increase costs and
6 increase population at adjacent facilities. But you can't
7 have population without staff or spike overtime. So those
8 are some things I'd ask you to consider when you think of
9 this.

10 I mean, listen, I don't think anyone
11 disagrees that we want to mitigate impacts on the staff in
12 particular, the local community in particular, and any path
13 to do a better job of that, we're all in. I just want to
14 make sure we consider all of the unintended consequences.

15 I think that's it for now. I'd be happy to
16 answer questions. There was another point, but I forgot it.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you.
18 Maybe you'll recall it during the Q and A.

19 Representative Wheeland.

20 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: Thank you,
21 Secretary, that helped a little bit.

22 I do believe that the announcing of potential
23 closures, certainly would that not help the local economy
24 before people were to make investments in their businesses?
25 And also with employees, would that not help before an

1 employee -- let's say it's a CO that gets transferred or may
2 want to transfer into a facility that has potential of being
3 closed, at least they would be cautious and not buy a house,
4 maybe not move their children into that particular school
5 district until things settled down. Is there a way that --
6 and we almost got there, I guess, by announcing these
7 potential -- I mean, certainly you're not going to close all
8 of them, right? It was just basically --

9 SECRETARY WETZEL: Actually, there's no
10 closures imminent. You know, I have to say that. So we
11 don't have any closures imminent.

12 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: But I mean, just by
13 posting the fact that, "okay, these facilities are on the
14 radar for potential closing in the future," I think that
15 would be helpful to the employees and I think it would be
16 helpful to the local economy and I would also think it would
17 be helpful before major capital improvements are done on a
18 facility if it's going to be closed. And again, I reference
19 back to the BRAC and how they pretty much, you know, said,
20 "This is the potential list," and it saved the taxpayers a
21 lot of money and it saved their employees and the local
22 economy a lot of grief.

23 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah, so let me start on
24 the capital improvements. These are operational prisons
25 that have to have systems that work up until the day they

1 close. So it's one of the things when you look at which
2 facility to close, it's something you factor in. But if the
3 roof needs to be repaired and we have folks in there, or we
4 have a security system, they have to be -- so it's really a
5 comparison across the facilities. But to defer repair
6 costs, you have to just strike a balance with that.

7 I would -- to have it drag out too long,
8 again, I'm concerned that -- so let's say in the future, if
9 you have an administration that comes in and the goal is to
10 significantly reduce the number of prisons, under this bill
11 with a year notice, I could envision a process where, every
12 year during the annual budget, an announcement from the
13 Governor, you put a group of facilities on the hit list
14 every year and move forward. And I think that's a lot of
15 pressure on staff.

16 I mean, some of the feedback we got after the
17 Pittsburgh closure -- we did focus groups and got feedback
18 from staff and they felt like it was, that month felt like a
19 long period of time. And again, I think that was probably
20 too short, looking back. But I couldn't imagine, like,
21 announcing five prisons and having that process go for a
22 year. Hiring at those prisons would be very difficult.

23 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Representative
24 Wheeland.

25 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: Again, focusing on

1 the capital improvements -- and you may not remember, but
2 you and I worked together when I was a county commissioner
3 and you did an excellent job and I'm glad you were retained.
4 You're an excellent secretary and I enjoyed my time working
5 with you at the CCAP level.

6 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah.

7 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: But again, back to
8 the capital improvements, you mentioned, you know, the roof
9 is leaking. Well, there's a big difference between fixing a
10 leak and spending millions and millions of dollars on doing
11 a 50-year roof on a facility that's potentially closed. So
12 again, all I'm asking is that that be part of the
13 consideration to save taxpayer dollars.

14 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah, I agree with that
15 100 percent.

16 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: Thank you.

17 SECRETARY WETZEL: You got it.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
19 Representative Wheeland.

20 Representative McCarter.

21 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Thank you, Mr.
22 Chairman.

23 Thank you, Secretary Wetzel, for being here
24 today.

25 Help me a little bit more with -- and again,

1 I think, because it seems we're obviously debating over time
2 lines, as to what is the best figure somewhere between
3 whether it's a year or whether it's the three months, and so
4 forth in the bill. How much of a problem is it in terms of
5 safety? Are there safety issues involved here beyond the
6 issue in the sense of medical care that would take place
7 also that could come into play with the timing of this? Do
8 you see that as an issue?

9 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah, I think that's where
10 you'd -- if you had a hard time, for instance, filling
11 positions, you'd have to reduce the population. Like safety
12 is not something you'd compromise in doing that. You'd find
13 a way to mitigate it. And the cost of that mitigation --
14 there would be a financial cost for that.

15 But, you know, prisons are a tough
16 environment to begin with. But this added pressure -- and,
17 listen, any time human beings are not, don't generally
18 embrace change, when you're talking about something that's
19 going to affect your life -- and you talk about a huge
20 employer. Like most of the places, we're one of the bigger
21 employers in the county. So there's so much at stake that
22 it does cause, add to the stress of an already stressful and
23 difficult job.

24 So again, I just don't know what the sweet
25 spot is as far as a time line. A year sounds like a very

1 long time to me. And again, I'd be concerned that that
2 would be conducive to, like I said, people announcing every
3 year, "these are the prisons we'll potentially close next
4 year," and that's not an environment we should put our staff
5 through.

6 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: So if I understand,
7 then, once that announcement is made that "this particular
8 facility is going to be closed," or even if it's on the
9 possibility list, people will start to transfer employees to
10 other facilities that have vacancies and so forth for their
11 own benefit, obviously, in trying to do that.

12 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah.

13 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Whether it's -- I
14 think Representative Wheeland has mentioned, you know, for
15 families moving, et cetera, et cetera, for their kids.

