

**Pennsylvania Board of Probation and Parole**

**Testimony of Leo L. Dunn, Chairman**

**House Appropriations Committee**

**February 27, 2018**

Good morning, Chairman Saylor, Chairman Markosek, and distinguished members of the House appropriations committee. Thank you for the opportunity to appear before you today to discuss the probation and parole budget request for FY 2018-19.

For the coming year, the agency is requesting increased funding to support mandated contractual increases and cost-to-carry expenses. That increase will allow the agency to serve Pennsylvania's growing parole eligible population and expand its work on making better paroling decisions.

I am certain that the merits of the governor's proposal will be recognized and discussed in due course. In the current fiscal year, the budget for probation and parole is \$11.285 million. This figure includes essential funding for the Board, which includes the hearing examiner office and office of board secretary.

In recent years, the Board has made serious strides towards increased efficiency and improved outcomes. The MOU of October 19, 2017 has helped decrease the inefficiency and duplicative nature of some job functions that were completed by employees of both agencies. In 2012, the General Assembly unanimously passed the first phase of the Justice Reinvestment Initiatives (JRI). The agency will continue to work with the legislature to pass common-sense reforms. This is in line with Governor Wolf's emphasis on creating a "government that works" for all Pennsylvanians.

The Board has been participating in many technology initiatives during the past year that will make the agency more efficient and produce cost savings. Onbase is the agency's electronic file initiative. My predecessors have discussed the coming implementation of Onbase for a number of years, but I am proud to say that we fully implemented Onbase for all hearings in September 2016 and we completed all file conversions by December 31, 2017. The board ended FY 2015-16 with a surplus of \$7.3 million which was used in large part to pay for the up-front costs of converting our files to Onbase. Onbase will eliminate a majority of the agency's annual mailing costs as well as roughly 85% of its annual paper needs. This initiative, a part of the Governor's Office of Transformation, Innovation, Modernization and Efficiency, will result in a FY 2017-18 savings of \$268,000, and will save approximately \$1,000,000 in total over the next four years. Additionally, in FY 2016-17 we ended with a surplus of \$8.8 million that was used to offset the cost of the current training academy class, and to complete the file conversion.

**Focusing on Decision Making**

On October 19, 2017 the board of probation and parole entered in to an MOU with the department of corrections to begin the process of merging portions of the two agencies. While this is an ongoing process, to date the transition has been smooth and beneficial to both agencies. Combining parole supervision with community corrections has proven successful especially when tied to institutional programming. It is instrumental to success that state

institutional staff, community corrections staff, parole supervision staff and county probation staff work together based on the same approach.

Since the signing the MOU, the Board has been able to focus its attention solely on the decision making process. Along with our colleagues at the department of corrections, we have started reviewing the process by which we assess inmates, and we hope to transition to a 4<sup>th</sup> generation assessment tool by the end of 2019. Along with the sentencing commission, we are in the process of making three substantive updates to the process of paroling individuals. Updating the parole guidelines will allow us to better focus on making decisions more consistent and understandable to the public. We are also working to update the parole decisional instrument itself which will create a more efficient process internally. Lastly, we are working to update and clarify the conditions of parole that we impose upon inmates who are granted parole.

The Board of Probation and Parole looks forward to further unifying operations with our colleagues at the department of corrections. I have made it a personal priority to help facilitate that unification. Unifying the two agencies, while keeping independent the decisions on whether parole is granted or denied, will ensure that all staff work towards the same goal, and do so under unified direction.

I am optimistic that the increased opportunities to reduce recidivism, by using evidence-based practices to change criminal behavior, will allow us to continue to enhance public safety. I am encouraged by Governor Wolf's leadership in this area, and share the governor's belief that a safer, more united Pennsylvania is a better Pennsylvania.

Chairman Saylor, Chairman Markosek, and honorable committee members, thank you for your time and consideration of these additional resources.