

HB2585

Sponsor: Rep. Belfanti

Committee: Labor Relations

HB2585 would provide law enforcement powers and authority to sheriffs and deputy sheriffs.

Testimony:

Andrew J. Krahe, Co-Principal
Harbor Creek High School

September 9, 2010
Erie County Court House

The Harbor Creek School District is fortunate enough to be entering its **ninth** year of a partnership with the Erie County Sheriff's Department, which has brought a school resource officer (SRO) into the school district. This program has developed into a true asset for the entire district and our community. This program is one that is extremely valuable to the township residents, school faculty and staff, and most importantly the students.

Harborcreek Township does not have a municipal or independent police department and relies solely on the services of the Pennsylvania State Police. Although they have been very supportive and cooperative with the school district, the Pennsylvania State Police have the burden of being the primary law enforcement agency for the majority of the rural Erie County area, and simply cannot be everywhere at every moment.

The Erie County Sheriff's Department has worked continually with the Harbor Creek School District to develop a fully integrated and successful SRO program. Our school resource officer has been much more than just a 'police officer in the building'; he has been a **multifaceted resource** for the school district. The SRO program has provided us with an excellent liaison to law enforcement agencies; fire and EMS personnel; the District Attorney's office; the Office of Children and Youth; and juvenile probation.

Having a school resource officer, not only helps the school deal with outside agencies, but it has further enhanced the daily operations of our school buildings. Our SRO has conducted many classroom presentations from kindergarten through 12th grade. These activities have included drug/alcohol awareness, personal health and safety, and an understanding of law enforcement career and opportunities. He has also assisted the administration and faculty by **coordinating the school district's comprehensive safe school plan, responding to school-wide emergencies and conducting several investigations**. The SRO has also worked closely with the student body by helping them through **individual crises, personal and peer issues, especially those dealing with harassment and drug and alcohol issues**. Regardless of the circumstances, our SRO has always had a calming effect, which brings out the best in any individual or situation.

It is that interaction between our SRO and the students that has proven to be the most beneficial part of this program. The students have an excellent rapport with our SRO and feel very comfortable with confiding in him regularly. His constant accessibility and willingness to assist them with **school or personal situations and their day-to-day safety are comforting none the less**. Over the past nine years, students have shared information and details with our SRO that has proven valuable, when shared with other law enforcement agencies, on several investigations involving drugs, alcohol, theft, vandalism, and overall community safety.

The SRO program has proven to be the **most valuable student-oriented program** I have been associated with in my 17 years of education.

I believe that by providing law enforcement powers and authority to sheriffs and deputy sheriffs, House Bill #2585 would not only further **support these police officers**, it would also **increase the opportunities for additional SRO programs** in other school districts across the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

Under this proposed legislation, sheriffs would be able to serve on a variety of **task forces** at the federal, state, and local level; **exercise the authority and power** provided to all other municipal law enforcement agencies; as well as **enter cooperative law enforcement agreements**, regarding mutual aid, with those same agencies. These powers and duties would prove valuable for the sheriffs and deputy sheriffs and especially the countless adults and children they serve and protect throughout Pennsylvania.

I can safely say that on behalf of the **285** faculty and staff and most importantly on behalf of the **1,998** students of the Harbor Creek School District, please show your support of House Bill #2585 and provide full law enforcement powers and authority to sheriffs and deputy sheriffs of Pennsylvania.