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Law Enforcement Alliance of America
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April 16, 1998

House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Corrections
Pennsylvania General Assembly

Good morning and thank you Mr. Chairman and members of the committee for providing me with the opportunity to discuss a bill which will help to enhance the safety of correctional officers who live in the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

My name is Andrew LeFevre and I am the Director of State and Local Affairs for the Law Enforcement Alliance of America more commonly known as LEAA. LEAA is the nation's largest coalition of law enforcement officers, crime victims, and law-abiding citizens dedicated to finding effective, common-sense solutions to the problems facing our country's criminal justice system. LEAA represents 65,000 members and supporters across America.

The reason why LEAA supports House Bill 2278 is simple. Law enforcement is the only profession in the United States that is required to interact on a daily basis with the most dangerous and violent segment of our society.

After criminals are taken off of our streets, there is a tendency by most people to forget about them. Unfortunately, as we all know, criminals don't disappear. They must be housed in jails, penitentiaries, and as they are more commonly called today, "correctional facilities." Once these less reputable members of society are safely behind bars, it becomes the job of correctional officers to watch them until their release.

As I'm sure you've heard from correctional officers themselves, walking a cellblock can truly be considered walking one of the toughest beats in America.

We must give our law enforcement officers -- and that includes corrections officers -- the tools they need to keep themselves, as well as our streets, safe.

House Bill 2278 will empower select officers within the Pennsylvania Department of Corrections with "peace officer" powers.

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This legislation will help in the ongoing task of increasing the professionalism of correctional officers in Pennsylvania. The mandatory basic course of study for peace officers will help set a higher level of training for correctional officers, and will bring corrections professionals more in line with the rest of Pennsylvania's law enforcement community who keep the streets safe.

There has been much talk lately on the benefits of having more police officers on the streets to help cut down on crime. House Bill 2278 will allow correctional officers to use their experience and training to help keep their neighborhoods safe by having powers of arrest in certain circumstances.

Additionally, after a 20-year career of locking up criminals – many of them numerous times – most law enforcement officers fear facing someone they sent to prison. Too often this fear becomes a reality. Just imagine the danger off-duty correctional officers face having to deal with violent criminals with whom they have been in contact every day on the job.

House Bill 2278 will allow correctional officers to carry a concealed firearm for personal protection just like the rest of Pennsylvania's peace officers. If you fail to pass this bill you will take away the most effective tool available for them to defend themselves and you will give violent, vindictive criminals an unfair opportunity to seek revenge against the officer.

LEAA has been proud to support similar legislation in several other states that have recognized the need to give their states' correctional officers "peace officer" status. It is easy to see the inherent benefits of having the training and experience of law enforcement officers available to help keep our streets safe from violent crime. That is why I respectfully urge you to pass House Bill 2278.

I thank you for the opportunity to testify and would be happy to answer any questions you may have.