

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS BUDGET HEARING WRAP

Monday, March 3, 2025



General Overview:

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) Secretary Dr. Laurel Harry and senior staff testified before the House Appropriations Committee this morning. The discussion centered on the department's financial aspects, proposed facility closures, and the potential impact of legalized recreational marijuana.

Key Takeaways:

- The governor's proposal for the DOC totals \$3.3 billion, representing 6.4% of the \$51.47 billion General Fund budget, and underscoring the significant role the department plays in the state's finances.
 - DOC has proposed cost-cutting measures in the 2025-26 fiscal year budget. Committee members are supportive of cutting costs but expressed concerns regarding the strategies proposed. Potential impacts on public safety and communities must be the primary considerations in any cost-cutting measures and overall budgeting for the DOC.
- Members of the committee shared concerns about the recently proposed closure of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp and asked pointed questions, including:
 - Composition and activities of the DOC steering committee on closures: DOC leadership shared that the committee has met at least three times and is composed entirely of internal DOC staff.
 - Cost of maintenance for closed facilities and impacts on surrounding community: The Commonwealth is still paying to maintain prisons that closed well over a decade ago, and surrounding communities have experienced blight in the wake of these previous closures.
- Members questioned DOC leadership regarding the impact of the governor's recreational marijuana proposal and the plan to expunge the records of individuals with only possession of marijuana offenses.
 - As with the State Police, the DOC was not consulted in the development of the governor's recreational marijuana proposal.
 - The DOC shared that the plan would result in the release of approximately 10 individuals currently incarcerated, so this plan would not result in significant cost savings to the DOC.
 - Corrections Officers (COs) and other staff will be drug tested and not permitted to use marijuana.
- Lowering the age of eligibility to be a CO from 21 to 18 years old has positively affected recruitment and retention of COs.

Notable Q&A:



Rep. Marci Mustello seeks details about the DOC steering committee which recommended the closure of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp.



Rep. Eric Nelson discusses the safety of COs, the methods of violence mitigation the COs can use, and the blight impacts of closed facilities on surrounding communities.



Rep. Jeff Olsommer asks the DOC how the governor's recreational marijuana proposal will financially impact the DOC's budget.