

Testimony Before the Senate Law and Justice Committee
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Good morning Chairman Rafferty and Chairman Logan. My name is Rick Sheetz, and I am the head of the Criminal Law Division within the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you regarding this important matter.

Pennsylvania State Troopers have a longstanding tradition of excellent service to the Commonwealth. Excellence, diligence and dedication to the people of Pennsylvania have become ethics for which they are widely recognized. Our office considers them to be our partners in ensuring safety and protection from criminal elements, and we have come to rely on their abilities and experience. The necessity of preserving that reliance, and the threat that the administration's civilianization plan poses, brings us before you today.

Clearly there are some positions and duties that do not require the aptitude of a Trooper. But the positions targeted by this plan raise concerns. For instance, positions dealing with the examination and management of fingerprint and ballistic evidence require the comprehensive knowledge of law enforcement procedures that are possessed by the Troopers. Civilianization of these positions would cause these law enforcement duties to be undertaken by a citizen without demonstrated proficiency in police operations, and without the vital field experience the Troopers in these positions currently possess. Finding qualified civilians to fill these positions may be difficult. Should these positions remain vacant, there will be a gap in the services provided by the Pennsylvania State

Police. Should the Office of Attorney General or a District Attorney then require these services, they will incur additional expenses.

Civilianization, as a concept, is not intrinsically bad. Permitting Troopers to focus on enforcement is a worthy goal. The efforts of Troopers should be concentrated on serving important law enforcement needs, and civilianization could release them from other tasks such as answering phones, receiving visitors and clerical duties. But when considering an approach to civilianization, great care must be taken so as not to compromise the Troopers' ability to operate in a capacity in which their law enforcement expertise is of critical need. The administration's strategy is likely to force such a compromise.

Troopers' keen understanding of the criminal justice process has proven invaluable in the court room. As prosecutors, we often rely on their competence when attempting to put criminals behind bars. The credibility and integrity that Troopers carry during witness testimony has been important for the successful prosecution of criminal trials. This is significant because the civilianization plan in question would force reliance on civilians in many cases for expert testimony concerning evidence or events. At best, this would hinder trials by forcing prosecutors to rely on witnesses with far less direct law enforcement experience. At worst, this may reduce the likelihood of winning convictions.

Another concern is the exacerbation of the Troopers' already significant manpower shortage. Troopers historically have been individuals who are devoted to the work of law

enforcement. As such, they tend to stay in their positions for many years. If civilians are to be placed in positions historically held by troopers, it is necessary to consider that these new employees would likely be more motivated by the promise of higher salaries in the private sector. Higher turnover of employees would add to the Troopers' ongoing struggle with personnel deficits.

Additionally, civilianization may increase financial burdens borne by the Troopers and the Commonwealth. If civilian employees are to be retained, it would be necessary to raise salaries to stay competitive with the private sector, inflating the public cost. The alternative is to be faced with higher turnover, the need to constantly train a new array of employees, and to shoulder a higher cost of providing the necessary training.

The stated goals of this civilianization plan are admirable: permitting Troopers to focus on safeguarding the citizenry while simultaneously reducing costs. But it is our concern that this particular strategy will have the direct opposite effects of inflating the financial burden on the Commonwealth, compounding existing manpower deficits, and most significantly, compromising the level of dedication and service Pennsylvanians expect and on which we have come to rely.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you this morning. I would be happy to take any questions you might have at this time.