

STATEMENT BY
CORRECTIONS COMMISSIONER DAVID S. OWENS, JR.
TO THE SENATE JUDICIARY COMMITTEE

October 31, 1989

GOOD MORNING MR. CHAIRMAN AND MEMBERS OF THE COMMITTEE. I UNDERSTAND THAT THIS HEARING WAS SCHEDULED SOME TIME AGO TO CONTINUE YOUR EXAMINATION ON THE GROWING PROBLEM OF OVERCROWDING IN OUR STATE PRISON SYSTEM. AS YOU KNOW, THE GOVERNOR AND I SHARE YOUR CONCERN. THAT'S EXACTLY WHY WE'RE NOW ENGAGED IN THE MOST UNPRECEDENTED EXPANSION OF PRISON CAPACITY IN PENNSYLVANIA HISTORY. YET THE HUGE INCREASE IN DRUG-RELATED CRIMES, TOGETHER WITH TOUGH NEW MINIMUM SENTENCING LAWS MEAN THAT OUR CHALLENGE ONLY CONTINUES TO MOUNT.

CLEARLY, THE EVENTS OF RECENT DAYS AT THE STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT HUNTINGDON AND CAMP HILL PUT A NEW LIGHT ON THESE HEARINGS. BUT IT SHOULD BE JUST AS CLEAR THAT IT'S FAR TOO EARLY FOR US TO BE IN A POSITION TO PROVIDE YOU WITH ANSWERS TO THE QUESTIONS YOU, ALONG WITH THE REST OF US, MAY ASK. WE CONTINUE TO DEAL WITH THE FALLOUT FROM LAST WEEK'S EVENTS AND THE INVESTIGATION INTO THEIR CAUSES IS ONLY NOW BEGINNING.

NONETHELESS, I'M GLAD TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITY TO PROVIDE YOU WITH A STATUS REPORT ON THE SITUATION AT CAMP HILL; ON THE RESULTS OF OUR EFFORTS TO RETAKE CONTROL OF THE FACILITY ON OCTOBER 26 AND 27 WITH THE MINIMUM POSSIBLE THREAT TO HUMAN LIFE; ON OUR CURRENT PLANS TO HOUSE THE DISPLACED CAMP HILL INMATES; AND ON OUR PROGRAM TO EXPAND THE CAPACITY OF OUR STATE PRISON SYSTEM BY SOME 50 PERCENT.

FIRST, LET ME GIVE YOU THE CURRENT SITUATION AT THE FACILITY:

TODAY, 1,820 INMATES ARE HOUSED AT SCI CAMP HILL . . . THIS NUMBER IS DOWN FROM THE 2,564 INMATES WHO HAD BEEN HOUSED THERE . . . AS OF 8 P.M. LAST NIGHT, ALL INMATES HAD BEEN REMOVED FROM THE PRISON YARD WHERE THEY WERE PLACED ON FRIDAY MORNING WHEN WE RETOOK CONTROL OF THE INSTITUTION.

CURRENTLY, INMATES ARE BEING HOUSED IN THE 828 CELLS WHICH REMAIN USABLE IN CELL BLOCKS A, B, D, E, F, AND K. WITHIN A WEEK TO 10 DAYS, WE EXPECT TO HAVE ANOTHER 445 USABLE CELLS IN G, H, AND J BLOCKS. THIS WILL GIVE US APPROXIMATELY 1,273 OF THE 1,414 CELLS ORIGINALLY AT THE INSTITUTION.

THERE HAVE BEEN AN AVERAGE OF 225 STATE POLICE TROOPERS ON HAND TO MAINTAIN SECURITY AT THE INSTITUTION. THE STATE POLICE WILL PROVIDE INCREASED SECURITY FOR THE PRISON AS LONG AS NECESSARY. ADDITIONAL CORRECTIONS STAFF HAVE ALSO BEEN CALLED IN TO HELP DURING THE EMERGENCY.