16 Usually, I would assume that once the list is
17 out, we also begin to transfer inmates to other facilities
18 also to start drawing down the number of inmates at that
19 particular facility. Is that the normal procedure?

20 SECRETARY WETZEL: So that's what we did,
21 yes. In the -- for instance, with Pittsburgh, I think we --
22 end of January, beginning of February is when we announced
23 that SCI Pittsburgh was going to close. And then we slowly
24 reduced the population over the next three and a half, four
25 months.

1 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Okay. And --

2 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Representative
3 McCarter, we do have some other members and we can come back
4 to you if we have time for another round.

5 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Excuse me, Mr.
6 Chairman --

7 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Representative
8 Dush.

9 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: Thank you, Mr.
10 Chairman.

11 Secretary, you had mentioned about the CCCs
12 and your concerns over, they're leased properties, but they
13 also are state employees. We've got overtime and several
14 facilities that are around those simply because of a
15 shortage in manpower. Giving the employees a little bit
16 more advanced notice, I think -- and especially if they're
17 going to have to uproot their families and take them
18 someplace, more than 20 days or so I think is a very serious
19 consideration.

20 How does this bill not actually address that
21 for those employees?

22 SECRETARY WETZEL: So we don't always have
23 control over leases. So I think it's fundamentally
24 different. You know, if someone ends a lease with us, we
25 don't have control over that. In a state facility, there's

1 no if, ands, or buts about it. But when you're talking
2 about leased property and leases, sometimes we're on
3 year-to-year leases in some of those facilities. So there's
4 things that are out of our control. And I don't know how
5 the bill would contemplate something that's out of our
6 control.

7 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: How would that address
8 if the department was planning on closing one? Not if it
9 was the person who was doing the lease, but I still think
10 that if the department is going to be doing it or
11 contemplating it, I think much more advanced notice to the
12 employees is going to be important.

13 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah, I don't disagree
14 with that.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
16 Representative Dush.

17 Representative Bullock.

18 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK: Thank you, Chairman
19 Metcalfe.

20 I'll yield my time to Chairman McCarter --
21 Representative McCarter.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: We don't yield
23 time.

24 Representative DeLissio.

25 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: Thank you, Mr.

1 Chairman.

2 Secretary, good morning.

3 Is there -- when we talk about impact, first
4 of all, are there no guidelines currently?

5 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah, there are guidelines
6 and I believe we provided them to the committee, and if not,
7 we will.

8 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: In terms of impact,
9 which is part of the bill, particularly the impact to local
10 economy, is it a realistic assumption to say that the impact
11 on SCI Pittsburgh, which is more in an urban/suburban area
12 versus a rural area, is going to be very, very different?

13 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah, I think, acknowledge
14 this, that no matter where you close a prison, you're
15 talking about a fifty- to hundred-million-dollar business,
16 so there will be an economic impact. The question is, is
17 there a disparate impact in one community versus another.
18 And that's one of the things that tipped the scale in SCI
19 Pittsburgh because the smallest economic impact was at SCI
20 Pittsburgh.

21 There was one of the facilities that
22 literally was 60 percent, I believe, or 62 percent of all of
23 the sewage that the community that it's in used. So an
24 impact like that on a community would be devastating for the
25 community.

1 So you look -- there's going to be impact.
2 Is there a disparate impact either good or bad? And I think
3 that's really what the process that we have laid out seeks
4 to do in pulling DCED, as well as Labor and Industry, to
5 weigh in on workforce impacts and look at things like
6 unemployment rates and those kinds of things. So yes.

7 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: And I'll be
8 interested to see and hear the rest of the conversation
9 because it looks like there's going to be an impact
10 regardless and it is what we're, as the state, prepared to
11 do about that impact. I mean, the idea is not to -- you
12 know, our incarcerated population, if I remember correctly,
13 was about 8,000 50 years ago, now it's, you know, closer to
14 50,000. And if that -- if we're to diminish, there is going
15 to be impact, that's a given. So this is a very interesting
16 conversation.

17 Thank you, Mr. Chair.

18 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Representative
19 Bullock, would you like to question still or...

20 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK: Thank you, Chairman.

21 So I wanted to go back to the time line
22 process. Could you share with me -- in the previous
23 closures, when staff left, how did it impact the safety of
24 the inmates and where did you see that time line kind of
25 moving?

1 SECRETARY WETZEL: So in the first closures
2 in 2013, the staff actually found out from the press outside
3 the prison. So they weren't properly informed. It just
4 created a horrible environment. And that was on us, that
5 was on me in doing that.

6 So in the second closure, there was more
7 time, there was five facilities who were on the list. And
8 the morning of, we were able to lock down those facilities
9 so we could inform maximum number of staff.

10 And then, what we did the second time that we
11 didn't do the first time is we had Labor and Industry, we
12 had human resources on site the next day to really start
13 getting finite and answering the questions about where are
14 people going to work and those kinds of things.

15 So I think to the extent that you can make it
16 finite for staff, make it finite for inmates, as quickly as
17 possible, so people can start planning their lives. I think
18 that was what we got better the second time. And those are
19 the kinds of things, when people are worried about their
20 kids and what school they're going to go to and how far
21 they're going to have to drive and impacts on their family
22 and day care -- some of our lower paying clerical positions
23 in particular, fortunately we were able to have sister
24 agencies hire some of them because of the drive. The less
25 money you make, the more impact the long drive would make.

1 So all those considerations, again, I think we did a better
2 job the second time. I think we can always continue to
3 improve.

4 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK: One follow-up
5 question, Chairman, may I?

6 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: It will be our
7 last question, Representative Bullock.

8 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK: Thank you, Chairman.
9 And so earlier you mentioned that you had
10 about 100 people turn over a month; is that correct?

