



**Testimony Submitted to the PA House Transportation Committee Regarding Vendor-
Designed Registration Plates**

Chairman Hennessey, Chairman Carroll, and members of the Transportation Committee, thank you for giving the Department the opportunity to provide testimony in regard to the proposed legislation that would privatize certain elements of the manufacturing of specific license plate designs in the Commonwealth. Our goal is to share with you today the history the Department has with the manufacturing of license plates, including vanity and specialty plates, our strong partnership with PennDOT and the value that this vocation has had on our incarcerated individuals.

The department has a long-standing history in the development and production of license plates for the commonwealth dating back to 1924 and holding strong even through the COVID-19 pandemic. When the General Assembly created the Department of Public Welfare in 1921, prison industries, now Correctional Industries (CI), was placed within the Bureau of Restoration. Under the law, the Bureau was mandated to sell manufactured articles solely to government institutions maintained by tax monies, and the reorganization of 1921 required that institutions under the Department of Public Welfare purchase state inmate products. That purchasing requirement was critical to the success of CI and the partnership has withstood the test of time with demonstrated growth and efficiency. At the height of the pandemic, our Correctional Industries shops operated at a limited capacity, but were able to produce 14,361 specialty and vanity license plates. Over our last fiscal year, CI produced 21,867 specialty and vanity plates which is an increase of 13% over the last comparable year (2018/2019).

Correctional Industries receives all of its' funding from the revenue generated from the sale of goods that it manufactures (no tax payer dollars used) with buyers limited to non-profits and government agencies. License plate sales serve as the main funding stream for CI. Every cent earned goes back into the operation and also supports other CI programs that do not generate substantial revenue. Despite the tremendous work that is required to maintain operations, they have exceeded expectations. Their work was recently highlighted through the Governor's Award for Excellence. That award recognizes commonwealth employees for exemplary job performance that reflects initiative, leadership, innovation and outstanding public service. They received that recognition for the impact they had on the commonwealth during the most challenging time this agency has ever seen. CI is also responsible for many of the repairs to PennDOT snow plows and the tens of thousands of cloth masks used in correctional facilities, nursing homes, and Commonwealth offices statewide.

Aside from the business and operational affects this proposed legislation would have, there is a critical human affect that may not have been considered by this body. There are currently 14 individuals who are employed to design and manufacture the vanity and specialty plates with potentially 57 others working in this area that may be impacted. Just as they would in the community, each incarcerated individual employed by CI must originally apply for these competitive positions. They are very carefully vetted and interviewed by staff, and if chosen, they are given the opportunity to learn real world skills in manufacturing under trained professionals. They are able to build and refine their work ethic in a safe environment. They are a part of a team where they work together to set and reach goals that award them real production incentives. The department prides itself on the benefits bestowed by this program while also

providing an annual 2.3 million license plates for a fair rate to PennDOT and Commonwealth customers.

Correctional Industries provides some of the highest paying positions in corrections employment due to the inmates' ability to earn significant production incentives. Earnings are deposited into the inmates account and are used to pay court costs, fines, and restitution. These funds incarcerated individuals to stay connected with their families, pay medical costs, and purchase what small comforts that are available to them in the prison setting.

This bill has the potential to negatively impact the department's ability to provide this employment opportunity and would invalidate the hard work of those staff and inmates working together on such critical skills for reentry. The department invites members of the Transportation Committee to visit our Correctional Industries license plate shop to learn more about our operations and hear first hand from staff and inmates on the positive impact this program has.