



**OFFICE OF THE DISTRICT ATTORNEY  
BUCKS COUNTY COURTHOUSE  
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**TESTIMONY SUPPORTING HOUSE BILL NO. 1240, SESSION OF 2015**

**Intro:** Matt Weintraub, Bucks County District Attorney's Chief of Prosecution.

**Description of Don Tollefson and his crimes** – Don Tollefson was a beloved Philadelphia area sports personality for over 20 years. He used his regional celebrity to establish a charity called “Winning Ways.” The problem was that this charity was not properly registered with the state, and thus he was able to get away with defrauding hundreds of people over the years of hundreds of thousands of dollars. In essence, Tollefson would piggy back onto a legitimate charity like the Brad Fox Foundation, which benefits the families of slain police officers. He would then “sell” sports trips to Eagles road games and the like for incredibly low prices. His claim was that the money would then be split between the sponsoring charity, his charity, and to pay for the sports trip package. So for example, a donor could donate \$500, with part of the proceeds going to Brad Fox Foundation, part going to Winning Ways, and the rest going to 2 tickets to an away Eagles game, including hotel and airfare. It sounded too good to be true, and it was, but Tollefson conned people into believing it because they trusted him.

**Outline of the investigation** – the wheels fell of the fraud train for Tollefson when people started complaining about not getting their sports trips after the Brad Fox Foundation fundraiser in Warminster, PA, on April 6, 2013. This triggered an investigation by the Warminster Township PD, and a request through the media for victims to contact that PD with their complaints. This started the avalanche. We were overwhelmed with hundreds of victim complaints spanning years. Tollefson was arrested for theft and violation of the PA Charity laws. Warminster Detective John Bonargo teamed up with Department of State Agent Drew Koser to gather all of the voluminous bank records generated by Tollefson as he laundered his money in an elaborate Ponzi scheme. At first he was robbing Peter to pay Paul, but as he needed more money to live on after his legitimate sources of income dried up, he began robbing Peter and Paul to pay himself.

**Outline of the prosecution and Tollefson's defense** – This fraud case went to trial last year. during the trial, Tollefson claimed that he never intended to steal the money from these people or these charities that he claimed to help. Rather he claimed that he fell on hard times, and could no longer fulfill his promises of dream sports vacations combined with charitable donations. But the real facts belied his falsehoods. Sometimes he would shamelessly siphon money from his “charity” bank account right into his own personal accounts, with no legitimate accounting practices in place. Many times, he brazenly skipped even this pretense, and use the “charity” funds to pay for his own personal expenses, such as doggie day care, pet grooming, and pet supplies. Sometimes he just cashed the charitable checks and pocketed the money.



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**Limitations of Department of State's investigation** – Department of State Agent Drew Koser did a fantastic job in this investigation. He was limited however to a reactive investigation, joining Warminster Police Department's investigation once it began. A better approach would be to increase funding to the PA State Department so that they can proactively seek these violators out to stop them before they can defraud people and other charities out of their cash and donations.

**This Bill would help to eliminate limitations on Department of State** – Even at trial time, our office had to pay the bill to have Agent Koser stay at a hotel so that he could attend the trial every day. I understand that this was one of the department's biggest cases of the year. We were happy to do it, but it would make sense for the Department to have funds to allow for this anticipated ancillary cost of prosecution and preparation.

**This Bill would close loopholes in the current charity law** – People are very generous, and trusting, when it comes to charitable giving. If we voted to support a charity like the Brad Fox Foundation right now, I'm sure the vote would be unanimous in favor of it. The problem is that there are crooks like Don Tollefson who prey on these generous and trusting people for their own criminal gain. The donors lose, the charities lose, and public trust is eroded, which effects future giving for years. This type of fraud DOES happen, in many ways. The Department of State did a great job in this case, but with more funding, as would be derived from Representative Marguerite Quinn's bill, the State Department would be able to go after more law breakers, would be able to actively investigate suspected violators before they have an opportunity to amass a fortune in stolen donations over many years, and even to proactively educate our generous constituents about what questions to ask before they give.