

2016-2017 BUDGET REQUEST

PENNSYLVANIA STATE POLICE

STATEMENT TO HOUSE APPROPRIATIONS COMMITTEE

MARCH 1, 2016



Good afternoon Chairman Adolph, Chairman Markosek and members of the House Appropriations Committee. I am Colonel Tyree Blocker, Commissioner of the Pennsylvania State Police (PSP). With me today is the Acting Deputy Commissioner of Operations, Major William Horgas, Deputy Commissioner of Administration and Professional Responsibility, Lt. Col. Lisa Christie, Deputy Commissioner of Staff, Lt. Col. Stephen Bucar, and the Director of the PSP Bureau of Staff Services, Mr. Marc Infantino.

Over the past year and a half, the actions and practices of law enforcement agencies have come under intense public scrutiny. Nationally, public protests over police related incidents have become almost commonplace. Whether those events were occurring in Ferguson, New York City, Baltimore or Chicago, they were reflective of a significant portion of those communities expressing dissatisfaction, suspicion, and distrust with their law enforcement providers. I am pleased to note that the PSP has largely remained above such public criticism and continues to enjoy broad based support from the citizens and guests of this Commonwealth. We could not enjoy this support without the strong backing and commitment to public safety displayed by Governor Wolf and members of the General Assembly. That support has not gone unnoticed, and I would like to express my sincere gratitude.

The PSP is one of the most comprehensive providers of police services in the country. We are the 10th largest police department in the nation and 3rd largest internationally accredited law enforcement agency in the world. Currently, we patrol

82 percent of the land area in the state and 60 percent of the Commonwealth's highways, including all of the interstates. We provide either full-time or part-time police protection to one in four Pennsylvanians. Last year, Troopers made over 73,000 criminal arrests and issued over a half million traffic citations. Troopers also made over 17,300 arrests for driving under the influence of alcohol or drugs. The demand for PSP services has grown considerably over the years. For example, last year, members of the PSP played a prominent role in planning and providing security in and around Philadelphia during the papal visit which occurred in September. That event was one of the largest security undertakings in our nation's history and by all accounts was a successful venture. In a few short months, the PSP will again play an integral role in a national event when we deploy our members to Philadelphia for the Democratic National Convention.

As in past budgetary cycles, the funding of regularly occurring Cadet classes remains a primary need of the PSP. I must acknowledge the diligent work of this committee and the General Assembly in recognizing and supporting our fiscal needs in the past. While the PSP has received funding for multiple Cadet classes during the last few years, there remains uncertainty over our ability to maintain adequate staffing levels into the future. There is the possibility that our agency will be hit with a significant wave of retirements. Presently, about 25 percent of our enlisted members are eligible to retire. It is very difficult to predict with any precision the number of those members that will choose to separate. The decision to retire is unique and highly personal, and remains an unknown variable.

As of February 19, 2016, there were 366 vacant enlisted positions within the PSP. We would like to thank Governor Wolf for his generous proposal to fund three cadet classes that would send 180 cadets through our training academy. With the graduation of our current and proposed cadet classes, our enlisted complement is poised to remain in excess of 4,500. We believe this number should be viewed as the "Public Safety Line" – a level that will greatly reduce the chance that public safety will suffer.

In addition to routine patrolling and solving crimes, the PSP provides a range of other services. Some of the most visible of these are the Sexual Offender Registry (Megan's Law), the State Crime Lab, the Special Emergency Response Team, the Pennsylvania Access to Criminal History (PATCH), and the Pennsylvania Instant Checks System (PICS). The safety and efficiency of Troopers and municipal police officers is greatly enhanced by unique elements within the Pennsylvania State Police. These specialty units are staffed by highly trained members of the Department, many of whom provide this service in addition to their primary function as Patrol or Criminal Investigation Unit members.

Our Clandestine Lab Response Team (CLRT) has the unenviable job of collecting evidence and conducting "clean-up" operations for all suspected illicit drug labs. In 2015, the team responded to over 300 incidents – almost triple the number of responses from just five years ago.

