

**Testimony of
Michael L. Green, Chairman
Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole
Regarding SB 859 PN 1421
December 7, 2015**

Thank you Chairman Marsico, Chairman Petrarca, and members of the House Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to state my views regarding Senate Bill 859 which proposes to merge the Board of Probation and Parole with the Department of Corrections to form a new agency – the Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation.

I have been a member of the board since 2003 and was appointed chairman in October 2015. I had previously served as acting chairman during the Rendell Administration. I have over 40 years of experience in probation and parole serving both at the county and state level. My views on the benefits of merging correctional/rehabilitative functions while maintaining independent discretionary decision making has evolved over time.

Public safety is always the first concern of anyone in criminal justice, especially in parole. One of the most critical concerns is having enough parole agents on the streets to adequately supervise offenders with the resources necessary to provide these offenders with help where it is needed to promote successful reintegration to society. As of October 31, 2015, our 521 agents were supervising 41,252 parolees and carrying an average caseload in the high 70s.

Our agents do an excellent job of supervising parolees given the time and resources available. This is exemplified by the fact that even though the parole population has increased by 5,270 offenders since June of 2012 the percentage of the state sentenced population of technical parole violators is only .90% and the percentage of the state sentenced population that are convicted parole violators is .81%. In other words, less than two percent of the state sentenced population is parole violators.

Over the past decade, the recidivism rate of parolees has decreased from 52% in 2005 to 44% in 2015. This does not include arrests, only returns to prison. However, the last two years have seen this rate increase slightly from its 2012 low of 40% to 44%. It is also noted that the parole caseload grew from 35,000 in 2012 to 40,400 in 2015. However, our agent complement did not keep pace with this growth. (Note: Caseload of 30,937 (2008) to 40,636 (2014-15), or 31% growth; agent complement of 489 (2008) to 551 (2014-15), or 12.7% growth.)

What does this have to do with the proposed merger?

The merger will allow us to increase the number of agents on the street. That means increased public safety and enhanced reentry supervision and services!

Decreased average caseloads will also allow for expanded specialty caseloads such as offenders with mental health issues, sex offenders, and high risk offenders. Combined with the creation of administrative caseloads for very low risk parolees, the average street agent caseload can be reduced per agent. This would be a major win for our communities.

In addition, the proposed integration of field supervision with the community corrections will allow agents access to expanded treatment resources while eliminating interagency delays.

These enhancements would be paid for by eliminating administrative redundancy, reducing community corrections bed contracts, and eliminating funding for some vacancies. Secretary Wetzel can provide further detail on the funds movement.

The current version of the bill provides for insulating the board from these concerns. Maintaining the board as being responsible only to the governor and the Senate for appointment and funding support separates them from influence by the department regarding prison population. The board will maintain its independence in its decision making under the proposed merger.

With regard to parole decision making, the proposed plan retains the board's role as an independent discretionary parole board. The board has a recognized track record on continuous

improvement utilizing best practices with regard to its parole guidelines, actuarial measures and professional development. This has maintained quality public safety in parole reentry decisions.

In closing, I believe the parole board and our agents have done a great job over the years and implemented many new innovations. I believe we have an opportunity to build on these achievements through heightened resources, enhanced coordination and organizational focus on reentry. The current proposed program offers an opportunity for continuous improvement while maintaining public safety.

Thank you again Chairman Marsico, Chairman Petrarca, and members of the House Judiciary Committee for this opportunity to state my views regarding Senate Bill 859.



**Testimony of
Ed Marsico
Dauphin County District Attorney
Legislative Chair, Pennsylvania District Attorneys Association**

**David Freed
Cumberland County District Attorney
President, Pennsylvania District Attorneys Institute**

**Before the House Judiciary Committee
Regarding Senate Bill 859**

**December 7, 2015
Harrisburg, PA**