WE HAVE TRANSFERRED 744 INMATES TO STATE CORRECTIONAL FACILITIES AT PITTSBURGH, GRATERFORD, SMITHFIELD, MERCER AND WAYMART. BEGINNING TODAY, ANOTHER 800 INMATES ARE SCHEDULED TO BE TRANSFERRED ON A TEMPORARY BASIS TO THE FEDERAL PRISON SYSTEM. THESE TRANSFERS WILL TAKE PLACE OVER THE NEXT SEVERAL WEEKS. 250 INMATES WILL BE SENT TO THE FEDERAL FACILITY IN MCKEAN. ANOTHER 550 WILL BE TRANSFERRED TO THE FEDERAL PENITENTIARY IN LEWISBURG.

THIS ARRANGEMENT WITH THE FEDERAL BUREAU OF PRISONS WAS MADE POSSIBLE BY U.S. SENATORS ARLEN SPECTER AND JOHN HEINZ. I WOULD LIKE TO PUBLICLY THANK THESE GENTLEMEN FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE. WE ARE TRULY IN THEIR DEBT FOR THE TREMENDOUS HELP THEY HAVE PROVIDED IN THIS EMERGENCY.

AND NOW WE MOVE FORWARD: TO IDENTIFY AND PUNISH THOSE INMATES WHOSE CRIMINAL ACTS DESTROYED PROPERTY AND PUT INNOCENT LIVES IN DANGER;

TO PROMPTLY CRAFT A PLAN TO REPLACE THE LOST PRISON CELL CAPACITY AT CAMP HILL AND PROVIDE ADDITIONAL CELL SPACE THROUGHOUT OUR STATE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM ON AS FAST A TRACK AS POSSIBLE.

TO RELIEVE THE PRESSURE PLACED ON ALREADY OVERCROWDED FACILITIES BY THE TEMPORARY RELOCATION OF THE CAMP HILL PRISONERS.

ON SATURDAY, THE GOVERNOR RESTATED HIS SUPPORT FOR THE EARNED TIME LEGISLATION NOW BEFORE THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY WHICH HE, ALONG WITH OTHERS, HAVE ALREADY ENDORSED. AND WE'RE ALREADY CONSIDERING OTHER IDEAS DESIGNED TO REDUCE THE KIND OF PRISON OVERCAPACITY WHICH PREVAILS NOT ONLY HERE IN PENNSYLVANIA, BUT ACROSS OUR NATION.

YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT A FULL-SCALE CRIMINAL INVESTIGATION ALREADY BEGUN BY THE STATE POLICE WILL BE CARRIED FORWARD TO IDENTIFY THOSE INMATES WHO COMMITTED CRIMINAL ACTS SO THEY WILL BE PROSECUTED AND PUNISHED.

AT THE GOVERNOR'S DIRECTION, WE'RE NOW IN THE PROCESS OF DRAFTING A REPLACEMENT PLAN FOR THE LOST PRISON CELL CAPACITY AT CAMP HILL, WITH RECOMMENDATIONS TO BE MADE AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

I'VE ALSO BEEN DIRECTED TO UNDERTAKE AN IMMEDIATE REVIEW OF THE NEED FOR ADDITIONAL CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN THE STATE SYSTEM, WITH RECOMMENDATIONS ALSO TO BE PROVIDED AS SOON AS POSSIBLE.

AND THE GOVERNOR HAS DIRECTED ALL OF THE INVOLVED DEPARTMENTS OF STATE GOVERNMENT TO ACCELERATE AND GIVE URGENT PRIORITY TO THE PLANS AND PROPOSALS THAT HAVE ALREADY BEEN MADE FOR NEW PRISON CONSTRUCTION AND THE PROVISION OF ADDITIONAL CORRECTIONS OFFICERS IN THE STATE SYSTEM.

SOME OF THIS EFFORT MAY REQUIRE THE SUPPORT OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY AND I WOULD URGE THIS COMMITTEE TO LOOK FAVORABLY ON SUCH PROPOSALS AS THEY ARE DEVELOPED.

EVEN BEFORE THE DESTRUCTION OF SOME OF THE CELL BLOCKS AT CAMP HILL, OUR STATE PRISONS HAD TOO MANY INMATES IN THEM. WE HAVE FACED UP THE PROBLEM, AND WE'VE MOVED AGGRESSIVELY TO TRY TO SOLVE IT.

