

DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS BUDGET HEARING WRAP

Thursday, February 26, 2026



General Overview:

Pennsylvania Department of Corrections (DOC) Secretary Dr. Laurel Harry, department senior staff, and Jim Fox, Chair of the Board of Probation and Parole, testified before the House Appropriations Committee today. The discussion centered on the department's financial aspects, proposed facility closures, prison safety, and privileges extended to death row inmates.

Key Takeaways:

- For the DOC, the Governor is proposing a total General Fund spending amount of \$3.38 billion for Fiscal Year 2026-27, an overall increase of \$142.5 million, or 4.4%, over the current fiscal year.
 - The DOC is responsible for 6.3% of overall spending in the Governor's proposal and is the third largest agency in terms of General Fund spending.
- House Republicans believe that victims of crimes should feel justice is being served through sentencing as well as rehabilitation. DOC leaders tried to avoid taking accountability for providing extra privileges to an inmate convicted of three murders despite a settlement agreement that already afforded the inmate less time in solitary confinement and other agreed-to privileges.
 - After being confronted with a letter from the Office of the Victim Advocate, which communicated that additional privileges had been extended since the settlement agreement, department leaders walked back their initial comments, but failed to explain why this decision was made.
- Committee members again expressed concerns regarding the closure of SCI Rockview and Quehanna Boot Camp. The committee learned that while the facilities are effectively closed, the Commonwealth still bears operating costs for these locations.
- The DOC has taken additional measures to prevent drugs from entering its facilities, including the use of drones and K-9 officers. The committee learned these efforts are working.
- Violence rates within state prisons have doubled since FY 2020-21. The DOC is working on more de-escalation training and mentorship training. It was also shared that as more non-violent crimes, such as drug-related crimes, are placed in diversionary programs, the concentration of violent criminals in facilities increases, which may cause increased violence rates.
- The Board of Probation and Parole shared that body cameras have been ordered and will soon be deployed for all Parole Officers.

Notable Q&A:



Rep. Kristin Marcell questions why crime victims received notification that an inmate convicted of three murders was provided with extra privileges on death row.

Rep. Thomas Kutz asks for an update on body cameras for Parole Officers.



Rep. Jeff Olsommer asks the DOC about efforts to reduce drugs being smuggled into state prisons.