

Honorable Labor Relations Committee Members, last Thursday, in this very room, I had the pleasure of attending a retirement party for a 37 year veteran of the United States Attorney's Office. It was attended by Assistant United States Attorneys, federal judges, Federal Bureau of Investigation Agents, United States Drug Enforcement Agents, United States Deputy Marshals, state and local police agencies, district attorneys, sheriffs and deputy sheriffs. After two hours of speeches, one thing was crystal clear; each was an integral part in the investigation, arrest, prosecution and conviction of a multitude of dangerous criminals. These convicted felons, who threaten the lives and safety of the good citizens of this Commonwealth, were stripped of their freedom and punished for their actions due to the cooperation of all of the law enforcement agencies mentioned previously. Any weakness in the chain of the thin blue line which stands between us and those who would harm us may have resulted in catastrophe.

One may assume that catastrophe is a strong word, an exaggeration of facts made to illicit a strong reaction; this is not the case. If even one of these convicts were left for one more day on the street while a crucial piece of evidence went undiscovered, could someone have been killed, raped, kidnapped, extorted? Would this have affected your family, mine, your neighbors, your friends? Would there be a cry of outrage that a catastrophe could have been prevented if we could have locked the culprit up earlier? Do you want to assume this chance? By eliminating sheriffs and their deputies as tools in the arsenal against crime, we risk catastrophe.

However, I do understand the concern that investigation and arrest powers should not be trivialized or handed out lightly. This is a serious business, where a culture of corruption of power could cause a negative effect on our citizens. We need men and women who are accountable, educated and properly trained and who possess the resources necessary to fulfill their duties. I do not know of any group of people who espouse these qualities more than the county sheriffs and their deputies. Their education and training is provided by the Pennsylvania Commission on Crime and Delinquency. I would assume this is a knowledgeable and trusted Commonwealth agency capable of providing proper curriculum. The offices of the county sheriffs of Pennsylvania have firearms, handcuffs, emergency vehicles, radios and bullet proof vests. It appears that resources have been provided in order for them to fulfill their duties. Accountability must therefore be the main quandary. However, other than the office of district attorney, the county sheriff is the only law enforcement chief administrative officer which may be replaced every four years by a mere swipe of the fingers of the voters of this Commonwealth.

It is beyond my comprehension why anyone would be opposed to the restoration of arrest and investigative powers with which elected sheriffs and deputy sheriffs of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania were entrusted for more than two hundred years. If, as the County Commissioners' Association of Pennsylvania implies, it is because of county budgetary restraints and there is a worry of bloated payrolls in the office of sheriff, then the commissioners of the afflicted county are weak and ineffective and need to be replaced. Maybe the District Attorneys' Association makes a better argument in hiring county detectives; however they use many of the same resources and tax dollars as the sheriffs

and also have a four year election cycle. Thus, the claim of the various police organizations must be true and sheriffs and their deputies must not have adequate training. However, Pennsylvania State University and PCCD have developed and implemented a vigorous and comprehensive training program for deputy sheriffs, and even if that is not sufficient, many sheriff deputies are former police officers and have completed an Act 120 training regiment. It seems that these arguments are moot and, unfortunately, the groups opposing House Bill 2585 are opportunistic and are looking to seize more power, influence and resources for themselves while throwing the citizens of our Commonwealth into the clutches of criminals.

My fellow Commissioners of Montour County and I stand united with the Sheriff of Montour County and his deputies in a quest to right a wrong. I urge the members of this committee to see past the propaganda regurgitated in contrary to House Bill 2585, which does not invest more power, but merely restores power of investigation and arrest to these highly trained and dedicated professionals. In rural Pennsylvania we need sheriffs and sheriffs' deputies in the war against crime. If counties are arms of the Commonwealth, and Harrisburg is the heart, then sheriffs are the hands which ensure the safety of your family and mine. Do not sever their ability to do their job.

Trevor S. Finn, Chairman

Montour County, Pennsylvania Board of Commissioners

**RESOLUTION R-7-13-10
IN SUPPORT OF HOUSE BILL 2585**

WHEREAS, the Montour County Board of Commissioners is greatly concerned with the safety and well-being of its citizens and desires that the best possible protection be available to them; and

WHEREAS, one-third of all Americans live in rural areas and ninety percent of all law enforcement agencies serve populations of less than 25,000 and, rural crime has increased in the last ten years; and

WHEREAS, Montour County is a rural area and of its 11 municipalities, only three are served by municipal police forces, leaving State Police protection to the remainder of the County; and

WHEREAS, the local Pennsylvania State Police encompasses a wide coverage area and limited personnel to cover the three counties in its jurisdiction; and

WHEREAS, the Montour County Sheriff and his Deputies have consistently participated in law enforcement efforts to keep Montour County a safe place to live, work and raise a family; and

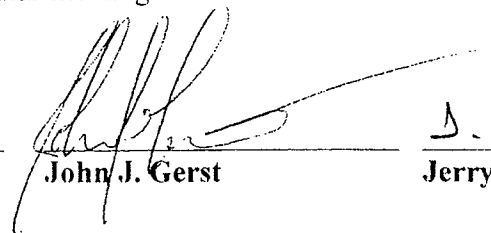
WHEREAS, the Montour County Sheriff and his Deputy Sheriffs possess training and skills commensurate with other law enforcement personnel but are prohibited by antiquated provisions of the Second Class County Code from performing duties of a municipal police officer; and

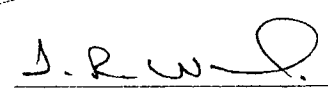
WHEREAS House Bill 2585 would restore those powers to Pennsylvania's Sheriffs and Deputies and thereby increase protection to citizens of the Commonwealth;

NOW, THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED that the Board of Commissioners of the County of Montour, Pennsylvania, do hereby support passage of House Bill 2585, restoring full police powers to the Commonwealth's Sheriffs and Deputy Sheriffs.

Duly adopted at a regular meeting of the Commissioners of Montour County this 13th day of July, 2010.


Trevor S. Finn, Chairman


John J. Gerst


Jerry R. Ward

SEAL

BY: 
Holly A. Brandon, Chief Clerk