

**Testimony of
Harry Dannehower, Legislative Liaison
Pennsylvania State Troopers Association (PSTA)
Pennsylvania House
State Government Committee**

May 23, 2018

Thank you Chairman Metcalfe and Chairman Bradford, as well as all members of this committee for sharing in our efforts to make Pennsylvania a safer place for our families. We appreciate the opportunity to work with you on an issue that is important to the safety and security of 12 million Pennsylvanians.

My name is Harry Dannehower, and I am proud to serve as Legislative Liaison of the Pennsylvania State Troopers Association (PSTA). The PSTA represents over 4,300 active men and women who have dedicated their lives to proudly serving their neighbors, relatives and communities as Pennsylvania State Troopers. The PSTA is committed to enhancing the ability and resources of the Pennsylvania State Police to handle the ever-increasing duties placed on our department. While we recognize the great importance of SB 748, unfortunately it was not possible to be present for this hearing, so please accept the following as my remarks on this important issue.

Recently communities that have historically had a State Police station have been caught by surprise when the department announced that stations in Lancaster and Phillipsburg were closing as active Trooper locations. In both cases the decision was apparently made with little to no public input or consultation with other agencies or governmental units concerned with public safety, such as the District Attorney, County Commissioners, or other law enforcement agencies that relied on the personnel and resources of the local station.

We support SB 748 as a prudent course of action, that insures decisions impacting public safety are not made in a vacuum and that the decision to move forward with a closure can withstand the light of day. Such decisions should only be reached after careful deliberation of the impact upon the local community, other law enforcement agencies, and what measures can be implemented to insure adverse impacts are mitigated to the greatest extent possible. Such decisions should never be viewed only from the perspective of cost reduction or the expiration of a lease.

We believe the following critical questions must be fully vetted with the host community, and other law enforcement agencies which may be impacted.

- What is the improvement to public safety and net savings, if any, to justify closing of a station?
- What is the impact on trooper efficiency in terms of response times, travel to a new station location for duty assignments or to obtain a patrol vehicle, the securing of evidence, or the holding of a suspect?

- If a station is closed in a county in your legislative district, and a constituent arrives at that former station with an emergency, what is the travel time to the next closest location they can go to for assistance?
- How much will it cost to educate the general public about the closure of the barracks and where alternative law enforcement assistance is located?

Our stations are frequently used by your constituents as locations to exchange child custody in contentious family arrangements, as a shelter from a potentially harmful domestic disturbance, or to report suspicious activity.

We often hear of budget issues leading to some of the decisions that have been made in our department. At the end of the day, public safety has to be about more than saving money. It's an old saying you hear time and time again, but if our actions – as police officers, public servants, elected officials and policymakers – save even one life, well then our efforts are worth it.

SB 748 is about making sure tough questions are raised and answered before final decisions are made that may adversely impact your constituents' safety. Such decisions cannot be about money alone.

As you know, many state police stations are integral parts of their communities and needed 24 hours a day. People have grown accustomed to the Pennsylvania State Police always being in their community, ready to help.

We realize that with enhanced technology, new roadways, significant populations shifts, or the establishment or closure of a local or regional police agency our department cannot remain a stagnant entity. It must evolve with the changing nature of our communities and the demands placed upon modern policing.

Are there ways to offset the diminished presence of Troopers within your community should the State Police station be closed, Yes. Many states have assigned vehicles for each patrol trooper, so their patrol car is parked outside their home, enabling quicker response time and less frequent need to report to a central location, while providing for greater efficiency for initiating patrols within their assigned area. Further the presence of patrol cars within communities also conveys a greater sense of safety for communities.

It is important to note that SB 748 does not prevent the closing of a station, but it does make sure that such decisions are thoroughly and carefully vetted. That the impacted communities, other law enforcement entities, and the public are provided an opportunity to express their concerns and thoughts relative to a potential closure, before it happens, not after the fact.

Thank you for your consideration of our support for SB 748 and we urge you to report this important legislation from committee and to support efforts to bring it before the full House for consideration.