

House Hearing on Prison Closures Testimony
Secretary John E. Wetzel
PA Department of Corrections
February 13, 2013

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the opening of SCI-Benner Township (BEN) and simultaneous closing of SCI-Greensburg (GRE) and SCI-Cresson (CRE).

As I am sure you can appreciate, this is a very challenging time within the Department. In the past decade, PA has had one of the fastest growing prison systems in the country. While most states were reducing population, we continued to grow. We grew to a point where the cost of "business as usual" has increased to \$100,000,000 per year. In other words, our "cost to carry", with contractual raises, benefits, pensions, and contracted increases with vendors, yields a significant financial increase every year. At the same time, we have a strong team of dedicated professionals, so as we endeavor to reduce costs, we also have a responsibility to them to continue to provide a safe environment for them, and ensure that we mitigate any negative impacts (such as relocation) to the extent possible.

Fortunately, with the partnership of the General Assembly, we were able to pass a significant Corrections Reform Package in two bills, SB100 and HB135, both passing unanimously. (You'll see the fiscal note in the data package). These bills, coupled with improvements to internal processes, have put us on the path that most states have taken; that is a path to see significant population decreases. In the last 6 months of 2012, we saw a reduction of over 500 inmates, consistent with the projections included in the fiscal notes.

These facts, and the population projections (also included), led by the PCCD, required that this fall we review the assumption that SCI-BEN was to be used as a capacity expansion, and consider it as a capacity replacement.

It is important to note that the DOC budget allocation has been predicated on these population projections for as long as the projections have been done. The projections process includes looking at legislation, sentencing data, parole data, DOC data and crime data to include trends, and then project population into the future.

Given the projections, utilizing the nearly completed SCI-BEN as a replacement for older, more expensive capacity, was the only financially responsible choice. In early December, that decision was made.

The next decision was timing. Several things went into this. In speaking to many Corrections Directors across the country, the consistent theme was that these closings usually were timed within the next budget cycle, making June 30th the most appropriate date. The time between announcement and closure varied with a low of 60 days and a high of over a year. In our case, early January would provide approximately 6 months, allowing ample time to meet with all affected unions, go through the surveying process to place staff, get staff trained on SCI-BEN, and get the inmates transferred.

SCI-BEN is built for 2000 inmates; however, we have a couple of empty housing units that provide an additional 450 beds. We wanted to identify approximately 2400 beds to take off line which would yield the biggest savings, and from a location standpoint, give us the best shot to relocate staff as close to home as possible. Per diem is a measure we use to compare the cost of facilities regardless of size, so we listed each facility where the per diem exceeded 100 dollars per day, and that was the list to work from (in packet).

SCI-GRE is historically our most expensive non-specialty facility. We did not have any specialties there that could not be replaced elsewhere and it is located within 60 miles of 6 facilities.

SCI-CRE is on the list of those facilities over 100 dollars. It also is a very staff intensive facility, utilizing 500 staff members for 1400 inmates (only 60 less than will be required to operate SCI-BEN with 700 more inmates). The special functions (MHU/SSNU) could be replaced at SCI-BEN and SCI-Rockview. The fact that it's 1400 inmates maximizes the savings and its location made it one of the closest facilities to SCI-BEN, and is also within 60 miles of 9 facilities.

After securing side letters from the various affected bargaining units, we have made good progress in placing staff at various facilities (included in packet). We've been able to create more positions at local facilities after identifying upcoming retirements, and have also created opportunities for employees who are unable to be placed at their first choice, making it quite likely that they will get back to their first choice within the next 3 years. Once we are completely through the first phase of placements, we will reassess where there are unmet needs, and determine how to address them.

Clearly, removing an approximately 50M enterprise from a community will have an economic impact. This is unavoidable if the goal is to reduce spending in Corrections. To emphasize, it is impossible to both reduce spending in Corrections and not have an initial impact locally. So our responsibility is to ensure we (as an Administration) are in a posture to provide

assistance for the affected communities to quickly begin identifying re-use. For that reason, we put together rapid response teams, led by Deputy Chief of Staff Chris Abruzzo, which include staff from DGS, DCED and L&I to work with local officials and mitigate the impact.

There has obviously been much attention as to the timing of the announcement. In looking back, the decision to notify legislators in advance of staff was an error as it should have been done simultaneously.

However, as to the overall timeline, not only is it appropriate, it was truly the only responsible approach. As public servants, we have a duty to ensure we are acting in the best interest of the citizens of the Commonwealth. When circumstances change that have the potential to save significant dollars, we have an obligation to be responsive to those changes. To do otherwise would be irresponsible. When the legislation passed and there was both a subsequent reduction in population with a projected continued decrease, it required this decision.

Type Employment	# of Employees	# of Positions Posted/Available	Offers Pending Acceptance	Accepted	Rejected Job Offer	No bid rec'd or no placement available
AFSCME	84	185	3	63	2	13
PSSU	38	77	0	31	0	5
OPEIU	3	3	0	3	0	0
SEIU	21	30	16	1*	1	3
FOSCEP	2	3	1	1	0	0
PDA	2	Placed w/o posting	1	1	0	0
Civil Service Managers	75	N/A – used the surveys for reassignments	1**	34	0	0
PSCOA	591	1033	300 Reassignments have been determined and the remainder are pending completion			
CIVEA	22	45	2	16	0	4

*PRN Nurse

**12 Due to Civil Service procedure requirements, CO3s are being interviewed for 5 vacancies. Those not selected will go into Round 2 of the reassignment process. All CO4s have been placed. The majority of the employees are receiving their first choice of location. Placements to date have been to the employee's current job title. If the employee's current job title is not available, which may be the situation for a few employees, the employee will be eligible for another position. If that would occur, the employee would be provided a furlough letter in order to maintain their Civil Service rights back to the current job title if a vacancy occurs in the next year.