

Veto No. 2005-2

HB 603

December 23, 2005

To the Honorable, the House of Representatives
of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania:

I am returning herewith, without my approval, House Bill 603, entitled "An Act amending Title 71 (State Government) of the Pennsylvania Consolidated Statutes, further defining 'enforcement officer' to include certain Pennsylvania Game Commission employees."

The provisions of House Bill 603 amend the State Employees' Retirement Code to allow Game Commission law enforcement officers to retire with full retirement benefits at age 50 rather than age 60. The increased employer cost for this enhanced benefit is \$600,000 a year for the next ten years. The Game Commission's share of the employer's increased cost will be approximately \$260,000.

Recent Game Commission press releases announcing reductions in services and programs and urging legislative action to increase license fees reflect that the Commission's current financial condition is bleak at best. Moreover, a press report of former Executive Director Vernon Ross' testimony before the Senate and House Game and Fisheries Committees quoted him as stating: "Given fixed costs and stable license sales, the agency's revenues will continue to fall behind the cost of doing business and result in future cuts in programs and services." Incoming Executive Director Carl Roe, in a December 2005 Game Commission release, states, "There are many challenges on the horizon, not the least of which is the agency's current financial situation." Since the operations of the Game Commission are not funded out of the General Fund but by revenues generated by license fees, the implementation of this Bill would have a dramatic effect on the Commission's already flailing finances, forcing even more cuts in programs and services or an increase in fees, or both.

The balance of the increased employer cost for this enhanced benefit, \$340,000 per year, will be paid by Commonwealth agencies and all other employers within the State Employees' Retirement System, not just the Game Commission whose employees benefit from this change. As a result, the Bill would not only affect the Commission's finances, but other Commonwealth agencies will have to share the cost burden of these increased benefits.

As I have said on more than one occasion, I intend to enforce a "pay as you go" budget process for Pennsylvania. I will not sign legislation that either

significantly increases spending or reduces revenue without a specific plan to pay for it. For these reasons, I must withhold my signature from House Bill 603.

EDWARD G. RENDELL