Illicit drugs remain a significant problem in the Commonwealth. The PSP has always taken a proactive and progressive role in disrupting the flow of drugs through the state. Take, for example, our Bureau of Criminal Investigation's "Safe Highways Initiative through Effective Law Enforcement and Detection" program, or SHIELD. The SHIELD Unit consists of three fulltime teams of Troopers which operate out of six different locations across the Commonwealth. The teams focus their efforts on the major interstates and highways throughout Pennsylvania. Last year, SHIELD Unit members conducted 4,609 traffic stops. As a result of their efforts, over \$118 million of contraband and illicit drugs were seized.

The epidemic of opioid abuse is particularly problematic. In 2015, our Troopers confiscated approximately 180 pounds of heroin with an estimated street value of \$61 million. However, we cannot arrest our way out of this problem. Treatment, Education and Prevention must be part of a multi-faceted approach to address this plague. Beginning in April of last year, all of our patrol vehicles were outfitted with Naloxone – the drug used to reverse the effect of opioids, especially in overdoses. Since implementing our Naloxone program, 14 of our fellow Pennsylvanians have been saved through our members' deployment of the drug. Additionally, the PSP provides presentations which have been developed for schools and community groups concerning drug trends and dangers.

Our Bureau of Criminal Investigation operates the Commonwealth's federally designated all-hazards fusion center, also known as the Pennsylvania Criminal Intelligence Center (PaCIC), which received nearly 1,500 tips associated with a wide variety of topics including those associated with suspected terrorism, drug dealers, and the whereabouts of fugitives. All of these tips were investigated by either members of the PSP or allied agencies. The Center is staffed by 40 analysts and supervisors along with representatives from a host of state and federal law enforcement agencies and all-hazards partners, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Department of Homeland Security. PaCIC received approximately 37,000 requests for information from federal, state, and local agencies, and as a result of those requests, our analysts completed over 52,000 products for these agencies, enhancing and furthering their investigations. The Center remains a national model of information sharing by providing law enforcement agencies archived public information, situational awareness reports, investigative material, and criminal information. Recently, PaCIC was honored by the National Fusion Center Association and received the 2015 Fusion Center of the Year Award in recognition of the exceptional service provided. Moreover, PaCIC had the distinction of being the only fusion center in the nation to receive three total awards at the annual National Fusion Center Association ceremony this past November.

In 2015, our PATCH Unit set a record by receiving and responding to 2,407,960 requests. That number represents 1,000,000 more requests over the previous benchmark that occurred in 2014. The most likely reason for the spike is due to the recent overhaul of the state's child protective services law and its expansion of

background check requirements for those who regularly interact with children. Despite the glut of PATCH requests, our personnel assigned to PATCH were up to the challenge and worked conscientiously to ensure backlogs and turnaround times remained reasonable.

Last year, PICS conducted nearly 1,000,000 gun background checks. In 2015, PICS referred over 4,600 cases to PSP troops and municipal police departments for investigation of potential violations of the Pennsylvania Uniform Firearms Act that came to light during the background check process. As of now, over 2,000 of those referrals are being prosecuted.

While the PSP is renowned for adopting cutting edge law enforcement technologies, the agency lagged behind many of our law enforcement partners in the use of a modern computerized reporting system. Since the founding of the PSP in 1905, we have captured investigative information using pen and paper. While this process served the Department well for much of its existence, it became evident that if the Department was committed to 21st century policing, we needed to modernize. We are currently in the process of rolling out a state-of-the-art Records Management System which is able to capture and share information from the originating call for PSP services throughout the lifecycle of an investigation. This electronic capture and analysis of data will greatly enhance the investigative capabilities and efficiency of our personnel.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention the budgetary crossroads we are at and the concern it has created for me. Governor Wolf has made it clear that there are two roads moving forward. Depending on the path ultimately taken, public safety could be compromised. The PSP's budget is driven primarily by personnel costs, and cuts to PSP's budget could result in future Cadet classes being eliminated. In the event that occurs, the PSP's ability to provide quality services at a level expected and deserved by the citizens will be negatively impacted. Additionally, cuts to programs such as the statewide radio system could compromise Trooper safety. I know you will be cognizant of the concerns as you work through this challenging process.

I am extremely proud to once again be part of what I believe is the finest law enforcement agency in the nation. The enlisted men and women of the PSP and our civilian support staff are a special breed of people, and I am honored to serve as their Commissioner. Thank you for allowing me to address your committee. I will be pleased to take any questions you may have.