11 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yes.

12 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK: What is the average
13 at a -- can you average that by facility or is that just
14 across the department?

15 SECRETARY WETZEL: It's just across the
16 department. I could probably break down historic for a
17 couple of years if you're looking for that. But just in
18 general, we have about 18,000 employees, counting both us
19 and field supervision, and we have about 100 turnovers a
20 year, which we can ride that attrition curve, create
21 vacancies, and fill positions that both reduce overtime and
22 give staff opportunity to keep working.

23 REPRESENTATIVE BULLOCK: Thank you.

24 Thank you, Chairman.

25 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,

1 Representative Bullock.

2 Thank you, Secretary, for being with us.

3 SECRETARY WETZEL: Thank you.

4 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: We appreciate
5 your time. Thank you.

6 SECRETARY WETZEL: Do you want that
7 information, historic vacancies by facility?

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Representative
9 Bullock?

10 (No response.)

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Yes, sir. If
12 you could just send that to the offices of our chairs, we
13 would appreciate it.

14 SECRETARY WETZEL: Yeah, you got it.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you.

16 Our next testifier will be Mr. Jason Bloom.
17 He's the president of Pennsylvania State Corrections
18 Officers Association.

19 Mr. Bloom, you can begin when you're ready,
20 sir.

21 MR. BLOOM: All right. Thank you very much.
22 Again, Chairman, thank you.

23 Committee members, thank you for holding this
24 hearing. I believe it's a very important issue that we're
25 discussing here today.

1 As you've heard from the previous testifiers,
2 that it's -- when you close a prison, and I'm here looking
3 at the impact of not only my members, but the employees of
4 all of the institutions, they -- you need to give them
5 advanced warning. You need to let them know.

6 Secretary Wetzel talked about the two
7 previous closings. The first one was horrible at best, when
8 the inmates were given notification via, I believe a letter,
9 and then our members found out when they were on their way
10 to work. That's just disrespectful for what we do, for our
11 profession, and that's unacceptable.

12 The second time around, they chose, they put
13 five prisons on the list, as you all well know. And I don't
14 know if this was much better because instead of Cresson or
15 Greensburg, "okay, they're closing my prison," now there's
16 all this doubt with these five institutions. You know, I
17 had -- fielding calls, "What are you doing about saving my
18 jail? What are you doing about saving my jail?" Well, the
19 answer that I gave to everybody was, "I don't want to close
20 any of the prisons and I'm doing the best I can to not close
21 any, but I can't pick to save one or to sacrifice one." So
22 that didn't bode very well the second time around.

23 And as you know, you know, there were
24 legislators that were, you know, not in my district, not in
25 my area, not my constituents. So I believe that you have to

1 get better at this. You absolutely -- they have to get
2 better at this.

3 And with these questions you heard, "Did I
4 just lease a house? Did I just buy a house? Where am I
5 going to travel to?" All those types of things, I don't
6 believe that you should have to make those decisions,
7 life-altering decisions, for your children and your family
8 inside of two weeks or three weeks with a notice. I just
9 don't think that that's a reasonable time frame for anyone.
10 And I don't believe anybody that I'm looking at believes
11 that that's a reasonable time frame either.

12 Also, we already know that we do a dangerous
13 job and not many people want to do this job. And with this,
14 when you close a prison, those -- there's 100, Secretary
15 Wetzel said there's about 100 turnover a month. We don't
16 turn 100 inmate over a month. If you're closing a prison of
17 2200, where are you putting them? So you're stacking them
18 somewhere else. You're putting them -- you're compressing
19 that. And you're putting dangerous, violent individuals on
20 top of each other where they don't have any room to get out
21 or be alone for a minute to maybe avoid these altercations.

22 As you very well know, we just lost --
23 Sergeant Baserman at Somerset was murdered, and that's just
24 dealing with a normal, run-of-the-mill inmate. We're not
25 talking about class C or class D inmates with psychological

1 problems.

2 You also know that Senator -- or excuse me,
3 Auditor General DePasquale did an audit a few years ago and
4 we had 65 direct assaults a month, a month, on staff.
5 That's prior to this last closing. And 136 fights between
6 inmates a month. And those fights get broken up by our
7 staff. So by piling them in, you're creating even a worse
8 environment for where we work.

9 With that, I know that you have ramifications
10 for financial and you have to do those things, but the
11 communities also have a reasonable right to voice their
12 opinion on how these things get done.

13 And with that, thank you very much, and I'll
14 be happy to answer any questions.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
16 Mr. Bloom.

17 Representative Wheeland.

18 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: As far as moving
19 staff, and I'm talking about the previous closures, any
20 stories that you've heard through your members, whether it's
21 union members or whether it's management staff, where state
22 government paid to have them moved to a facility and then
23 the facility closed and they had to pay to move them again?

24 MR. BLOOM: I know that in -- Secretary
25 Wetzel talked about transfers and hiring freezes. I would

1 like to point out that the Department of Corrections
2 controls both of those.

3 When they closed Cresson, I know personally
4 they transferred a staff member from an institution in two
5 or three days previously and then announced that they were
6 closing Cresson. So really? You didn't know you should
7 have just told that guy -- they continue the transfer
8 policy. You should have just told the guy, "No. No, we're
9 not transferring you. You're staying where you're at,"
10 knowing that they were going to make this announcement.

11 And as far as the hiring freeze, like, yeah,
12 there's a hundred a month, and if it goes for a year and you
13 know where you're leaning towards you're going to close,
14 we'll just say Pittsburgh, and you need, there's going to be
15 400. They can put a hiring freeze whenever they want and
16 they can take it off whenever they want. So as far as
17 saying that, "oh, we're running short of staff here or
18 there," we're short-staffed everywhere right now, as I know
19 Representative Dush will -- he watches the overtime like a
20 hawk and he knows that. And it's -- so I'm just saying that
21 they can control those things.

