

TESTIMONY OF JEFFREY IMBODEN
BOARD MEMBER
PENNSYLVANIA BOARD OF PROBATION AND PAROLE

I have spent 38 years in the criminal justice system; 25 years at the State level as a Parole Agent and a Parole Board Member and 12 years at the County level as a Probation Officer and as Chief County Probation Officer. Having this diverse experience has allowed me to see parole and corrections from all different sides.

This attempt to merge these two departments is not unprecedented. In fact, this is the fourth time in my career it has been considered. There's a reason why it hasn't succeeded before. This is because it is not in Pennsylvanian's best interest. The reason for blocking this move have remained consistent throughout the different administrations.

1. Public Safety
2. Public Safety
3. Public Safety

This tidal wave first hit in 1990 after SCI Camp Hill burned for 3 days. The end result of that paradigm shift was a rise in the crime rate and an increase in the number of victims in the community, culminating in the pardon of Reginald McFadden, the release of Robert "Mudman" Simon and Governor Ridge's "Midnight Sessions on Crime".

A checks and balances system is aggravating, frustrating, sometimes time consuming, but necessary. The Parole Board and the Department of Corrections have been banging heads for decades and that's good for Pennsylvania. Similar in many ways to the three branches of government no one agency should have too much power.

Since the imposition of Act 122, our "Convicted Parole Violator" rate has risen 18%. That reflects state parolees who have committed new crimes in the community and harmed more victims. Our absconder (fugitive) numbers are growing at an alarming rate. History shows that taking too liberal or too conservative an approach when dealing with this population always ends in disaster. Prison overcrowding is a national problem but the states that have had the most dramatic reduction in prison population have achieved this through a revision in sentencing issues not parole issues.

In 2008 after the tragic shooting of a police officer in Philadelphia by a state parolee, Governor Rendell declared a moratorium on parole. Dr. John Goldkamp, from Temple University, was brought in as a consultant to the Board. His first words to the Board when he first met with us were, "I have no political agenda" and he didn't. When he testified in front of the Senate Judiciary Committee he told them that the Board does a good job in both decision making and supervision. One of the Senators asked him what should Pennsylvania do to address this situation. He responded, "Don't over-react". Later, another Senator asked him what other states have done with parole in similar situations. He responded, "Over-reacted".

This Board, this Agency, has been around since the Parole Act of 1941. It has weathered many a political storm and remained independent.

For public safety reasons, it should remain so.