AN EXAMINATION OF THE RECENT RECORD OF INVESTMENT IN OUR STATE PRISON SYSTEM IS QUITE INSTRUCTIVE:

LET ME START OFF WITH AN HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE. AFTER 300 YEARS AS A COMMONWEALTH, FROM THE TIME OF GOVERNOR WILLIAM PENN THROUGH THE TERM OF GOVERNOR THORNBURGH IN DECEMBER 1986, THE COMMONWEALTH HAD 11,048 CELLS IN USE.

SINCE THEN, THE EXPANSION THAT'S BEEN COMPLETED, IS NOW UNDERWAY OR PROPOSED, WILL ADD MORE THAN 5,600 CELLS TO THE STATE PRISON SYSTEM. THAT'S A 50 PERCENT INCREASE IN ONLY A FEW SHORT YEARS.

IN THE PAST TWO YEARS, THE COMMONWEALTH OPENED FOUR NEW PRISONS -- CRESSON, FRACKVILLE, RETREAT AND SMITHFIELD. THIS EXPANDED OUR CAPACITY BY OVER 2,000 CELLS AT A COST OF \$120.6 MILLION.

DURING THAT SAME PERIOD OF TIME, WE EXPANDED THE STATE CORRECTIONAL INSTITUTION AT GRATERFORD BY MORE THAN 400 CELLS, AT A COST OF \$46.7 MILLION.

EARLIER THIS YEAR, GOVERNOR CASEY AUTHORIZED ANOTHER \$24.4 MILLION IN CONSTRUCTION TO ADD 536 CELLS AT FOUR EXISTING INSTITUTIONS -- SMITHFIELD, GREENSBURG, RETREAT AND ROCKVIEW.

THE PENNFREE ANTI-DRUG PROGRAM PROVIDES \$12 MILLION IN FUNDING FOR THE FAST-TRACK CONVERSION OF FARVIEW STATE HOSPITAL INTO A STATE PRISON. THE CONVERSION WILL PROVIDE ANOTHER 1,000 CELLS TO OUR SYSTEM WITHIN THE NEXT FEW MONTHS.

THAT COMES TO A CAPITAL INVESTMENT OF MORE THAN \$203.7 MILLION IN PRISON EXPANSION OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS.

THERE'S MUCH MORE ALREADY IN THE PIPELINE. WE'VE BUDGETED SOME \$50 MILLION FOR A NEW 650-CELL INSTITUTION IN SOUTHEASTERN PENNSYLVANIA SOLELY FOR USE BY INMATES WHO ARE DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSERS.

FINALLY, THE GOVERNOR HAS PROPOSED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW 1,000 CELL MAXIMUM SECURITY INSTITUTION AT A COST OF \$86 MILLION.

ON THE STAFFING SIDE, THE COMMONWEALTH'S COMMITMENT HAS ALSO GROWN SUBSTANTIALLY. TOTAL PERSONNEL COSTS TO STAFF THE STATE CORRECTIONAL SYSTEM STATEWIDE HAVE INCREASED 28 PERCENT SINCE 1987-88. WE NOW PAY ABOUT \$218 MILLION A YEAR ON PRISON PERSONNEL IN OUR STATE.

WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF DETERMINING HOW MANY ADDITIONAL CORRECTIONS OFFICERS WILL BE REQUIRED BY THE OVERCROWDING EMERGENCY WHICH HAS RESULTED FROM THIS INCIDENT. TO PROVIDE THEM ON A PRIORITY BASIS, WHILE ALSO PROVIDING FURTHER COMPLEMENTS OF CORRECTIONS OFFICERS AS THE NEEDS OF AN EXPANDING SYSTEM REQUIRE.

WE HAVE FUNDING IN THE CURRENT BUDGET FOR 4,226 CORRECTIONS OFFICERS SYSTEMWIDE. THAT'S 33 PERCENT MORE THAN THE 3,167 CORRECTIONS OFFICERS WHO WERE ON THE JOB JUST TWO YEARS AGO.

WE'VE ALSO ADDED 269 PEOPLE TO THE NUMBER OF AUTHORIZED SUPPORT STAFF IN THE DEPARTMENT OF CORRECTIONS OVER THE PAST THREE YEARS.