22 And as far as transferring of staff, it's --
23 when they announced Pittsburgh, yes, it's Pittsburgh. They
24 handed you a questionnaire, said, "Here you go, get it back
25 to me in two weeks, rank your choices one through whatever,

1 and we'll see what we can do for you." Now, like I said,
2 we're talking about life-altering decisions. I don't know
3 how you could research a housing market, let alone a school
4 district, let alone looking for work for your spouse in a
5 two-week period and make a reasonable, educated decision on
6 that.

7 I believe that that's one of the things that
8 if you're doing this, your process, you can't expect any of
9 the staff to make that decision inside of two weeks and rank
10 their lives where they want to go. I believe that end of
11 the process -- I don't know what reasonable is, but I would
12 know that if you have 25 institutions and you're looking
13 that, you want to scour the entire state, I would say you
14 need two or three months to make an educated decision on
15 that on the back end.

16 Did that answer your question, sir?

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Representative
18 Wheeland.

19 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: I was kind of more
20 focusing in on, you know, some of the stories that I heard
21 about the state incurring a lot of expenses just prior to,
22 you know, the official announcement of closure. And I was
23 just wondering if you had any specific examples on the
24 amount of money that was, in my opinion, wasted, taxpayer
25 moneys that was wasted by doing such a short-term

1 announcement. So I was just curious about that.

2 And possibly even the capital expenditures at
3 prisons. I've heard stories that, you know, the amount of
4 moneys that were spent right up to the announcement was an
5 awful lot of taxpayers' money that was really wasted. So if
6 you hear of those stories, if you could get them to myself
7 or our chairman, we would appreciate it very, very much.

8 MR. BLOOM: Yes, sir.

9 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Any other
10 members?

11 Representative Dush.

12 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: Thank you.

13 Thanks, Jason.

14 I was actually aware of that situation down
15 at Cresson where the guy came in right before they closed.
16 Do we have any more instances of this type of thing?
17 Because on the personnel side, at least at the
18 administration level, I believe they should be aware of it
19 enough to be able to put a stop to those kinds of transfers,
20 especially if the person is just going to get there, won't
21 even get done with orientation before he's going to have to
22 be looking for a new job and a new location.

23 Are there any other similar types of
24 situations that happened with these other, with the other
25 facilities?

1 MR. BLOOM: None that I'm aware of. That's
2 the first one that jumped out -- you know what I mean --
3 that we actually heard of. The guy picked up the phone and
4 said, "I can't believe that they let me transfer in. I sold
5 a house and here you go, now I'm moving again."

6 So that's the one that I know right now. I
7 also know impact -- you have guys that were five, six months
8 from retiring. You know what I mean? They were ready to
9 roll out the rest of their time at Pittsburgh. And instead
10 of picking up and uprooting, they retired early. So that's
11 another impact for the staff.

12 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: And as you pointed out
13 with the overtime, the jails right now, our correctional
14 facilities, we have a shortage of staff. Do we have a
15 shortage of inmates in those institutions? What I'm saying
16 is --

17 MR. BLOOM: No, we don't have a shortage of
18 inmates.

19 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: So if we're going to be
20 closing them, I think it's very important that we start
21 taking a serious look at those numbers. And then if we're
22 going to make the transition, we want to make sure that we
23 do this in a way that -- and I'm hoping this bill will help
24 to address that -- that when we have the lead time and can
25 start considering where we're putting the staff, especially

1 where there is such a -- so there is such a need with the
2 overtime hours simply because we don't have the staff to
3 fill the slots. There has been a hiring freeze
4 department-wide and it's having a direct effect not just on
5 the daily lives of our officers, the ones who just want to
6 do their eight and negate and get mandated, but also, it's
7 having a negative effect on our retirement system. So I
8 think we definitely need to do a better job of getting
9 advanced notice so that your people can plan and so that we
10 can also plan the personnel side of this thing much more
11 efficiently.

12 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
13 Representative Dush.

14 Representative McCarter.

15 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Thank you, Mr.
16 Bloom, for being here today.

17 One of the questions I was trying, going to
18 ask Mr. Wetzell, Secretary Wetzell, dealt with the current
19 guidelines that are used for closings in the state and
20 comparing those to the guidelines that are going to be
21 suggested that New York has been using in terms of these.
22 Do you have any comment on those in terms of your concerns
23 with the current closure guidelines that we're using here in
24 Pennsylvania or would be proffered in the new bills?

25 MR. BLOOM: Well, I think the closure

1 guidelines that they're using now, they -- it's done in a
2 bubble. I mean, the Department of Corrections, they get in
3 a room, they earmark, "okay, we're going to close Pittsburgh
4 or Frackville or whatever," and they sit and they talk and
5 they convince themselves that this is the right decision
6 with no input from anybody else. And I just think that you
7 need to open it up and you need to hear what everybody has
8 to say.

9 And I think one of the things -- when they
10 make these guidelines, you need to have members,
11 representatives of the employees in that institution at the
12 table. That's my biggest thing, that they need to have that
13 input.

14 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Are there any other
15 specifics within the guidelines at the present moment,
16 though, that are causing problems?

17 MR. BLOOM: Not that I can think of off the
18 top of my head.

19 REPRESENTATIVE McCARTER: Okay. Thank you
20 very much.

21 MR. BLOOM: You're welcome.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: So part of your
23 argument was that putting inmates in on top of each other is
24 going to create more hostile situations and less safety.
25 When the last prison was closed, how many prisoners had to

1 be relocated? Do you know off the top of your head or a
2 ballpark figure? Was it a couple thousand?

