



FY2015-16 Budget Hearing Recap Wednesday, March 18, 2015

Pennsylvania State Police/Office of Homeland Security

Testifying: Acting Commissioner Colonel Marcus Brown; Lt. Colonel George Bivens, Deputy Commissioner of Operations; William Box, Director of Fiscal Division

The State Police are funded through the General Fund (25%) and Motor License Fund (75%). They also receive some targeted funding from the Gaming Fund for gaming enforcement and from the State Stores Fund for liquor control enforcement.

For FY 2015-16, Governor Wolf is proposing to increase the State Police's General Fund appropriation by \$19.5 million or 8.8%.

For FY 2015-16, Governor Wolf is proposing to increase the State Police's Motor License Fund appropriation by \$63.2 million or 9.3%.

The Governor is proposing an increase of \$3.9 million from the Gaming Fund for gaming enforcement and an increase of \$2.46 million from the State Stores Fund for liquor control enforcement.

The State Police are hoping that with the proposed increased funding they will be able to train an additional 350 cadets. The Acting Commissioner stated his goal was to get the trooper complement to 4,500. With an expected retirement of 225 for the upcoming year, the Acting Commissioner feels that the addition of 350 new troopers will still allow them to get to 4,500 troopers.

The Acting Commissioner was asked about the capabilities to train 350 new troopers. He stated that the State Police are very committed to getting to 4,500 troopers and if some cadets don't get through the academy in the first classes then the State Police will add more cadets in later classes to make up for the loss.

The State Police are reviewing the operational ability and safety of the current State Police radio system. The Acting Commissioner stated that there are better systems being used by other law enforcement agencies and that the State Police are actively looking at different radio systems to replace the current one.

The Acting Commissioner was questioned about the Pennsylvania Instant Check System (PICS) used to do background checks for gun purchases. The State Police work with firearms dealers to ensure that there is always appropriate staffing to make the process safe and efficient. During high volume call times, such as gun shows, the State Police increase staffing and work overtime to make sure all queries are handled as quickly as possible. PICS also allows users to submit a background check via the internet which cuts down on call volume. About 1/3 of all background requests are now handled online.

When asked about the practicality and necessity of using both the PICS and National Instant Check, Lt. Colonel Bivens stated that both background checks are effective and necessary and that Pennsylvania should continue to use both.

The manhunt for Eric Frein cost the State Police \$11.7 million. The State Police were able to absorb this cost by savings from the lower than expected cost of fuel and from dipping into reserves.

Department of Corrections/Board of Probation & Parole

Testifying: Acting Secretary John Wetzel; Acting Chairman John Tuttle

For FY 2015-16, the Governor's budget proposal has an increase of \$146.97 million, or 7% for the Department of Corrections.

State Correctional Institutions increases \$111.36 million, or 6.1%, to \$1.925 billion. This increase continues the current program and funds an initiative to provide enhanced treatment for inmates with serious mental illness.

The Board of Probation and Parole is receiving an overall increase of \$16.13 million, or 10.3%, compared to FY 2014-15, for a total of \$172.46 million.

The Board's General Government Operations increases by \$13.37 million, or 9.9%, to \$148.02 million to provide resources to maintain caseload ratios for an increased parolee population. It will also provide money to fund initiatives for specialized mental health agent training and supervision enhancement, and sex offender recidivism reduction through increased global positioning system monitoring.

There are currently 50,756 inmates in the state correctional system. This is the lowest inmate population since June 2009. The Corrections Secretary testified that it costs approximately \$38,000 per year to house a prisoner.

Pennsylvania has seen a marked increase in the percentage of its criminal justice population with mental health issues. The Department of Corrections states that 24% of inmates are on the active mental health roster also, 18% of the parole population have serious mental health concerns.

The Acting Secretary stated that they are working on implemented measures to enhance the treatment and care of offenders suffering from mental illness. They are working to provide better training to correctional officers and improve treatment options to inmates. Currently, Corrections has trained more than 90% of its employees in Mental Health First Aid and are on track to have every employee trained by the end of fiscal year 2014-15.

The Corrections Secretary was asked about the closure of SCI Greensburg and SCI Cresson and if the \$23 million in cost savings projected last year had been met. The Acting Secretary believes that the savings have been realized even when taking into account the \$7.6 million buyout of the power plant at SCI Greensburg.

The Department of Corrections continues to be concerned about Right-to-Know Requests. The Department is concerned about security of its employees in regards to requests by inmates and the cost of the large volume of requests.

Judiciary

Testifying: Justice Max Baer; Justice Michael Eakin; Zygmunt Pines, Court Administrator of PA; Kenneth Crump, Budget Administrator

For FY 2015-16, the Governor's budget proposal has the Judiciary level-funded with the current fiscal year.

The Justices expressed concern with the level-funding. They had requested an increase of \$30 million or 8%. With level-funding the Justices fear that Courts will have a tough time handling their caseload. Justices feel that tough personnel cuts may occur if the final General Fund budget has Judiciary level-funded.

While the Justices were not able to provide exact numbers of the costs savings of problem-solving courts they expressed confidence that the courts were working in helping address the root cause of criminal activity and helping to prevent recidivism by defendants. Examples of these courts include drug courts and veterans courts.

The Justices were questioned about the weighted case load analysis for the Court of Common Pleas. The Justices stated that they hope to have that completed by next year and are looking at case load per county of cases that may not make it in front of a judge.