

Testimony provided by:

State Police Lt. Joseph M. Bonenberger (retired)

Respectfully submitted to:

**Pennsylvania State Senate
Law and Justice Committee
Hon. John C. Rafferty, Jr., Chairman
Hon. Sean F. Logan, Democratic Chairman**

October 17, 2005

Good morning. My name is Joseph M. Bonenberger, and I'm here today to share my experiences about the value of maintaining troopers in our forensics labs. As a Trooper who retired after serving nearly 27 years in the Pennsylvania State Police – 21 in the lab as a document section expert, supervisor, and Assistant Director in the lab – I can tell you that any attempt to civilianize lab positions would be a big mistake.

As someone who has interacted with other agencies across the nation, including federal agencies, I can tell you, without hesitation, Pennsylvania State Police lab experts are considered the finest in our field. And there are only 250 document experts in the country. We have been requested to assist the states of Wyoming and New Jersey because of the lack of qualified document examiners. Frankly, others agencies are jealous at the type of experience and in-depth knowledge our Troopers bring to the job.

Troopers are ideal for these positions because many have already put several years in at crime scene investigation before they even begin their training. Now, contrast that with hiring a civilian who has just been taken off the street with little or no experience. There is no comparison. The Trooper has the experience, as to what is needed in an investigation.

Civilians won't know, for instance, that almost 50 percent of the document section harassment cases we handle end up pointing the finger at the supposed victim, who is actually the perpetrator.

It's also important to note that the state police doesn't just do its job on state cases. Local police work comprises about 70 percent of our time. Additionally, the document section has done cases for the DEA, FBI, and Postal Service, when timely prosecution has been a factor. Having our experts on the case and available to testify has become a key tool for local police, federal agencies, and prosecutors. Moving toward a less-experienced, civilian system will hurt everybody.

Thank you.

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