3 MR. BLOOM: From Pittsburgh, probably 2300,
4 maybe a little more.

5 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: So did the other
6 facilities have the vacant capacity to house those?

7 MR. BLOOM: No. At that time, the Department
8 of Corrections, by their numbers, they were running at 107.9
9 percent capacity, I believe. And as of their latest
10 numbers, they're at 99.9 percent capacity.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: So is that
12 capacity based on the number of beds that the facility was
13 designed to handle originally, or where are they putting
14 them?

15 MR. BLOOM: An example -- I can get you all
16 of the numbers from probably 2004 up to now. I know SCI
17 Huntingdon, because that's where I came from, their bed
18 capacity was 1600. They added 300 -- they magically found,
19 300, 340 beds, somewhere in there. And it was just by --
20 they double-celled. You know, a cell block that was all
21 single cell was now double cell. And you put someone in a
22 cell that is designed for one and you put another guy in on
23 top of it, tempers will flare. There's no personal space.

24 And I'm not advocating for that, but I also
25 think that you need some cool down time or a place to go.

1 You know, if you're pissed off at something, or if you're
2 mad at our wife or your husband, you generally walk to
3 another room and give yourself a minute to cool down.
4 Inside a prison, you don't have that and now you're
5 compounding all that problem by stacking more and more and
6 more inmates in. And you also have to look at, at this
7 point, through JR 1 and JR 2, you've let the so-called
8 better inmate out and the inmate that you're dealing with
9 now is not the one that will use some rationale and walk
10 away.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: So at those
12 single -- I mean, I've never visited a prison to see what
13 the cell looks like --

14 MR. BLOOM: Well, schedule a tour.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Well, it's
16 always a place I was always taught I should be out on the
17 outside of.

18 MR. BLOOM: Understood.

19 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: I've really
20 never had any big desire to be on the inside looking out.

21 MR. BLOOM: All right.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Although some of
23 my colleagues over the years have, which that's a whole
24 other story.

25 So are the majority of the facilities single

1 cells?

2 MR. BLOOM: No.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Okay. So that's
4 more of the dangerous populations.

5 MR. BLOOM: Correct, correct. And what
6 they're doing now is, they'll be -- I believe Somerset, I'll
7 use that as an example, they had day rooms. Well, then you
8 take the TV out of the day room and you put five double
9 bunks in. Now, all of a sudden, you've got bed space for
10 10. And the Department of Corrections uses operational and
11 emergency -- and I'll get you those numbers -- for what they
12 say they can hold.

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you.
14 Thank you.

15 Representative Dush, for another question?

16 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: Actually, Jason just
17 touched on it.

18 Up at Houtzdale, we ended up closing down a
19 day room, which it's a small facility, perhaps a quarter of
20 the size of this small room. Most of the cells, you have
21 two inmates in a cell, you've got toilet facilities in
22 there, et cetera. They closed down a day room and put, I
23 think 16, actually, inmates in that small space, no restroom
24 facilities. More work for the officers. They actually had
25 to get up and open up the door to that every time somebody

1 had to use the restroom facility. It was labor-intensive
2 and we're stacking several people into a smaller confined
3 space. And then you have to make sure that you're not
4 putting an inmate that's got a propensity for violence
5 either against staff or other inmates -- and when you start
6 looking at making dormitories out of what was intended to be
7 a day room, there's some significant safety issues that have
8 to be considered with that. So I think having some extra
9 time to decide on that is a benefit to the officers and all
10 of the staff.

11 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
12 Representative Dush.

13 Representative DeLissio.

14 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: Thank you.

15 Mr. Bloom, do you happen to know -- I come
16 out of long-term care. And the regulations require square
17 footage per resident, patient, client, whatever. Are there
18 like guidelines for corrections where -- so that in a
19 100-square-foot room, we would be prohibited from housing
20 more than one person. Do you know if like guidelines exist?

21 MR. BLOOM: I do not know.

22 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: Thank you,
23 Mr. Chair.

24 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
25 Representative DeLissio.

1 Thank you, sir, for your testimony today.

2 MR. BLOOM: Thank you for your time.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Our next
4 testifier is Mr. H. Roy Dannehower, political liaison with
5 the Pennsylvania State Troopers Association.

6 Thank you for joining us, sir.

7 MR. DANNEHOWER: Thank you for having me.

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Begin when
9 you're ready, sir.

10 MR. DANNEHOWER: Pleasure. Thank you.

11 Good morning. Thank you, Chairman Metcalfe
12 and members of this committee, for sharing in our efforts to
13 make Pennsylvania a safer place for our families. We
14 appreciate the opportunity to work with you on this issue
15 that is important to the safety and security of nearly 13
16 million Pennsylvanians.

17 My name is Harry Dannehower. I currently
18 have the honor and privilege to represent the Pennsylvania
19 State Troopers Association as its legislative liaison.
20 Prior to this, I served the Commonwealth for 30 years as a
21 trooper with the Pennsylvania State Police at Troop M.

22 PSTA represents over 4,300 active men and
23 women, their dependents, and all retirees. These troopers
24 have dedicated their lives to proudly serve their neighbors,
25 relatives, and communities as Pennsylvania state troopers.

1 The PSTA is committed to enhancing the ability of the
2 Pennsylvania State Police to handle the ever increasing
3 duties placed on the department.

4 Our President, Sergeant David Kennedy, sends
5 his best regards. Today Sergeant Kennedy and our executive
6 board are meeting as we speak with the command staff of the
7 Pennsylvania State Police. Please accept a correspondence
8 provided to the committee, as per your request, as our
9 official response to this issue.

10 We fully support Senate Bill 748 as a prudent
11 course of action. This legislation ensures that the
12 decisions impacting public safety are not made in a vacuum.
13 It further allows for a full vetting so that any decision
14 that is made can withstand the light of day. Such decisions
15 should never be viewed only from the perspective of cost
16 reduction or the expiration of a lease.