THAT'S THE HISTORY. LET ME GIVE YOU SOME PERSPECTIVE ON HOW WE'RE DOING COMPARED TO OTHER STATES TODAY. AS YOU ARE UNDOUBTEDLY AWARE, THE NUMBER OF PEOPLE IN PRISONS IN IS A NATIONAL PROBLEM IN OUR COUNTRY.

NONETHELESS, WE'RE BETTER OFF THAN MANY STATES. THE AMERICAN CORRECTIONAL ASSOCIATION SETS ACCREDITATION STANDARDS FOR PRISONS. AND PENNSYLVANIA IS AMONG THE LEADERS IN THE PERCENTAGE OF OUR FACILITIES THAT HAVE BEEN ACCREDITED, WITH BETTER THAN 60 PERCENT.

IF THERE IS ONE POINT I WOULD LIKE TO LEAVE YOU WITH BEFORE I TAKE YOUR QUESTIONS, IT IS THIS: WE IN PENNSYLVANIA ARE NOW EMBARKING UPON A PRISON EXPANSION PROGRAM OF UNPRECEDENTED PROPORTIONS. BUT THE SAD FACT REMAINS THAT WE CANNOT SIMPLY BUILD OUR WAY OUT OF THE PROBLEM. AS OF TODAY, THE SYSTEM IS STILL RECEIVING ABOUT 685 PRISONERS EVERY MONTH, WHILE DISCHARGING ONLY 418.

THE GOVERNOR BELIEVES, THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY BELIEVES, AND THE PEOPLE OF OUR STATE BELIEVE THAT TOUGH SENTENCES ARE A CRUCIAL TOOL IN FIGHTING CRIME, AND PARTICULARLY DRUG CRIME IN PENNSYLVANIA. SO AS THE CRACKDOWN ON DRUGS INTENSIFIES, THE RATE OF THOSE INCARCERATED WILL ONLY EXPAND FURTHER.

CLEARLY, THE ONLY LONG-TERM ANSWER IS TO STOP DRUG ABUSE BEFORE IT STARTS. THAT'S WHY I JOINED GOVERNOR CASEY, AND MANY MEMBERS OF THE LEGISLATURE FOR THE 60 HOURS OF PENNFREE ANTI-DRUG HEARINGS ACROSS OUR STATE THIS PAST JUNE. THAT'S WHY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY COMMITTED SOME \$90 MILLION TO THE PENNFREE PLAN, MUCH OF WHICH WILL GO TO THE KIND OF TREATMENT AND DRUG EDUCATION WHICH WILL PREVENT OUR YOUNG PEOPLE FROM BECOMING INVOLVED IN DRUG ABUSE AND DRUG DEALING.

EDUCATION, PREVENTION, TREATMENT -- THAT'S THE REAL ANSWER TO THE CAMP HILLS AND THE HUNTINGDONS. BECAUSE THEY REALLY DO WORK. AND IF THERE IS ANY BRIGHT SPOT IN THE PAST FEW DAYS, IT IS A STORY WHICH SHOWS THAT DRUG TREATMENT PROGRAMS CAN MAKE A DIFFERENCE, EVEN TO THE SEEMINGLY HARDENED CRIMINAL.

I'VE BEEN TOLD THAT THE CAMP HILL INMATES WHO PARTICIPATED IN THE FACILITY'S DRUG REHAB PROGRAM NOT ONLY SURROUNDED THEIR QUARTERS AND FOUGHT OFF THE ATTEMPT OF OTHER INMATES TO SE IT ON FIRE. THEY ALSO FOUGHT TO PROTECT A CORRECTIONS OFFICER FROM ATTACK BY OTHER INMATES. THEIR TREATMENT AND THERAPY HAS CHANGED SOMETHING IN THEIR LIVES. HAS MADE THEM FEEL LIKE PART OF A COMMUNITY. HAS GIVEN THEM A CONNECTION TO SOCIETY. THE KIND OF CONNECTION WHICH IS SO CLEARLY LACKING IN THOSE WHO BEGAN AND PARTICIPATED IN THE KIND OF VIOLENCE WE'VE SEEN IN THE PAST WEEK.

THERE'S A POWERFUL LESSON THERE. AND ONE I HOPE WE CAN BUILD ON AS WE GO FORWARD IN REBUILDING AND EXPANDING OUR PRISON SYSTEM.