17 Recently communities were caught unprepared
18 when two stations closed in Ephrata, Lancaster County,
19 and Philipsburg in Centre County. In both closures, the
20 decision was apparently made with little or no public input
21 or consultation with other agencies or governmental units.
22 It is essential that there be a dialogue with the
23 stakeholders concerned with public safety. This should
24 include, but not be limited to, the district attorney,
25 county commissioners, and other law enforcement agencies

1 that rely on the specialized personnel and resources that
2 the local station may provide.

3 We believe that the following critical
4 questions must be fully vetted with the host community and
5 other law enforcement agencies that may be impacted by the
6 closure of a station: What is the improvement to public
7 safety and net savings, if any, to justify the closing of a
8 station? What is the impact on the trooper's ability to
9 respond to incidents in a timely manner? What is the impact
10 on the trooper's ability to travel to a new duty station to
11 obtain a patrol vehicle to go out on patrol to secure and to
12 log in to evidence and to secure a suspect or prisoner? If
13 a station would close in your legislative district and a
14 constituent arrives at that station with an emergency, what
15 would be the travel time to the next closest secure state
16 police facility? How much will it cost to educate the
17 general public about the closure of a station?

18 As a young trooper, I was educated early and
19 often that the state police has been open for business 24
20 hours a day, 7 days a week since 1905. For 113 years, the
21 troop headquarters and substations have served as beacons of
22 safety for our citizens. Families with contentious child
23 custody disputes exchange their children at the stations.
24 Citizens, both men and women, seek shelter from violent
25 domestic situations. Victims come on station to report

1 crimes, as well as suspicious activity. Megan's law
2 violators renew their registrations and at times submit DNA
3 samples. The list of services that the stations provide go
4 on and on.

5 We sometimes hear budget issues leading to
6 some of the decisions that have been made relative to the
7 department. At the end of the day, public safety has to be
8 more than just saving money. It's an old saying, but it
9 still rings true, "If our actions as troopers, public
10 servants, elected officials, and policymakers save one life,
11 well, then our efforts are worthwhile."

12 We realize that with enhanced technology, new
13 roadways, significant population shifts, and the
14 establishment or closure of a regional police department the
15 state police cannot remain a stagnant entity. It must
16 evolve with the changing nature of our communities and the
17 demands placed upon a modern police agency. To that end,
18 are there ways to offset the diminished presence of troopers
19 within your community should a state police station be
20 closed? The answer is yes. Many state police and highway
21 patrol agencies issue a car to its troopers per capita as a
22 matter of policy. This enables the trooper to respond to
23 incidents in a timely manner, provides for greater
24 efficiency in the patrol function, and provides a visible
25 presence in the community, thereby conveying a greater sense

1 of safety.

2 Senate Bill 748 is about making certain the
3 tough questions are raised and answered before final
4 decisions are made that may adversely impact your
5 constituents' safety. Such decisions cannot be about money
6 alone.

7 It is important to note that Senate Bill 748
8 does not prevent the closure of a station. It does make
9 certain that such decisions are thoroughly and carefully
10 vetted. It also provides that the impacted communities,
11 other law enforcement agencies, and stakeholders and the
12 general public are given the opportunity to express their
13 concerns. These issues must be raised prior to the closure
14 of a station, not after the fact.

15 Thank for your consideration of our support
16 for Senate Bill 748. We urge you to report this important
17 legislation from committee and to support efforts to bring
18 it before the full House for consideration.

19 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you, sir.

20 MR. DANNEHOWER: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Representative
22 Wheeland.

23 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: Thank you very
24 much. Thank you for your testimony and thank you for your
25 service, 30 years.

1 MR. DANNEHOWER: Thank you.

2 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: Thirty years?

3 MR. DANNEHOWER: Yes, sir.

4 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: I bet you have some
5 good stories.

6 MR. DANNEHOWER: I do.

7 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: True Path, which is
8 located not in my district, but right next door. It's in
9 Representative Everett's district. And in no way am I
10 insinuating that I've heard or that it's going to be closed
11 or -- I have not heard any of that. But under the
12 assumption that it would be closed, I wanted to point out
13 that there has been significant capital investment in that
14 building. As we speak today, I believe there's contractors
15 working there.

16 So I'll ask you the same question that I
17 asked previous testifiers: Do you know of any of these
18 facilities that are about to be closed or that have closed,
19 that there were capital improvements, expensive capital
20 improvements, invested in those buildings prior to them
21 closing?

22 MR. DANNEHOWER: I can't speak to an
23 individual station. My expertise is, quite frankly, in
24 Troop M. Troop headquarters are generally owned by the
25 Commonwealth, including Troop F in Montoursville. Most, if

1 not all, of the substations are leased facilities. With
2 that being said, there are capital improvements that go on
3 continually at these troop headquarters.

4 Troop F, as you stated, is the largest land
5 mass, if you will, of any troop within the Commonwealth.
6 There are 15 across the state, including the turnpike. To
7 close the troop itself, you have to absorb all the
8 substations to adjoining troops. I think it would be a very
9 difficult undertaking, in my opinion.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Any of the
11 members?

12 (No response.)

13 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you, sir,
14 for your testimony. We appreciate you coming.

15 MR. DANNEHOWER: Thank you, sir.

16 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you.

17 Our next testifier is Teri Ooms, executive
18 director with the joint urban studies at Wilkes-Barre
19 University.

20 Thank you for joining us, ma'am.

21 MS. OOMS: Thank you.

22 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: You can begin
23 when you're ready.

24 MS. OOMS: Good morning, Mr. Chairman,
25 members of the committee, and invited guests. My name is

1 Teri Ooms and I am the executive director of the Institute
2 for Public Policy and Economic Development. We are an
3 economic and applied social science research center that was
4 formed out of a unique partnership of 12 higher education
5 institutions and the business community in northeastern
6 Pennsylvania.

7 My testimony today focuses on community
8 economic vitality and sustainability. Resilient communities
9 have large diversified employment bases. They have
10 businesses of many sizes employing individuals with
11 different skill levels and different levels of education
12 attainment. They have strong quality of life assets such as
13 schools, health care, recreation, and venue, access to food,
14 shopping, and affordable and available housing at different
15 price points. More vulnerable communities have many less
16 assets. Many communities have an unusually high reliance on
17 public sector employment. This is especially the case in
18 Pennsylvania.

19 Last year, at the request of State Senator
20 John T. Yudichak, our organization conducted a partial
21 economic impact study on the effect of the proposed prison
22 closures in northeastern Pennsylvania. An economic impact
23 study is a pure quantitative analysis of the changes of
24 dollars and jobs that flow through an economy, which may be
25 a small community or a small region, as a result of a change

1 in business or industry. It can be the impact of the
2 operations of a higher education institution, an event, a
3 new business moving to the region or, in this case, the
4 closure of a major business.

5 For an economic impact study, it does not
6 matter whether the business is for profit, nonprofit,
7 public, or private. An impact study uses data inputs such
8 as the number of jobs, average wages, and changes in revenue
9 to complete the analysis. The multipliers used in the
10 analysis are the product of a variety of weighted regional
11 statistics, so they are geographically specific and change
12 yearly with changes in the local economy. There are a few
13 national providers of multipliers, including the Federal
14 Bureau of Economic Adjustment, and they are all very
15 consistent. We use what is called the IMPLAN model.

16 Using the number of lost corrections jobs in
17 our northeastern Pennsylvania area and their average wage,
18 we determined that that \$52,000 wage, while being a loss to
19 the individual household, has another \$49,000 in losses to
20 other sectors of the economy because that household income
21 is no longer flowing through the economy. There is also a
22 loss of \$7,000 per job in federal and state tax revenue,
23 such as sales tax, business taxes, and personal income
24 taxes.

25 This is an extremely conservative estimate

1 because our analysis did not take into context other jobs at
2 the prisons nor the prisons themselves. The prisons are
3 businesses that buy goods and services, and if they are
4 closed, that money is not flowing through the economy, as
5 well. That means a further reduction in jobs and revenue to
6 other businesses and households, an additional impact on tax
7 dollars.

8 Using our partial analysis, if a prison lost
9 100 jobs in northeastern Pennsylvania at a salary of \$52,000
10 per job, with the indirect and induced impact of an
11 additional \$49,000 plus the loss in tax revenue, that 100
12 jobs has over \$1 million worth of impact on a community.
13 And that is not a one-time event; that is an annual event.

14 To a small community or region where these
15 public sector facilities are major employers, they're also
16 usually employers of family-sustaining jobs. It can be
17 devastating. Even communities with a number of employers
18 may struggle if that employee base is not diversified.

19 Entry in mid-level jobs in many industries do
20 not pay family-sustaining wages. This is critical because
21 many employed Pennsylvanians do not earn a family-sustaining
22 wage. These working poor struggle because they are earning
23 too much to qualify for any assistance program, but not
24 earning enough to meet their basic needs such as food,
25 housing, transportation, and medical care.

1 Living wages can vary by community and by the
2 size of the family. In northeastern Pennsylvania, a
3 two-parent household with one child needs to earn over
4 \$47,000 to meet those basic needs. The average corrections
5 job pays \$52,000 a year. In other words, that was a
6 family-sustaining job.

7 As I mentioned, living wage numbers change
8 and in Pennsylvania the average is almost \$50,000 a year for
9 a living wage for two parents and one child in a household.
10 So if we extrapolate those numbers to the average wages of
11 prison jobs in 2017 at 52,000, it meets the criteria. So it
12 would be a loss of family-sustaining wages.

13 If communities and households do recover from
14 this type of large scale loss, it could take decades to
15 replace the large number of jobs and the lost
16 family-sustaining wages; thus affecting not only the
17 households themselves, the broader community, their
18 businesses in the community, and even the operations of
19 local and state government because of the loss of tax
20 revenue. Most communities are likely not to recover without
21 a strategic plan in place.

22 While we recognize that a major decision,
23 such as a prison closing, includes a number of deciding
24 factors and has many other implications, including a
25 detailed community analysis and a full economic impact study

1 should definitely be part of the process.

2 Thank you.

3 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
4 ma'am.

5 Representative Dush.

6 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: Thank you, Chairman.

7 Teri, when you were taking into the
8 consideration the contracts and that kind of thing that
9 happened locally -- I know the Department of Corrections at
10 one point, we produced most of the food through inmate labor
11 force out on the work farms, then we went to the purchasing
12 agents at the prisons being able to buy, do contracts with
13 local produce suppliers, meat suppliers, whatever, and now
14 we've gone into more of a statewide contract.

15 So are there other things other than food
16 commodities and that sort of thing that are routine
17 purchases that are done more at the local level, and what
18 type of things do you see as being impacted in that way?

19 MS. OOMS: Without having access to the
20 financials of a prison, we weren't able to complete the full
21 analysis to determine that. But I would imagine everything
22 from things such as office supplies to the food purchases to
23 small equipment purchases and things like that, that could
24 be purchased on a community or subregional level should be
25 part of the analysis and would demonstrate a negative

1 economic impact on an annual basis if it were no longer
2 there.

3 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: Would you recommend
4 that that process be transparent and out in the public so
5 everybody can take a look at how much, how big of an impact
6 that would be in each given community as part of the
7 process?

8 MS. OOMS: Yes, definitely.

9 REPRESENTATIVE DUSH: Thank you.

10 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: So as far as the
11 economic impact, if you closed down one of those facilities,
12 but -- in a study like that, would you take into
13 consideration the original reasons for the belief that that
14 facility should be closed and the overall economic impact on
15 the state?

16 MS. OOMS: That's a separate analysis, sir.

17 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: But I think --
18 but ultimately, for state policymakers to make the right
19 decision, you have to understand that if there's a facility
20 that's a drain on the state, that it might be propping up a
21 community unnaturally, and if that facility is not there,
22 that market forces would bring in other replacements that
23 would help the community to thrive again. And I mean,
24 there's certainly going to be short-term losses with any
25 government facility that's going to be closed. But I think

1 for the overall good of the state, the Commonwealth, then we
2 need to make those decisions sometimes.

3 MS. OOMS: I think that's part of it. There
4 should be an economic impact analysis of the facility itself
5 in terms of the cost to the state, as well as to the
6 community. Some communities are going to be more impacted
7 than others.

8 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Right.

9 MS. OOMS: And it really depends on the size
10 of the community, the diversification of the employer base.
11 General wage rates in that particular community will help
12 determine that.

13 So some communities, especially when we did
14 the analysis in northeastern Pennsylvania for like SCI
15 Waymart, for example, that community would have been so
16 extremely adversely impacted that recovery would have taken
17 decades. That prison there is a major employer and they're
18 really, because it's a more rural area, less dense
19 population, less dense business infrastructure, the economic
20 implications were significant.

21 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: I'd like to
22 understand the economic consequences of placing a facility
23 that's so far removed from other vendors and other -- even
24 for the families that visit there or for the correctional
25 officers' families, I think there's a lot of economic

1 impacts that we have to consider beside just the local
2 community.

3 Representative DeLissio.

4 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: Thank you.

5 Thanks for your testimony. What you said
6 here as it pertains to the study that you were asked to
7 conduct by Senator Yudichak, that could be applied to the
8 private sector, as well, correct?

9 MS. OOMS: Oh, definitely.

10 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: A company -- and I
11 think, and I don't know if it's a federal or a state
12 requirement -- and I don't know if I'm accurate about
13 this -- but I believe they need to give 60 days' notice of a
14 layoff, at least, I don't know if it's also a planned
15 closing, but this conversation this morning will prompt me
16 to go look those up.

17 So, you know, we don't control the private
18 sector. A company makes a decision to close. It obviously
19 has an impact particularly when there's loss of employment.
20 I guess here we're thinking this is a public sector entity
21 that is controlled. But along the lines of what the
22 chairman said, there is that whole equation of the impact on
23 the state and the cost to government. I mean, you know, are
24 we subsidizing entire towns?

25 And, you know, that may be a little bit of a

1 harsh way to look at it, but if there's not a -- we know it
2 does well, it employs people, that's all important. But
3 this whole conversation this morning has been very
4 interesting. So that would apply to a private sector, as
5 well?

6 MS. OOMS: Yes, most definitely.

7 REPRESENTATIVE DeLISSIO: Thank you.

8 MS. OOMS: And I think in this case in
9 particular, that if the state had decided to close a prison
10 in a community where there was significant impact, then the
11 state has to understand that level of impact to revenue that
12 the state would lose from employee taxes, sales tax
13 purchases, and things like that, and look at that side of
14 the impact, as well.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
16 Representative DeLissio.

17 Thank you, ma'am, for providing testimony
18 today. We appreciate you sharing that with the committee.

19 MS. OOMS: Thank you.

20 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: That's all of
21 the testifiers that we have. I'd like to ask Representative
22 Wheeland for his thoughts on what we received on his
23 legislation today before we adjourn the meeting -- adjourn
24 the hearing.

25 REPRESENTATIVE WHEELAND: Thank you again,

1 Mr. Chairman, for hosting this hearing.

2 I would encourage members of this committee,
3 and certainly the chairman, to bring forth this legislation
4 so that we can get it through this committee and on to the
5 House floor for a quick vote. I think it is -- obviously,
6 based on the testimony that we heard today, I think we can
7 see why this is important.

8 However, I think I have more questions now
9 than when I came in. So I would suspect, just a gut
10 feeling, that we need to pass this, but I suspect that we'll
11 be back as more information comes forward in this process
12 and there may be additional legislation to get us to where
13 we need to be.

14 So again, thank you, Mr. Chairman.

15 MAJORITY CHAIRMAN METCALFE: Thank you,
16 Representative Wheeland.

17 For any members that might have some input on
18 the legislation, we'd certainly appreciate hearing that
19 input before we get to the voting meeting because I think
20 there were some good suggestions made. I think the 30 days
21 or 40 days is certainly too short. I think a year is
22 certainly a time line that might be too long. So I think we
23 should be able to find some kind of a meeting halfway time
24 line that makes sense. And I look forward to some of the
25 members' discussion on the issue to come up with what that

1 time line should be, and if there's any other amendments
2 that are needed before we move legislation forward. But I
3 would certainly be willing to bring the bill forward. We
4 just need to talk about what type of amendments we might
5 need, if any. Personally, I think that we're going to need
6 some.

7 Thank you, members, for your time. Motion to
8 adjourn by Representative Sankey, seconded by Representative
9 Walsh. This meeting is adjourned. Everyone have a great
10 day.

11 (Hearing concluded at 11:13 a.m.)

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C E R T I F I C A T I O N

I hereby certify that the proceedings are contained fully and accurately in the notes taken by me on the within proceedings, and that this copy is a correct transcript of the same.



Summer A. Miller, Court Reporter
Notary Public

